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Fatherhood Images and Ideals

Transforming, Circulating, and Responding
to the Swedish Dads Photo Exhibition

FATHERHOOD IMAGES AND IDEALS

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Swedish Dads Photo Exhibition

Sarah Jane Mitchell

Linköping Studies in Arts and Sciences, No. 820
Linköping University, Department of Thematic Studies – Child Studies
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Abstract

Between 2016 and 2019, the Swedish state – via the Swedish Institute and Swedish embassies – circulated the ‘Swedish Dads’ photo exhibition to 54 countries. The exhibition was based on a photobook by the same name and featured photographs of Swedish fathers on parental leave with their children. Many Swedish embassies hosting the exhibition combined it with photographs of local fathers and children – as was the case in Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the case of ‘Zambian Dads’, this exhibition was also circulated in Sweden. This thesis problematizes the transnational circulation of the Swedish ideal of progressive, gender-equal fatherhood across a range of local and national contexts where the availability of parental leave – as well as material conditions and family ideals – might be very different from the Swedish context. The aim of this thesis is to contribute critical, interdisciplinary knowledge by examining the transformation, circulation, and negotiation of images and ideals of fatherhood across contexts. Taking a social constructivist approach, the thesis draws theoretical inspiration from parenthood studies, visual culture studies and nation branding studies. Empirical material was collected through a visual ethnography and analysed using visual discourse analysis and thematic analysis. The analysis highlights firstly, that while Swedish dads on parental leave were constructed as ‘ordinary’ in the photobook, they were constructed as ‘exceptional’ in the exhibition circulated by the Swedish Institute. Secondly, photographs of local fathers and children were used to ‘bridge’ the contextual divides between Sweden and countries hosting the exhibition. Finally, representations of progressive fatherhood in Zimbabwe were found to challenge and extend the Swedish ideal beyond the context of the middle-class, nuclear family.

Keywords: fatherhood; childhood; parenthood; photo exhibitions; Swedish Dads; Swedish Institute; visual culture; nation branding

Abstract

Mellan 2016 och 2019 distribuerade svenska staten – via Svenska Institutet och svenska ambassader – fotoutställningen ‘Swedish Dads’ till 54 länder. Utställningen baseras på en bok med samma namn och porträtterar föräldralediga svenska pappor tillsammans med sina barn. Flera ambassader kombinerade utställningen med porträtt av lokalbefolkningens fäder och deras barn. Så var bland annat fallet i Zambia och Zimbabwe. Utställningen ‘Zambian Dads’ visades även i Sverige. Den här avhandlingen problematiserar den transnationella cirkuleringen av svenska ideal av progressivt, jämställt faderskap i kontexter med en begränsad eller obefintlig föräldraförsäkring, och där ekonomiska omständigheter samt familjeideal skiljer sig från det svenska sammanhanget. Målet med avhandlingen är att bidra med kritisk och tvärvetenskaplig kunskap genom att undersöka transformationen, cirkuleringen, och tolkningen av bilder och ideal av faderskap i olika kontexter. Avhandlingen utgår från ett socialkonstruktivistiskt perspektiv och hämtar inspiration från föräldraskapsstudier, visuell kultur samt studier av nation branding. Det empiriska materialet samlades in utifrån en visuell etnografisk ansats och analyserades med hjälp av visuell diskursanalys och tematisk analys. Analysen visar att medan föräldralediga svenska pappor framställdes som ‘vanliga’ i fotoboken framställdes de som ‘exceptionella’ i Svenska Institutets utställning. Vidare visar analysen att porträtten av lokala fäder och barn i Zambia användes för att överbrygga de strukturella och kontextuella skillnaderna mellan länderna. Till sist visar analysen att den lokala utställningen i Zimbabwe utmanar det svenska progressiva faderskapsidealet och utvidgar det bortom ett medelklass- och kärnfamiljsideal.

Nyckelord: faderskap; barndom; föräldraskap; fotoutställningar; Swedish Dads; Svenska Institutet; visuell kultur; nation branding

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Linköping, October 2021

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Article I

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Article II

Mitchell, S.J. (Under review) “Bridging and equalizing global fatherhoods: Swedish circulations of images and ideals”. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*

Article III

Mitchell, S.J. (2021) “Representing ‘Progressive Fatherhood’ in post-colonial Zimbabwe: Binaries, Ambivalences and Ambiguities”. *Families, Relationships and Societies* <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674321X16097451930178>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines photo exhibitions featuring images and ideals of fatherhood, with the aim of illuminating how fatherhood is constructed and how ideals are circulated transnationally. Father figures have long held deep symbolic power – from the idea of ‘God the father’ to the notion of the ‘founding fathers’ of nations (cf. Henriksson Wahlström, 2016). Research on representations of parenthood has previously been dominated by studies focusing on images and representations of motherhood (cf. Johnston and Swanson, 2003; Woodward, 2003; Ilicali and Fisek, 2004; Kehily and Thomson, 2011). This has meant that until relatively recently, little attention was paid to visual representations of men as fathers (Sparrman, 2013). However, since the 1990s, fatherhood as an institution has become increasingly visible in research and policy contexts (Dermott, 2008). This was partly due to the influence of second wave feminism – that saw women leaving the domestic sphere to enter the workforce; and the gay and civil rights movements – whereby the hierarchy dominated by the white, heterosexual male has increasingly been challenged (cf. Podnieks, 2016: 2). Representations of fatherhood have come to reflect changing constructions of fatherhood in Western societies – with fathers increasingly being portrayed as nurturing and emotional and sharing parenting and domestic work with their partners (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Today, father-centric narratives and patrifocal images and texts have become prolific, providing a rich source of material for examining how fatherhood is constructed (cf. Podnieks, 2016: 3).

It is important to study how fatherhood is constructed because language and images do not just *reflect* reality but actively *produce* it (Lupton and Barclay, 1997: 4-5). Indeed, the ‘culture of fatherhood’ – consisting of the norms, values and beliefs surrounding men’s parenting – has implications for how men are expected to behave as parents (cf. LaRossa, 1997: 11) but also for how fatherhood as an institution is understood in society more broadly. Representations of fathers and fatherhood have been studied in the context of various forms of popular culture – including advertisements, films, television shows, blogs, memoirs, newspaper articles, and video games (Podnieks, 2016).

However, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Lazar, 2005), relatively few studies have examined how fatherhood has been represented in state-sponsored campaigns. Furthermore, what it means to be a ‘good’ parent is not fixed or stable but is subject to negotiation and change (Lind et al., 2017). This in turn makes it worthwhile to study how notions of good parenthood are constructed in specific national and local contexts (cf. Lind *et al.*, 2017).

This thesis focuses on the Swedish Dads photographs which feature Swedish fathers at home on parental leave with their young children. The thesis examines how these photographs were exhibited, transformed, and circulated internationally by the Swedish state, as well as local responses to the exhibition in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Therefore, I use the umbrella term ‘the Swedish Dads phenomenon’ to include the Swedish Dads photobook by Johan Bävman (2015), the Swedish Dads exhibition circulated by Bävman, the adapted Swedish Dads exhibition circulated by the Swedish Institute, and the embassy photo competitions and exhibitions produced in response to the Swedish Dads images.

International exhibitions have long been sites for the construction and display of national identities in the international arena (cf. Smits and Jansen, 2012: 173). Exhibitions can act as a barometer of dominant ideas of nation, identity, and power, and research on exhibitions can offer insights into a range of cultures (Kember, Plunkett and Sullivan, 2010: 347-348). While exhibitions are often presented to the public as self-evident statements, they are usually the outcome of particular processes and contexts (Macdonald, 1998: 1). It is therefore important to make these processes and contexts visible as this makes it possible to examine what is communicated through an exhibition and by whom. It also makes it possible to examine what gets displayed, silenced or ironed out of exhibitions, who decides and how these choices can influence public understandings of certain topics (cf. Macdonald 1998).

Part of the power of photographic representations lies in their ability to travel and circulate – and they do so with increasing speed and efficiency in the context of a

globalized world (Cartwright and Sturken, 2009). Therefore, visual culture scholars have emphasized the importance of observing and analyzing “the wealth of visual experience in postmodern culture” (Mirzoeff, 1999: 3). There is thus an important need for visual analysis that is guided by social theory. However, it has been argued that visual culture studies have tended to focus too heavily on the meaning and interpretation of images, without recognizing the importance of the conditions in which images are seen (Rose, 2012) and the practical circumstances in which exhibitions are embedded (Heath and vom Lehn, 2004). Indeed, an image may be looked at differently in different contexts because specific places invite different ways of seeing and spectating (Rose, 2016: 38-39). The meaning of a photo exhibition therefore depends not only on its *content* but also on the *contexts* in which it is produced, circulated and in which it meets its audiences (cf. Cartwright and Sturken, 2009; Martins, 2020; Rose, 2016). Therefore, this thesis focuses on the contexts in which fatherhood images were produced, as well as the contexts and conditions of their circulation and exhibition. Studying visual culture in this way makes it possible to examine key questions of what is represented to whom, how, where, and why (Mitchell, 1994: 420).

The Swedish Institute and Swedish Dads

I first encountered the Swedish Dads photographs while doing my master’s degree in Child Studies in Sweden. I heard that an exhibition was being shown in a neighbouring town and was curious to see it because of my interest in Swedish family life. I later discovered that an adapted version of this exhibition had been circulated around the world by the Swedish Institute (SI). I was familiar with the Swedish Institute because it was thanks to a scholarship from them that I was able to move from South Africa to Sweden to do my master’s degree. The Swedish Institute works with promoting Sweden abroad and the scholarship programme was intended to promote ‘future global leaders’. As an SI scholarship holder, I received a lot of material from the Swedish Institute with booklets, brochures, and information about Swedish culture. This included recipe books of classic Swedish foods, information about the Swedish practice of ‘fika’ and beautiful photographs of people BBQing in the Swedish archipelago in the Summer. It also included information about the Swedish parental leave system, repeatedly emphasizing

that Swedish parents share 480 days of parental leave. This is how I became interested in how notions of gender-equal fatherhood, visual culture, and nation branding become interconnected in the work of the Swedish Institute.

The Swedish Dads exhibition that was circulated by the Swedish Institute started with the Swedish Dads photobook which was produced by the photographer, Johan (Bävman, 2015). Bävman recruited fathers in Sweden who had shared parental leave equally¹ with their partners. He then produced 45 photographs of these fathers, taken while they were at home on parental leave with their child(ren). The fathers were shown doing household chores and caring for their young children. Many of the photographs included captions featuring excerpts from informal interviews that Bävman had conducted with the fathers. Bävman also exhibited these photographs and captions in his capacity as a photographer. The Swedish Institute became interested in using these images in relation to their work of promoting Sweden – and gender equality – abroad. Together with Bävman, the Swedish Institute developed an adapted collection of photographs and captions intended for international circulation as an exhibition.

From 2016 to 2019, the Swedish Institute circulated this adapted Swedish Dads exhibition to 54 countries. According to the Swedish Institute, the Swedish Dads exhibition uses personal narratives to spread knowledge about the Swedish parental insurance system; to generate discussions about the role of parents/fathers and to boost international interest in gender equal fatherhood by emphasizing its advantages (Swedish Institute, 2018: 1). Since the 1960s, the Swedish Institute has promoted the international circulation of images of Swedish men and women challenging traditional gender roles and since the early 2000s, they have been circulating images of Swedish fathers who are involved with family life and household chores (Klinth, 2019). The circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition can therefore be seen as a continuation of decades of work by the Swedish Institute – partly to promote Sweden using images of gender equality, but also to promote gender equality using images of involved fatherhood.

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¹ In this case, defined as fathers who took six months or more parental leave with their child

Parenthood Studies

In order to study how fatherhood is represented, this thesis takes an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that is anchored in the field of parenthood studies. Researchers in this field recognize that notions of ‘good’ parenthood cannot exist independent of notions of what constitutes ‘good childhood’ – making it important to study how parenthood and childhood are constructed in relation to each other (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010; Lind et al., 2017; Lindgren, 2015). Therefore, this thesis on fatherhood images and ideals is indirectly connected to child studies, since childhood and parenthood are understood as mutually constituting phenomena. In addition to parenthood studies, the thesis also draws theoretical inspiration from visual culture studies and nation branding studies. As images and representations of ‘imagined families’ circulate, they have the power to influence desires, ideas, and practices (Kehily and Thomson, 2007: 61-62). Indeed, cultural representations of fatherhood can have important implications – not only for individual families but also for broader understandings of people and nations (Henriksson Wahlström, 2020: 326). I will now situate the Swedish Dads exhibition in relation to Sweden’s gender equality policy.

Sweden’s Gender Equality Policy

In Sweden, the dual-earner/dual-carer family model has been used as a means of promoting gender equality. This model is based on the notion of ‘double emancipation’ whereby both men and women are encouraged to participate actively in caring for children, doing household chores, and earning money through paid employment (Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019). The Swedish state has put great emphasis on fathers’ involvement with childcare, making it easier for women to be more active in the paid labour force. Since 1974, Sweden has offered mothers and fathers ‘parental leave’ – as opposed to only offering ‘maternity leave’ to women (Jeziarska and Towns, 2018). However, encouraging Swedish fathers to be more involved with their children did not only require legislative changes, but also normative changes in gendered ideals of parenthood (Duvander, Haas and Thalberg, 2017: 127-128). This led the Swedish state to make use of parental leave campaigns – such as the campaign in 1976 that featured

a famous wrestler holding a baby tenderly in his muscular arms. This was an effort to reassure Swedish fathers that taking parental leave would not make them any less of a man (Klinth, 2008). Today Swedish parents receive 480 days of parental leave per child. As a means of encouraging fathers to take parental leave, 90 of the 480 days are reserved for each parent on a ‘use it or lose it’ basis. Such reforms have led to an increase in the proportion of parental leave used by men (Duvander and Johansson, 2012). Indeed, it has become a norm for fathers to take parental leave, with nine out of ten fathers doing so (Duvander et al., 2017). However, on average men in Sweden ‘only’ use 28% of the parental allowance days while women use 72% of the days (Statistics Sweden, 2018).

The Swedish Dads exhibition was connected to Sweden’s domestic gender equality policy because the photographs represent Swedish fathers at home on parental leave. However, the international circulation of the exhibition by the Swedish Institute was also connected to the state’s foreign policy. In 2014, Sweden became the first country in the world to have an explicitly feminist foreign policy – which emphasizes the promotion of equal rights, representation, and access to resources for all women and girls (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). This includes objectives such as promoting the political participation and influence of women and girls in all areas of society, and that all women and girls should have full economic rights and empowerment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2019) has referred to the Swedish Dads exhibition as “an important tool in the Swedish Foreign Service’s work to encourage new approaches and values” (p. 91) and a means of promoting women’s economic empowerment by giving “visibility to the role of men in gender equality” (p. 2). In this sense, the international circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition by the Swedish state could be seen to signal the state’s commitment to promoting gender equality – both domestically and internationally.

Internationalising Swedish Dads

During the exhibition period, Swedish embassies could apply to the Swedish Institute for funding to host the Swedish Dads exhibition. Embassies then physically produced the exhibition on-site, following ‘toolkit’ instructions produced by the Swedish Institute (Swedish Institute, 2020). Many of the embassies hosting the exhibition also chose to collect or produce photographs of local fathers and children. In some cases, these photographs were collected through embassies organizing photo competitions – as was the case with the photographs in the ‘Vana Baba Vanhasi/Obaba Balamhla/Fathers of Today’ exhibition in Zimbabwe. This exhibition consisted of the 25 captioned photographs selected by the jury of the photo competition. However, in other cases, photographs of local fathers and children were taken by professional photographers – as was the case with the photographs in the *Zambian Dads* exhibition. The *Zambian Dads* exhibition was produced by the embassy of Sweden in Zambia together with local partners and featured 22 captioned photographs of Zambian fathers and their children. The *Zambian Dads* exhibition was unique in that it was the only case where such photographs of local fathers and children were also circulated in Sweden.

Historically, western ideals of family, parenthood, and childhood have been ‘globalized’ and ‘universalized’ from countries in the global North to countries in the global South (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010; Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012). It is thus important to understand how norms and ideals are circulated transnationally in the present. This thesis examines how representations of fatherhood are circulated transnationally, and how norms and ideals are negotiated in this process. More specifically, the focus is on how the Swedish Institute adapted an artistic photobook into a narrative about Sweden and Swedish fatherhood, and how the ideals embedded in this exhibition were negotiated in the local settings of Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the construction and circulation of images and ideals of fatherhood across contexts. To achieve this aim, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. How were representations of Swedish fathers constructed and transformed in different contexts?
2. How were images and ideals of Swedish gender-equal fatherhood circulated across diverse contexts and what was communicated in these contexts?
3. How were Swedish fatherhood ideals taken up and/or negotiated in Zimbabwe and Zambia?

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 situates the Swedish Dads phenomenon in relation to the Swedish context, including the Swedish parental leave system, family ideals, and the state's previous use of visual culture to achieve political objectives. Chapter 3 situates the thesis in relation to this previous research on representations of fatherhood. Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical approach taken in the thesis, and details key concepts drawn from the fields of parenthood studies, visual culture studies, and nation branding studies. Chapter 5 outlines the materials and methods of the thesis. This includes a description of how the material was collected and analysed, as well as methodological and ethical reflection on the research process. Chapter 6 provides a summary of the three articles on which the thesis is based. The first article traces the transformation of Bävman's Swedish Dads photobook to produce the adapted exhibition that was circulated by the Swedish Institute (Article I). The second article traces the circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition – tracking the countries and contexts in which it was exhibited and the implications of the transnational circulation of Swedish family ideals. The article also examines how the Zambian Dads exhibition – produced in response to the Swedish Dads exhibition – was circulated in Sweden (Article II). The third article is a case study of the photo exhibition produced in relation to the Swedish Dads exhibition in Zimbabwe. The article examines how 'progressive fatherhood' is represented in the context of a photo competition organized by the

embassy of Sweden in Harare in post-colonial Zimbabwe (Article III). Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the findings of the articles and highlighting potential areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: SITUATING SWEDISH DADS

In this chapter, I highlight aspects of the Swedish context which are important in situating the Swedish Dads phenomenon. I begin by contextualizing the Swedish parental leave system in relation to the Swedish welfare state. I then go on to outline the ‘dual-earner/dual-carer’ family model. Finally, I describe the role of the Swedish Institute and show how the Swedish state has used images and exhibitions to achieve political objectives – both within and beyond Swedish borders.

The Swedish Welfare State

Nordic and Scandinavian countries are often seen as trailblazers in the project of social modernization (Musiał, 2009) – using their welfare states as a means of creating more equal societies (Cassinger et al., 2019; Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). This has often included a particular focus on gender equality, which has manifested in a range of policy reforms regarding childcare, working hours, paid parental leave and expansion of state-sponsored childcare and education in the 1990s and 2000s (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). The Swedish welfare state has been classified as a social democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 2016). Such welfare regimes are characterized by their emphasis on promoting egalitarian values through providing universal access to social services and social insurance (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006; Lundqvist, 2011). This is made possible by the relatively high levels of taxation (Hearn *et al.*, 2012) and government prioritizing spending on social services, such as parental leave. It is within the context of such a welfare state that the Swedish parental leave system exists. Today, both Swedish women and men have access to extended periods of paid parental leave. However, this system did not develop quickly or without controversy, but was instead the result of heated political negotiations which took place over several decades (Klinth, 2002).

Evolution of the Swedish Parental Leave System

In the 1930s, there were radical debates around family policy in Sweden, with social reformers questioning the traditional family model and traditional gender roles (Hearn *et al.*, 2012). During this period, Sweden had decreasing fertility rates and high levels of poverty among families with children (Lundqvist, 2011: 3). The influential Swedish sociologist and social democratic politician – Alva Myrdal – proposed social reforms to address these challenges (Lundqvist, 2011: 2). One of the key questions faced by Sweden after the first World War was how to improve women’s conditions in the labour market while ensuring that children received good quality care. From then on, the family became an important object of political intervention in Sweden, with family and gender equality policies being used as a means of achieving both economic and social objectives (Lundqvist, 2011: 3). It was at this time that Sweden introduced maternity insurance to allow mothers to take maternity leave (Wahlström Henriksson, 2016). However, despite the debates occurring in the 1930s, men remained relatively invisible in the family and social policy programmes of the 1940s and 1950s (Hearn *et al.*, 2012), with the ideal of the father as ‘distant breadwinner’ being predominant (Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019).

It was only in the 1960s that serious discussions around gender equality began to take place – largely influenced by the women’s movement (Hearn *et al.*, 2012). This led to a new political debate in Sweden that has been dubbed ‘daddy politics’ (Klinth, 2002). At the time, there was a lack of political consensus in Sweden when it came to the ideal relationship between the welfare state and the family (Littmarck et al., 2018). However, there was clear consensus across the political spectrum when it came to the importance of the welfare state supporting parents (Littmarck et al., 2018). Through the influence of the women’s movement in the 1960s, the ‘naturalness’ of gender roles came to be questioned – something which helped lay the foundation for the development of the idea of the ‘gender-equal family’ in Sweden (Lundqvist, 2011). The period from the 1960s to the 1970s has been seen as the period of expansion in terms of the family policy of the Swedish welfare state (Littmarck et al., 2018).

By the 1970s, gender equality was clearly on the political agenda as part of broader feminist politics in the country (Klinth, 2002). The desire to increase men's involvement in childcare was mostly expressed through the parental leave policy that took effect in 1974, when Sweden became the first country in the world to replace 'maternity leave' with 'parental leave' (Jezierska and Towns, 2018). This change made it possible for mothers *and* fathers to take up to 180 days of parental leave, during which they would receive 90% of their wages (Henriksson Wahlström, 2016: 33). Since the mid-1970s, there have been political debates around how to increase men's uptake of parental leave in Sweden (Klinth, 2008), and many state interventions have been introduced to help achieve this goal (Duvander and Johansson, 2012). The idea was that gender equality in parental leave would ultimately contribute towards greater equality in the division of household work (including childcare) and a better position for women in the labour market (Duvander and Johansson, 2012).

In the 1980s and 1990s, new gender equality laws were introduced and subsidized childcare was made available in Sweden – both of which were intended to reduce gender segregation in the labour market (Lundqvist, 2011). Since then, three key state reforms have also been implemented to increase men's uptake of parental leave. The first reform was the introduction of a policy in 1995 whereby one month of parental leave was reserved exclusively for each parent on a 'use it or lose it' basis. The policy later changed to allow fathers the exclusive right to two months of parental leave in 2002, and by 2016, a third reserved month was introduced for each parent (Persson, 2019). This means that today, Swedish parents are offered 480 days of paid parental leave per child, with each parent having an exclusive right to 90 of those days. The remaining 200 days can be divided between the parents as they chose (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2020). Although this parental leave system is based on the heterosexual two-parent model, same-sex couples and adoptive parents also have the right to parental leave (Wahlström Henriksson, 2016). The system offers flexibility in how parental leave is used, and parents have the right to take parental leave until the child turns

twelve² (Duvander et al., 2017). Parents in Sweden also have the right to flexibility in their working hours, having the option of reducing their work hours by 25% up until the child turns eight (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2021).

The Dual-earner/dual-carer Family Model

The Swedish vision of gender-equal parenthood can be understood through the dual-earner/dual-carer family model. This model is intended to promote gender equality because the father's involvement with child-care and domestic duties implicitly frees the mother to work outside the home. However, this is not a matter of switching roles to a female-earner/male-carer model – rather both parents are expected to contribute both ‘cash and care’ – sustaining their children emotionally and materially (Henriksson Wahlström, 2020: 322-323). This is intended as a form of ‘double emancipation’ because not only does it promote women's equal opportunities to be involved in paid employment, but it also promotes men's equal opportunities to be involved in family life (Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019).

To make this dual-earner/dual-carer model feasible in practice, the Swedish state offers several forms of support in addition to the parental insurance system. This includes providing subsidized public preschool for children from age one and offering paid leave that allows parents to stay home when their children are sick (Duvander et al., 2017). These measures are intended to make it easier for male and female parents to combine work and family life. Although both men and women have access to this state support, women are more likely than men to make full use of it (Wahlström Henriksson, 2016). For example, in the first two years after a child's birth, women use most (91%-100%) of the parental leave days, while men take less than half (45%) of the parental leave days when the child is between three and eight years old (Statistics Sweden, 2018).

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² For children born before 2013, this applies until the child turns 8.

As Swedish family policy shifted towards the dual-earner/dual-carer model, there have been corresponding changes in fatherhood ideals from that of the ‘good male provider’ to that of the ‘present and active daddy’ (Henriksson Wahlström, 2016: 34). Indeed, the ideals of involved fatherhood and care-orientated masculinity have been described as becoming hegemonic in Sweden (Johansson and Klinth, 2008; Wahlström Henriksson, 2016). While Swedish fathers’ narratives about their parenthood have been found to reproduce the ideals that are dominant in Swedish family policy, praxis often lags behind these ideals (Forsberg, 2007; Wahlström Henriksson, 2016). At the same time, empirical studies in Sweden have found that men are more likely than women to be praised for being active and involved parents (Björk, 2017). It is also worth noting that even when men do make significant use of parental leave, this may reflect child-centredness rather than necessarily reflecting a commitment to gender equality (Bekkengen, 2002; Wahlström Henriksson, 2016).

Several studies have connected the Swedish state’s circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition with Swedish nation branding (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021; Jezierska and Towns, 2018; Klinth, 2019; Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019; Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019). Nation branding is a ‘method of distinction’ whereby that which is seen as being unique about a country is used as a basis for developing a distinctive brand identity (cf. Valaskivi, 2016). In the case of Sweden, the country’s parental leave policies are “unique and radical” (Plantin 2007: 94) in an international context – creating a potential nation branding opportunity. The Swedish nation brand (or ‘Brand Sweden’) is generally associated with many positive qualities – such as being ‘progressive’, ‘open’, ‘caring’ and ‘authentic’ (Glover, 2009). In this sense, by using the Swedish Dads exhibition, the Swedish state was able to build on the existing connotations of Brand Sweden as being open, progressives and authentic, and to emphasize the country’s unique parental leave system.

The Swedish Institute

The Swedish Dads exhibition was circulated by the Swedish Institute (SI) – the government agency responsible for promoting interest and trust in Sweden abroad. *The Swedish Institute for Cultural Exchange with Foreign Countries* – as it was originally called – was established by a government-appointed committee in January 1945. Its purpose was to disseminate information about Sweden and to help improve the country's reputation abroad after WWII (Glover, 2009). During this time, the Swedish Institute had a modest budget which was financed by public funds and corporate support. However, by 1970, *the Swedish Institute* had become a fully state-funded foundation that received a major part of the total budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Glover, 2011). Today, the Swedish Institute's activities are financed directly by the state budget, supporting, for example, their work related to international cooperation and international aid (Swedish Institute, 2016).

The Swedish Institute has the following mandate from the Swedish government:

... the agency's task is to disseminate information and knowledge about Sweden and the Swedish language abroad and promote cooperation and long-term relations with other countries in the areas of culture, education, research, democracy, and social life in general. The agency's activities aim to increase the outside world's interest and confidence in Sweden, increase collaboration in Sweden's immediate area and promote democratic, fair and sustainable global development (Swedish Institute, 2016: 3 - author's translation).

In this sense, the Swedish Institute's official mandate is quite broad, including to increase Sweden's attractiveness, promoting international trade, promoting sustainable development, developing relationships between Sweden and other countries, and promoting values (Swedish Institute, 2016: 4). The Swedish Institute communicates Swedish values from a broad perspective, offering "tools and support to communicate the story of Sweden and collaborate internationally" (Swedish Institute, 2016: 4). The Swedish Institute makes use of toolkits as a method for supporting foreign authorities (such as embassies) in carrying out event activities efficiently and in a way that reaches a wide audience (ibid, p. 5). The toolkits consist of communication materials which

convey a relevant image about Sweden and can include smaller exhibitions (ibid, p. 5). The toolkits also offer flexibility, making it possible to adapt to the local context and to raise specific issues that are relevant to a particular country or context (ibid, p. 5). In this thesis, the toolkit related to the Swedish Dads exhibition is of particular interest, as it was used to provide Swedish embassies with instructions for producing the exhibition in a standardized fashion.

The Swedish Institute is also “the expert organization for monitoring and analyzing the image of Sweden in other countries” (Swedish Institute, 2016: 4 - author's translation). For many decades, the Swedish Institute has actively contributed to the image of Swedish fathers becoming a symbol for Sweden and ‘Swedishness’ (Klinth, 2018, 2019). For example, in the 1960s, the Swedish Institute circulated a photobook called *Swedish Women – Swedish Men* (Leijon, 1968) which shows Swedish men and women challenging traditional gender roles – for example, showing women chairing board meetings and men bottle-feeding babies (Klinth, 2018; 2020). Several decades later, the Swedish Institute circulated the photo exhibition *Dear Child* (Lemberg, 2000), featuring photographs of Swedish fathers and children in everyday situations. The *Dear Child* exhibition (Lemberg, 2000) asserted an image of a multi-ethnic Sweden, including a number of images of men and children who originate from various parts of the world (Klinth, 2018: 118). In this sense, the Swedish Institute’s circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition can be seen as a continuation of decades of effort by the Swedish Institute to connect ‘Brand Sweden’ to notions of progressiveness and gender equality (Jezierska and Towns, 2018; Klinth, 2018).

The Swedish State’s Domestic Use of Visual Culture

In addition to this history of using images and exhibitions to achieve political objectives in the international arena, the Swedish state also has a long history of using images and exhibitions to achieve political objectives domestically. For example, the Swedish state hosted the Stockholm Exhibition of 1897 which was partly intended to foster moral goals and ideas among working classes (Ekström, 1994). It was also intended to ‘socialize’ visitors and make them into participants in bourgeois cultural order,

providing an ‘aesthetic education’ in good taste and refinement (Ekström, 1994).

The Swedish state has also made use of photographs to communicate specific family ideals. For example, in the inter-war years, the state used photo contests and photobooks which represented ideals of how children’s bodies should look (Hallberg, 2017). These images have been described as functioning as political objects and as national symbols of ‘Swedishness’, challenging the boundary between the private and public realms (Hallberg, 2017). In this sense, the Swedish state has a history of using photographic images to deliver political messages about how families in Swedish society should look and function (Hallberg, 2017; Hallberg and Sandin, 2021).

More recently, the Swedish state used images as a means of encouraging Swedish fathers to take parental leave. After the introduction of parental leave in 1974, the first government-sponsored parental leave campaign was produced in 1976. This campaign featured the now-iconic image of the Swedish weightlifter Leif ‘Hoa Hoa’ Dahlgren. The image shows Hoa Hoa, with his bulging biceps and his blue and yellow shirt (the colours of the Swedish flag) holding a baby and gazing tenderly at it. This image has been described as seamlessly integrating “conceptions of masculinity, caring, and national identity – he is a family-orientated version of a Swedish welfare-state Viking” (Johansson and Klinth, 2008: 42). This image has also been described as representing the ideal of the ‘caring father’ which was dominant in Sweden in the 1970s (Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019). In this sense, it could be argued that Sweden has been using images and representations of fatherhood to promote gender equality within Sweden since at least the 1970s (Klinth, 2002, 2018, 2019) – around the same time that the Swedish Institute started circulating the photobook *Swedish Women – Swedish Men* (Leijon, 1968).

In this chapter, I have situated Swedish Dads in the context of the Swedish welfare state and the historical development of parental leave in the country. I have also highlighted the connections between this parental leave system and the ‘dual-earner/dual-carer’ family model and its relationship to promoting gender equality. I have also shown how

the circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition by the Swedish Institute can be seen as a continuation of their work of connecting the Swedish nation brand to notions of progressiveness and gender equality. This chapter has also shown that the Swedish state has a long history of using images and exhibitions to achieve political objectives – both domestically and internationally. In the following chapter, I will situate the thesis in relation to previous research on representations of fatherhood.

CHAPTER 3: PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In this chapter, I highlight some of the previous research on representations of fatherhood. I begin by detailing the studies which have examined material connected to the Swedish Dads phenomenon. I then go on to present research on representations of fatherhood. Through this review of the literature, I am able to highlight the questions related to representations of fatherhood which remain to be addressed, as well as how the current thesis hopes to contribute to the existing research on the topic.

Research on Swedish Dads

To date, six studies have examined material related to what I call ‘the Swedish Dads phenomenon’ – either focusing exclusively on material connected to this phenomenon (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019) or examining it as one aspect of a larger body of material connected to Swedish nation branding and constructions of Sweden and ‘Swedishness’ (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021; Jezierska and Towns, 2018; Klinth, 2018, 2019; Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019). These studies will now be presented and findings relevant to the current thesis will be outlined.

Two of the studies connected to the Swedish Dads phenomenon were written by Susanna Molander, Ingeborg Astrid Kleppe and Jacob Östberg – who were writing from a consumer culture perspective. Their work on the topic of Swedish Dads includes the article *Hero shots : involved fathers conquering new discursive territory in consumer culture* (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019) and a book chapter entitled *Swedish Dads as a National Treasure: Consumer Culture at the Nexus of the State, Commerce, and Consumer* (Molander, Östberg, et al., 2019). In the ‘Hero shots’ article, Molander and colleagues (2019) aimed to explore how visual expressions of culture might offer ‘new discursive territories’ within which consumer cultural ideals could be negotiated. The authors use Swedish Dads as an ‘illustrative case’ to examine the ‘discursive territory of fatherhood’ – i.e., the boundaries within which the ‘codes’ (cf. Hall, 2009) of meaning could be expressed. In examining this discursive territory, Molander, Kleppe and Östberg (2019) use critical visual discourse analysis to analyse photographs from

the Swedish Dads photobook (Bävman, 2015), as well as a range of materials connected to their subsequent dispersion by visual consumers, political stakeholders, and commercial stakeholders. This broader material included news articles connected to the Swedish Dads photographs; data collected from online conversations and relevant social media hashtags related to the Swedish Dads photographs, and examples from photo competitions connected to the international circulation of the Swedish Dads photographs by the Swedish state (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019). The authors identified three themes in the photographs from the Swedish Dads photobook – finding that involved fatherhood was represented in relation to themes of chores, play and tenderness (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019). The study further shows that when the Swedish Dads images were circulated online, they garnered a range of comments – including those in favour of the kind of parental leave system available in Sweden, and those who were more critical of such a system. The study also observed that even when international audiences accepted the general message ‘encoded’ (cf. Hall, 2009) in the Swedish Dads images, they generally reserved the right to make more negotiated applications based on their own life conditions (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019). If these images, seen as ‘hero shots’, were found to push the discursive territory too far, the photographs could risk becoming controversial and therefore being counterproductive. Also, the authors note the commercial appropriation of the Swedish Dads material by the Swedish state as part of a marketing campaign for ‘Brand Sweden’, describing the images as ‘easily consumable’ and as being in line with the Swedish gender equality project. The conclusion was that the Swedish Dads photographs offer ‘new discursive territories’ within which consumer culture and fatherhood ideals can be negotiated (Molander, Kleppe and Östberg, 2019).

Roger Klinth has published three studies connected to the Swedish Dads phenomenon – either as a sole author or in collaboration. The first was a report written for the Swedish Insurance Agency (Klinth, 2018), the next was a book chapter entitled: “Swedish Dads on Export: On the Relationship Between Fatherhood and ‘Swedishness’ in Strategic Communication of Swedish Family Policy Abroad, 1968–2017” (Klinth, 2019). Most recently, he and Klara Goedecke published an article entitled “Selling Swedish Fathers:

On Fatherhood , Gender Equality and Swedishness in Strategic Communication by the Swedish Institute, 1968-2015” (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021). These publications examine the Swedish Dads exhibition in relation to two previous campaigns where the Swedish Institute has used images of Swedish fathers to promote an image of Sweden as a gender-equal country – i.e., the book *Swedish Women, Swedish Men* (Leijon, 1968) and the photo exhibition *Dear Child* (Lemberg, 2000). Through analyzing these Swedish Institute campaigns, Klinth (2019) shows how images of Swedish fathers have become a kind of export commodity and a means for constructing Sweden as a gender equal country. In his discussion of his findings, Klinth (2019) observes that while the image of Sweden as a gender equality superpower is somewhat justified, it has also resulted in some problems being swept under the carpet. For example, the image of Nordic countries as exceptional democracies has sometimes been counter-productive in that it has “helped render racist and sexist social structures invisible rather than identifying and combating them” (Klinth, 2019: 60, cf. Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). The study concludes that the Swedish Institute’s use of images of Swedish dads in their strategic communications to the rest of the world was not a matter of chance. Rather, images of Swedish men on paternity leave have been used to connect the Swedish nation brand with notions of modernity, rationality, enlightenment (Klinth, 2019).

In their analysis, Goedecke and Klinth (2021) investigate formulations of gender equality, fatherhood and Swedishness in these three Swedish Institute campaigns (i.e., the book *Swedish Women, Swedish Men*, the photo exhibition *Dear Child* and the Swedish Dads exhibition). They observe how notions of ‘Swedishness’ have been actively constructed in relation to notions of gender equality as a means of discursively producing Sweden as a nation (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021). Goedecke and Klinth (2021) also highlight how these formulations can also produce racialized notions of the gender-equal Swedish man which can problematically result in ‘un-Swedish’ fathers being constructed as less progressive and gender equal than Swedish ones. Their analysis also highlights how Swedish fathers are constructed as both ordinary and exotic in the *Dear Child* and *Swedish Dads* exhibitions. They note that this everydayness is

evident in the snapshot quality of the pictures in both exhibitions. The authors use the concept of ‘demonstrative everydayness’ to capture the tension between the exotic and the mundane in these images (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021).

The last study which has examined material connected to the Swedish Dads phenomenon was written by Katarzyna Jezierska and Ann Towns (2018). They conducted a discourse analysis of websites and branding material related to the Swedish Institute – including the Swedish Dads exhibition. The analysis showed how imagery of fathers caring for small children has become an important aspect of the Swedish Institute’s efforts to contribute to the ‘Progressive Sweden’ nation branding narrative (Jezierska and Towns, 2018). In relation to the Swedish Dads material, the study notes that the fathers featured are ‘not typical Swedish dads’ since women are still generally the primary caregivers for children in Sweden. The study concludes that the Swedish Dads material is best understood as a “utopian narrative based on international comparison than a factual description of Swedish Fathers” (Jezierska and Towns, 2018: 60).

Research on Representations of Fatherhood

Apart from research connected to the Swedish Dads phenomenon, relatively few studies have examined how fathers and fatherhood may be represented in relation to specific nation states. A notable exception is Michelle Lazar’s (2005) book chapter on fatherhood representations in the Family Life campaign in Singapore – a state-sponsored campaign intended to reverse declining birth rates by encouraging educated Singaporean couples to have children and not to delay parenthood. This included the objectives of making fatherhood more visible and popular. Lazar (2005) uses discourse analysis to study this multimedia campaign, including advertisements shown on television, in newspapers and magazines and on buses. Drawing on Butler’s (1990) view of performativity, the study highlights the role that national governments can play in ‘performing state fatherhood’ – i.e., where national pronatalist ideals are promoted through a campaign featuring representations of fatherhood. Lazar’s (2005) analysis

identified two overarching discourses in the campaign: 1) ‘the discourse of egalitarian gender relations’ – based on and 2) ‘the discourse of conservative gender relations’ – based on traditional ideas of gender polarity. She also identifies the “hetero-normative imperative of the campaign” (p. 144), arguing that heterosexual masculinity is performed across both discourses.

It is also worth considering other types of research where representations of fatherhood have been examined, as such studies can provide insights into the construction of fatherhood ideals. For example, researchers have examined how fatherhood was represented in parenting handbooks and parenting magazines. Helena Wahlström Henriksson (2016) examined parenting handbooks directed at Swedish men, finding that fathering was generally represented as an everyday practice, with the notion of the ‘involved father’ featuring prominently. These handbooks were found to focus on the practical dimensions of childcare after the child’s birth – such as changing diapers, feeding, and cleaning. Interestingly, although these parenting books explicitly emphasized the importance of gender equality, women were often represented as barriers to men’s primary parenthood, and women’s voices were generally excluded from the books (Henriksson Wahlström, 2016). The study recognizes how political and media discourses of fatherhood, masculinity, gender equality and child-centeredness might feed into the subjective voices represented by parenting handbooks, and how such handbooks in turn contribute to broader societal discussions of parenthood (Henriksson Wahlström, 2016).

Representations of fatherhood have also been studied in various forms of parenting magazines. For example, Jane Sunderland (2000; 2006) analysed how male and female parents were addressed in magazines dealing with the topic of the care of babies and young children. The findings suggested that such magazines were increasingly addressing ‘parents’ rather than ‘mothers’. Yet, the analysis also showed that fathers were positioned as ‘part-time’ parents through discourses such as ‘father as baby entertainer’ and ‘father as mother’s bumbling assistant’ (Sunderland, 2000). Sunderland (2006) concluded that in terms of visual and linguistic representation, fathers were not

being fully addressed in these magazines. More recent research has also been done on portrayals of fatherhood in American parenting magazines, with a content analysis showing that many depictions were supportive of hegemonic masculinity and breadwinning identities over parenting identities (Schmitz, 2016).

Several studies have also examined how fatherhood is represented in magazines and newspapers. For example, a study on visual representations of fathers in advertisements in women's magazines from 1950 to 2010 found that a discursive shift had taken place in terms of how fatherhood and masculinity were constructed during this period. However, the study concluded that family-related advertising in women's magazines did little to challenge the traditional models of paternal masculinity, and that such representations might even reinforce traditional gender hegemony (Marshall et al., 2014). A media analysis of a Canadian newspaper series dedicated to family issues found that - through representations of parental guilt, parental responsibility, work-family balance issues, and hegemonic masculinity - mothers were positioned as primary parents, leading the researchers to question whether discussions of shifts in the culture of fatherhood had been overstated (Wall and Arnold, 2007). Research on representations of fathers in South African media observed a tendency to erase caring fathers, instead presenting them as the butt of jokes (Prinsloo, 2006).

Researchers have also studied how fatherhood has been represented in various other visual types of media and contexts. For example, a content analysis of comic strips published from 1940 to 1999 indicated that representations of fathers oscillated from one decade to the next – varying from mockingly portraying fathers as incompetent to portraying fathers as nurturant and supportive towards their children (LaRossa et al., 2000). Another example is a study of fatherhood in South African church imagery. That study identified strong connections between breadwinning, male headship, and fatherhood. Images created by these churches fathers were mainly found to be represented as patriarchs, heads of the household and active outdoor adventurers (Koenig-Visagie and Van Eeden, 2013).

Another important area where visual representations of fatherhood have been studied is in advertisements. There is a long tradition of studying gendered representations in advertisements, dating back to the work of Erving Goffman (1976), who studied gendered representations in advertisements from the 1970s. He found that women were more frequently pictured with a focus on their hands and fingers, while men were often pictured in the role of ‘instructing professional’ – both in the private and public realm. In adverts set in the kitchen or living room, women were shown contributing actively, while men were more passive, child-like presences (Goffman, 1976). Men were occasionally pictured performing domestic tasks, but only under the watchful eye of their competent female partners. Pictures of couples tended to position men as the central figure and women as a “backup support” Goffman (1976: 40). Goffman (1976) found that in advertisements featuring families, fathers tended to be pictured standing slightly apart from the rest of the family members, implying a slightly distant, but still protective, relationship. Women and children were found to be more frequently pictured on floors and beds than men, while men tended to be depicted in elevated positions – implying a higher social status (Goffman, 1976). Goffman (1976) concluded that these carefully staged images and performances of gender were presented as if they were ‘natural’. Many contemporary studies of representations of fatherhood in advertisements build on this tradition – either directly or indirectly.

In the Swedish context, fatherhood representations have been studied in marketing materials sent to new parents, where fathers were positioned as being actively involved with their children, but less so than mothers (Sjöberg, 2012). More recently, fatherhood and advertising have been studied in relation to the phenomenon of ‘dadvertising’ – a trend in branding whereby gender equity is commoditized to sell products (Leader, 2019). Caroline Leader (2019) studied the case of Proctor and Gamble’s Tide advertisements, where representations of loving fathers doing laundry for their daughters are used as a means of selling laundry detergent. Some of the advertisements studied were found to feature fathers who appeared comfortable in historically feminized roles, while others were found to justify this domestic labour through appeals to hegemonic masculinity (Leader, 2019). These advertisements were also found to

represent a form of idealized masculinity based on involved parenting and emotional vulnerability, constructing “the fantasy of a gender revolution that has supposedly already passed” (Leader, 2019: 85).

Research on the phenomenon of ‘dadvertising’ has problematized how contemporary American advertisements use representations of involved and stay-at-home dads to represent feminist goals of gender equality in problematic ways. Tara Walker and Harsha Gangadharbatla (2019) have examined how representations of fathers have been used to sell products such as Huggies diapers, Pantene shampoo, and Doritos chips. The authors argues that such representations reflect hybrid masculinity, feminism, and postfeminism, with advertisers combining portrayals of men doing housework and childcare with portrayals of traits connected to hegemonic masculinity - such as strength, toughness, and athleticism (Walker and Gangadharbatla, 2019). The authors see these representations of involved and stay-at-home-dads as problematic because they send the message that the fight for gender equality is complete rather than ongoing.

Researchers have studied depictions of stay-at-home dads in US television news during the late 1990s, spotlighting how such representations simultaneously challenged some traditional media representations of masculinity, while simultaneously reinforcing the importance of patriarchal privilege in the domestic space (Vavrus, 2002). These media representations were also found to naturalize the notion of stay-at-home dads as a middle-class phenomenon (Vavrus, 2002). As if in answer to these earlier studies, a more recent study entitled “‘Mr. Mom’ no more” examined representations of single fathers in primetime television in the US (Turchi and Bernabo, 2020). The authors compared these representations of single-fathers with prior research of lived experiences of single-fathers, finding that while some of these representations were ‘authentic’ in representing emotional connections, others perpetuated negative stereotypes about single fathers (Turchi and Bernabo, 2020).

Scholarly attention has also been paid to the phenomenon of ‘celebrity fatherhood’, whereby male celebrities’ paternal identities have been strongly emphasized in tabloid

media (Hamad, 2010). Analysis has also been done across a range of popular US films from the twenty-first century, including historical epics, war films, westerns, bromantic comedies, male melodramas, action films and family comedies (Hamad, 2014). Through these studies of representations of male celebrities in tabloid media and representations of fatherhood across a range of popular US films, Hannah Hamad (2010, 2014) develops the notion of ‘postfeminist fatherhood’ to capture what is seen as the tendency for popular cinema and tabloid media to configure ideal masculinity in paternal terms.

Situating the Thesis in Relation to Previous Research

This literature review shows that representations of fatherhood have been studied across a range of contexts – including parenting handbooks and parenting magazines, newspapers and comics, advertisements, television, and film. Many of these studies examined the extent to which these representations might challenge and/or reinforce traditional notions of masculinity, and the implications of these representations in terms of gender (in)equality. In this sense, these studies reflect an interest in power relations between men and women. In the current thesis, I am also interested in examining representations of fatherhood and their implications for potentially unequal power relations. However, I am not only interested in the implications of these representations for power relations between *men and women*, but also the potential implications for power relations between *nations*.

This literature review has also detailed several studies that have examined material connected to what I call the Swedish Dads phenomenon. These studies have mainly focused on the commercial and branding dimensions of the Swedish Dads exhibition. For example, they emphasize how Swedish Dads have become a ‘national treasure’ (Molander, Östberg and Kleppe, 2019), an ‘export’ commodity (Klinth, 2019) and part of something which the Swedish Institute has been ‘selling’ since 1968 (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021) as a means of connecting the Swedish nation brand to notions of gender equality and ‘progressiveness’ (Jezierska and Towns, 2018). In this sense, previous

studies have tended to focus on what the circulation of the exhibition communicates about Sweden and how it constructs certain notions of ‘Swedishness’. While these studies have recognized how the Swedish Dads exhibition has contributed to the branding of the Swedish nation as progressive and gender equal, less attention has been paid to the way this exhibition has been used in relation to the Swedish state’s international development objectives. This is one of the areas in which the current thesis hopes to contribute to the research on this topic.

Secondly, although previous studies have problematized the way the Swedish state ‘appropriated’ the Swedish Dads images for the purposes of marketing Sweden abroad (Molander, Kleppe and Östberg, 2019), the distinction between the Swedish Dads photobook (Bävman, 2015) and the Swedish Dads exhibition – that was circulated by the Swedish Institute – has yet to be examined. This gap in the research presents an opportunity to investigate the differences between the photobook and exhibition produced by Bävman – a commercial photographer, and the exhibition circulated by the Swedish Institute – a government agency responsible for promoting Sweden abroad. Therefore, building on the existing research, the thesis hopes to contribute by analyzing the transformation of the Swedish Dads photobook to produce the photo exhibition circulated by the Swedish Institute.

Thirdly, limited scholarly attention has been paid to local responses to the Swedish Dads exhibition that was circulated by the Swedish Institute. Previous studies have made mention of the photographs of local fathers that were produced in relation to the Swedish Dads exhibition – including showing examples of photographs from the Ugandan Dads and Chinese Dads photo competitions (Molander, Kleppe and Östberg, 2019). These images have been used to illustrate how the Swedish Dads exhibition opened up ‘new discursive territory’, providing opportunities for fathers in other countries to reflect on their own experiences of involved fatherhood (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019). The current thesis builds on this existing research by providing situated examinations of photographs of fathers and children produced in Zambia and Zimbabwe in relation to the Swedish Dads exhibition. This makes it possible to examine

how certain images and ideals of fatherhood were produced in specific local settings in response to the Swedish Dads exhibition. In the following chapter, I outline the theoretical framework of the thesis.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis takes a social constructivist approach whereby the things we perceive are understood as being produced in relation to our conceptualizations. According to this theory, society is created by people through their social interactions and everyday habits and in this way, meaning becomes embedded within society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In examining images and ideals of fatherhood, I focus on the *culture* of fatherhood rather than its *conduct* (cf. LaRossa, 1997). At the same time, I recognize that these dimensions of fatherhood mutually shape each other. I see images of fatherhood as being able to influence both the norms, values and ideals surrounding men's parenting – as well as being able to influence how men parent in practice. Conversely, I view men's parenting practices as being able to influence how fatherhood is constructed and depicted through images. I therefore use the term 'representation' in the constructivist sense – often using the terms 'representation' and 'construction' interchangeably. I focus on fatherhood photographs in their physical and digital form. I generally use the term 'image' in an abstract sense to refer to the mental images and imaginings we construct in our minds – although these images can also be connected to photographs.

The theoretical framework of the thesis draws conceptually on three fields: parenthood studies, visual culture studies, and nation branding studies. In the emergent field of parenthood studies, the concept of parenthood is understood as referring to socially constructed notions linked to the state of being a parent – including the ideals associated with 'good parenthood' (cf. Haukanes and Thelen, 2010; Sparrman *et al.*, 2017). In the field of visual culture studies, there is an interest in the politics and practices of visual representation – recognizing that depictions can act as important sites for the construction and (re)production of power relations (Fyfe and Law, 1988; Phoenix *et al.*, 2017; Pink, 2007; Rose, 2016). Because this thesis deals with representations of fatherhood that are connected to specific national contexts, the photographs are connected with how nations are 'imagined' (cf. Glover 2009; 2011). In other words, nations can be understood as being 'produced' through images and imaginings (cf.

Glover 2009; 2011). This constructivist view of nationhood is in line with the cultural approach to studying nation branding (cf. Kaneva 2011). I will now highlight the concepts and approaches borrowed from these three fields and which are used as theoretical tools in the examination of the construction and transnational circulation of photo exhibitions featuring images and ideals of fatherhood.

Constructing Childhood, Parenthood, and Fatherhood Ideals

I take my point of departure in the ‘new’ paradigm in the sociology of childhood which was developed in the late 1990s (Prout and James, 1997). The new paradigm emphasized that children should be understood as beings in their own right (Prout, 2005) who are actively involved in the construction of their own and others’ lives, and – importantly for this thesis – that childhood itself should be understood as a social construction (Prout and James, 1997). Because of its constructed nature, the meaning ascribed to childhood varies across historical and geographical contexts (Heywood, 2001). Over the past decade, scholars have emphasized the importance studying constructions of childhood in relation to constructions of parenthood (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010), since parenthood is often understood in relation to notions of ‘the best interests of the child’ (Lind *et al.*, 2017: 2). Therefore, although this thesis focuses on parenthood, I view parenthood and childhood as being mutually constituting phenomena.

Within parenthood studies, ‘parenthood’ refers to socially constructed notions linked to the state of being a parent, as opposed to ‘parenting’ – which refers to the actual practices that parents use in relation to their children (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010). In this sense, the notion of parenthood is broader than parenting practices, and includes normative ideas about parenthood and childhood, including constructed notions of children’s development and needs (Lind *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, one can distinguish between fathering – the individual experiences men have of engaging in fathering practices, and fatherhood – the wider societal context in which fathering takes place (cf. Miller, 2011).

Thus, fatherhood as a concept refers to the socially constructed notions linked to the state of being a male parent. Norms, values, and ideals have a strong influence on how fatherhood is constructed and can also influence how fathering is done in practice. Consequently, fatherhood is produced through language and visual imagery. Indeed, these representations play an important role in constituting reality (Lupton and Barclay, 1997).

In Western contexts, the notion of ‘good parenthood’ is often constructed in a similar way to what Sharon Hays (1996) has referred to as ‘intensive mothering’. Intensive mothering is a term used to refer to the child-centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive form of parenting that was culturally expected from mothers (Hays, 1996). However, constructions of ‘good motherhood’ have arguably been extended to include men and fathers (Faircloth, 2014; Lind et al., 2017). According to these ideals of ‘good parenthood’, both male and female parents are expected to be physically and psychologically present and to spend time ensuring their children’s ‘proper’ development. In the Swedish context, research has highlighted the ideal of parents being ‘child-centred’ – according to which, most of their time outside of work should be spent with their children and on their children’s leisure activities (Forsberg, 2009; Lindgren, 2015).

As the notion of ‘intensive mothering’ has expanded to include fathers, there have also been shifts in fatherhood ideals. In particular, the ideals of ‘intimate’ (cf. Dermott, 2008) and ‘involved fatherhood’ (cf. Forsberg, 2007, 2009) have gained traction in recent decades - especially in Western contexts. According to these ideals, an ‘involved’ father is understood as one who is emotionally present and nurturing, and who develops close relationships with his child(ren) (Farstad and Stefansen, 2015; Forsberg, 2009). These ideals emphasize the importance of a father spending continuous time alone with his child(ren) – particularly when they are young. Esther Dermott (2008) has connected this to the ‘dyadic turn’ in understanding intimate relations, where the emphasis shifted from relationships within the household or family to focus instead on the relationship between individuals.

Parenthood and fatherhood ideals also tend to be influenced by social class. In the United States, middle-class parents have been found to engage in ‘concerted cultivation’ – investing intensively in developing their children’s talents through organized leisure activities (Lareau, 2003). Working-class parents, on the other hand, have been found to rely on the ‘accomplishment of natural growth’ in their children’s development, being less likely to intervene in their children’s school life or to organize leisure activities for them (Lareau, 2003). Research on middle-class Swedish fathers’ involvement with their children’s education found that men drew on a discourse of ‘involved fatherhood’ to position themselves as being in line with the ideal of ‘involved parenthood’ (Gottzén, 2011). However, fathers who were less involved with their children’s educational were found to draw on a breadwinner discourse or to depict mothers as gatekeepers to father involvement (Gottzén, 2011). In this sense, ‘involved parenthood’ can be understood as a classed phenomenon – partly as an ideal that is associated with a particular class of society, but also because such ideals might require certain socio-economic conditions to be translated into practice.

Dermott (2003) has suggested that the term ‘involved’ is ambiguous since being involved implies being engaged in a positive manner, and the implication is that being ‘uninvolved’ is negative. However, she argues that a father could still be considered as ‘involved’ if he is earning money for the family – even if this means that he can’t be so physically involved with his children. She argues that the breadwinner model should be seen as one of many possible ways of ‘doing’ fathering involvement. In this sense, the involved father can be constructed as one who is both emotionally and economically engaged, with a strong emphasis on the importance of a father ‘being there’ (Dermott and Miller, 2015).

Fatherhood ideals are also closely connected to constructed understandings of masculinity, with ‘new fathers’ expected to mirror the mythical ‘new man’ (Hearn, 2002). Within the field of fatherhood studies, distinctions are often made between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘new’ model of fatherhood. The ‘traditional’ model works according to the “rhetoric of ‘paternal difference’” – advocating a view that men have a

distinctive role to play in family life (Freeman, 2003:34). This distinctive contribution can include, for example, being a male role model to children. This model of fatherhood is based on the idea of men as primary breadwinners. The ‘new’ model of fatherhood, in contrast, works according to “a rhetoric of ‘parental equality’” (Freeman, 2003:34). This model emphasizes the potential similarities between men and women as nurturers. The ideal of ‘new fatherhood’ and masculinity is defined in relation to notions of men’s presence, care, and involvement with domesticity and family life – with ‘old’ fatherhood being constructed as somewhat ‘toxic’ in comparison (Henriksson Wahlström, 2020: 321). This demonstrates how the ideal of involved fatherhood is linked to broader discourses of gender equality and justice (Collier, 2010; Ives, 2015) and to notions of modernity, enlightenment and democracy (Klinth, 2002). Because of these connotations, involved fatherhood has come to be constructed as ‘progressive’ – largely due to its supposed potential to challenge the gendered division of family life, thereby promoting gender equality (Ives, 2015). In this way, ideals of contemporary fatherhood take on a moral dimension, giving rise to notions of ‘gender equality-orientated (heterosexual) masculinity’ (Bach, 2017).

Despite the moral connotations of these ideals, they have also been the subject of critique. Feminist researchers have raised some important critiques of how the ideal of involved fatherhood is represented in various forms of popular culture. Several studies of such portrayals have argued that while these representations may initially appear to support a feminist agenda, they generally do little to challenge the status quo, and may paradoxically serve to reinforce it (cf. Marshall et al. 2014; Leader 2019; Vavrus 2002; Jordan 2018). Such representations have been described as ‘postfeminist’ rather than feminist (Vavrus, 2002), leading to the development of the concept of ‘postfeminist fatherhood’ (Hamad, 2010, 2013). Such representations are described as ‘postfeminist’ because they imply that the goals of first and second-wave feminism have already been accomplished and that feminist politics are therefore no longer necessary (Vavrus, 2000). In this way, postfeminist representations are seen to invoke feminism while simultaneously suggesting that feminism is “a spent force” that is “no longer needed” (McRobbie, 2004: 255). Thus, many feminist scholars argue that postfeminist

representations of ‘progressive’ and ‘involved’ fathers may give the impression of promoting second-wave feminist ideals while doing little to challenge existing power relations – and potentially reinforcing existing inequalities between men and women.

Globalizing and Universalizing Family Ideals

Just as ideals of ‘good’ parenthood and ‘good’ childhood vary historically and across national and local contexts (Lind et al., 2017; Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012), family ideals can also be understood as fluid and situated rather than fixed and universal. However, because of uneven power relations in the global social order, some nations have had disproportionate influence on how globalized family ideals have been constructed (McEwen, 2017). For example, the spread of European colonialism also entailed the spread of European family ideals – including the universalization of the European nuclear family system (Oyěwùmí, 2002). These cultural ideals remain ideologically entrenched, with the ‘modern’, nuclear family historically being seen as a mark of civilization (Kitch, 2009; McEwen, 2017).

Western ideals and ideas have also had a disproportionate impact on how notions of ‘good’ childhood are constructed in an international context. Particularly influential Western ideas about children and childhood have come from developmental psychology (cf. van der Horst *et al.*, 2020) and theories about a child’s emotional well-being depending on their having a warm, intimate relationship with their primary caregiver (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010). Such ideals tend to promote notions of intimate, child-centered parenthood whereby parents are encouraged to develop exclusive bonds with their babies (cf. van der Horst *et al.*, 2020). Such parenting ideals correspond with the notion of the individualized, modern child that has dominated Western thinking (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010). Although the universal applicability of Western understanding of child development has been challenged for failing to account for cultural and contextual factors, these ideals remain wide-spread and influential (cf. van der Horst *et al.*, 2020).

One way in which Western ideals of childhood – and corresponding ideals of parenthood – have been exported around the world is through the efforts of state agencies, NGOs, and international aid organizations (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012). Indeed, the universalization of globalized childhood ideals is closely intertwined with child-focused development projects (cf. Valentin and Meinert, 2009), with development agencies in the global North tending to project their own desired self-image onto countries in the global ‘South’ (Pickard, 2007). In this sense, international development work has been described as paradoxical – potentially being beneficial but also potentially being paternalistic (cf. Oloruntoba, 2020; Sweis, 2021).

Another related means through which Western childhood ideals have been universalized is through international agreements, such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). Indeed, the UNCRC is based on a childhood ideal that has a strong Western bias that may fail to recognize the larger social networks in which children are embedded (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010). In this way, the ‘global child’ has been institutionalized, becoming a standard against which all childhoods (and parenthoods) are measured (de Castro, 2020). Childhood studies scholars have problematized that while the majority of the world’s children live in economically poor regions of the world (making childhood(s) in the ‘developing’ or ‘Third World’ the most common type), it is paradoxically the privileged, protected, childhoods of children in the ‘First World’ that are treated as the norm (Punch, 2003).

This globalization of childhood and parenthood ideals has not meant that such ideals are universally accepted. Indeed, their translation in local contexts is not straightforward (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010), and in practice, global norms and ideals may be resisted, rejected, embraced or adapted to local contexts (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012). The globalization of Western notions of childhood has resulted in hybridized notions of childhood that are neither completely Western, nor completely local, in nature (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012). For example, the *African Charter on Children’s Rights* bears similarities to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), but is also adapted to account for the social realities facing children (and parents) in Africa (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012).

This discussion of the socially constructed nature of childhood, parenthood and fatherhood is an important basis for the thesis. Acknowledging this constructedness makes it possible to examine what ideals are being visually constructed and circulated through photo exhibitions. How this connects to theories and concepts from the field of visual culture studies will now be discussed.

Images and Exhibitions in Context

The field of visual culture recognizes that visual materials can have multiple and differing effects, depending on how, where and by whom they are viewed. Terms such as ‘the gaze’, ‘audience’ and ‘spectatorship’ were developed to capture these elements of visual culture (Cartwright and Sturken, 2009). Visual culture is defined by the interaction between ‘the viewer’ and ‘the viewed’ – what Mirzoeff (1999: 13) refers to as a ‘visual event’. Through these ‘visual events’, consumers of images seek information, meaning or pleasure (ibid, p. 3).

This thesis borrows from the field of visual culture studies in studying international photo exhibitions connected to specific national contexts. Since the World Expositions and Fairs of the mid-19th and 20th centuries, international exhibitions have functioned as sites for constructing and displaying national and imperial identities in a global context (Smits and Jansen, 2012). While their content may appear self-evident, it is usually the result of complex processes and decisions about what gets displayed, silenced or ironed out of an exhibition – which in turn can influence public understandings of certain topics (cf. Macdonald 1998). From a visual culture perspective, it is important to consider the practical circumstances in which exhibitions are embedded (Heath and vom Lehn, 2004), including the contexts in which images are produced, circulated and consumed (cf. Cartwright and Sturken, 2009; Martins, 2020; Rose, 2016).

Visual culture makes it possible to go beyond studying images as ‘products’ in themselves, instead focusing on the processes through which visual culture is produced.

In order to examine the construction and transnational circulation of images and ideals through photo exhibitions, this thesis draws on Rose's (2016) critical visual methodology. According to her theory, the meaning of an image is produced at four sites, including 1) the site of production of an image; 2) the site of the image itself (i.e., its visual content); 3) the site of the image's circulation (i.e., where the image travels) and 4) the site of the image's audiencing (i.e., where the image encounters spectators). Indeed, images are generally not consumed in the same sites where they are produced, and different places invite different ways of seeing and spectating (Rose, 2016). It is therefore important to consider the context in which images are seen, as well as to reflect on the contexts in which they were produced and circulated (Rose, 2016).

The field of visual culture also encourages one to reflect on what images *do* in the world, and to ask, as W.J.T. Mitchell (2006) suggests, what pictures *want*. Some of the key questions in the field of visual culture (Mitchell, 1994, 2002), are "Who or what represents what to whom with what, and where and why?" (Mitchell, 1994: 420). Asking those kinds of questions ties this thesis to the field. Therefore, when studying photographic depictions of fatherhood, I am interested in the choices that are made in terms of what is or is not represented and in what ways, but also in the power dynamics at play in such representational choices (cf. Lazar, 2005).

The Ordinary and the Exceptional within Nation Branding

In line with previous research on the topic, I understand the circulation of the 'Swedish Dads' exhibition as a form of nation branding (cf. Jezierska and Towns, 2018; Klinth, 2018, 2019; Molander, Kleppe and Ostberg, 2018). Nation branding is generally understood as a practice whereby national governments use marketing techniques to enhance their international image and to increase their attractiveness as a destination for tourism, investment, trade etc. (cf. Aronczyk, 2013; Wang, 2013; Jezierska and Towns, 2018). In response to calls for more critical, culturally-orientated research in this field (cf. Kaneva, 2011; Jordan, 2014), I take a cultural approach to the study of nation branding. A cultural approach within this field seeks to situate nation branding practices

in the context of broader discourses and power relations (Kaneva 2011). This cultural approach is distinct from other forms of nation branding research which may emphasize the development of theories to improve the applied practice of nation branding (cf. Kaneva 2011).

Nation branding scholars distinguish between the image a nation has of itself, and the image that others have of that nation (Glover, 2009). Indeed, “the imagining of a particular community is not solely the act of the members of that community (...) but also of transnational, co-constructions of that particular nation” (Glover, 2009: 258). Similar distinctions can be made between notions of national identity – which is intended to remind ‘us’ who ‘we’ are, and nation branding campaigns – which are generally outwardly directed and intended “to teach them about us” (Ståhlberg and Bolin, 2016: 7). In this sense, it is not ‘we, the citizens’ who are the intended addressees of nation branding campaigns, but rather ‘you’ – “who is not one of ‘us’” (Ståhlberg and Bolin, 2016: 6). Although in theory one can distinguish between a nation’s self-image and its outward facing image, these images influence each other in practice (Glover, 2009).

Nation branding has been described as ‘a method of distinction’, with individual nations using marketing techniques to show that their brand is ‘uniquely authentic’ (Valaskivi 2016: 139). Considering that nation branding could be seen as a way of representing a nation as ‘exceptional’, it is interesting to note the tendency for states to use ‘ordinary citizens’ to do this (cf. Fauve, 2015). This has also been the case in Sweden – where ‘ordinary’ Swedish citizens have been given the responsibility of representing and promoting Sweden in relation to an international audience. For example, ‘random Swedes’ were given control over the official @Sweden Twitter account for a period of time during 2011 (Christensen, 2013). Since 2016, the Swedish number campaign made it possible for international travellers to call and speak to an ordinary Swedish citizen to find out more about the country (Pamment and Cassinger, 2018).

The use of narratives from ‘ordinary people’ has also been identified as a trend in national museum culture and in international exhibitions (cf. Smits and Jansen, 2012). Indeed, the telling of national histories in national museums is increasingly done through personal narratives from individuals. Similarly, international exhibitions have increasingly been found to rely on visual media and sentimentalized stories of ‘ordinary people’ in a way that visitors can easily identify with (Smits and Jansen, 2012). This is partly a response to the increasing internal diversity of nations which are difficult to capture within a unitary national identity project. Thus, nations increasingly brand themselves using emotionally charged individual stories (Smits and Jansen, 2012). Indeed, Smits and Jansen (2012) argue that such exhibitions have become a means through which nations distinguish themselves based on the personal experiences those nations offer rather than based on their traditional culture.

Previous studies of Swedish Institute campaigns have highlighted how the photographs in the Swedish Dads exhibition could be seen to construct Swedish fathers as both ordinary *and* exotic (Goedecke and Klinth, 2021). Notions of the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘exceptional’ are particularly interesting to study in the context of Nordic countries like Sweden – since such countries are often seen as exceptional in an international context (Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012). Indeed, such exceptionalism has been found to constitute a central aspect of national identities in Nordic states, and to represent a particular form of nation branding (Browning, 2007). Nordic states’ international reputation for being exceptional is often connected to their being seen as trailblazers in the project of social modernization (Musiał, 2009). Furthermore, they use their welfare states as a means of creating equal societies – often with a focus on gender equality (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Therefore, the notions of the ordinary and the exceptional are key concepts used in this thesis.

This chapter has emphasized the social constructivist approach taken in studying representations of fatherhood and nationhood. This includes recognizing that parenthood and fatherhood are socially constructed and that when these categories are represented through visual images and other forms of text, they are also being

‘produced’. Similarly, the meaning attributed to visual culture is also socially constructed – making the meaning of images and exhibitions highly contextual. Taken together, this means that images and exhibitions representing fatherhood and childhood – and by extension, nationhood – should be understood in relation to the context of their production, circulation, and exhibition. This theoretical framework guides the analysis of the empirical material. The following chapter will provide details of the material on which the thesis is based, as well as the methods used in collecting and analyzing this material.

CHAPTER 5: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline my methodological approach and provide details of the material used in the thesis. I also show how the material was collected and analysed. The chapter ends with reflections on the ethical considerations of my research and how ethical dilemmas were managed.

Collecting the Material - Visual Ethnography

The collection of the material in this thesis was inspired by Sarah Pink's (2007) method of visual ethnography (Pink, 2007). As Pink highlights, 'ethnographic-ness' is not an essential property of an activity, image or text – rather, these things may be defined as 'ethnographic' based on interpretation and context (Pink, 2007: 23). In other words, what makes research (and by extension, research materials) 'ethnographic' is the way in which they are approached and used. Visual ethnography makes it possible to work across disciplinary boundaries through focusing on practices of representation and examining the contested nature of the meaning of visual phenomena (Pink, 2007). Visual ethnography can be combined with textual, historical, narrative, statistical and other research practices. This is possible because visual research methods are not purely visual in the sense that images and texts co-create each other and the world around them. Therefore, visual methods do not only focus on images, but pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture (Pink, 2007: 21).

This is relevant to the current thesis which focuses on the Swedish Dads phenomenon – a phenomenon which includes important visual elements, but which was also produced in a complex network of power structures comprising a range of actors and institutions located in different geographical places. To understand this complex phenomenon, it was necessary to collect a broad range of materials related to Swedish Dads. Therefore, I do not examine the photographs as isolated images – rather, I study these images together with their captions and with a sensitivity to the contexts in which they were produced, circulated, and exhibited. This contextual information was obtained through examining documents (such as calls for entry into photo competitions), as well as

through conducting key informant interviews with people directly involved with the exhibitions. I will now elaborate on how this material was collected.

Fieldwork

The main data collection period was between 2018 and 2019, where most of the images and texts were collected, and most of the key informant interviews were conducted. Other material was also collected intermittently as it was produced. I began by identifying which Swedish embassies had hosted the Swedish Dads exhibition – which I did by searching the Sweden Abroad website (SI, 2020) – the official website for Sweden’s embassies and consulates. This website also provided information about the exhibitions – such as when and where it was hosted and whether it was combined with local photo competitions and/or exhibitions. I was able to complement this information by searching Swedish embassies’ official social media page(s). In order to gather additional information which may not have been available through my online searches, I emailed embassies directly. When emailing the embassies, I informed them about my research and my interest in finding out more about where and when Swedish Dads was exhibited in their country and about their local photo competitions. I generally received a positive response from the staff at the embassies, and they were often interested in my research and happy to contribute towards it.

Collating and indexing the material

Part of the data collection entailed collating and indexing information into tables. Information for the tables was compiled through “the tracking and tracing of social actions” (Sumiala and Valaskivi, 2014: 229) – a method for studying circulation which I adapted for the purpose of studying the circulation of exhibitions. I compiled two tables with information about the transnational circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition and related photographs. The first table included information about when and where the Swedish Dads exhibition was circulated, which embassies and countries hosted the exhibition and which venues were used to exhibit it to the public. In terms of the embassies that hosted the Swedish Dads exhibition, I also collected information in a second table. There I produced an overview about embassies that chose to make use of

photographs of local fathers and children in relation to the exhibition. Here, I compiled information about the form of photographs used – i.e., whether the photographs were taken by professionals or whether photographs were collected using photo competitions open to the public. As new material was constantly being produced, the tables were updated periodically. These tables provided an important overview of the circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition and responses to it and constituted an essential source of material for Article II.

Material

Ethnographic research tends to produce large quantities of material, and this has been the case in this thesis too. I collected a range of material, including documents, such as toolkit manuals, photo competition guidelines, reports submitted to the Swedish Institute by embassies, and images, such as installation shots – i.e. photographs taken at an exhibition for the purposes of documenting it (O'Donnell 2016: 70). This material was highly important for my understanding of the phenomena I am studying. However, not all material was equally analysed. In the following I will describe the material analysed in the articles, starting with an overview which is provided in Table 1.

Photographs and Captions

The first type of image analysed includes the 45 photographs in the Swedish Dads photobook (Bävman, 2015). They were all accompanied by brief captions – providing information such as the age and occupation of the father in the photograph and the duration of his parental leave. Most of the images in the photobook were also accompanied by slightly longer captions in the form of excerpts from informal interviews that Bävman conducted with the fathers about, for example, why they took parental leave and how it has affected their family relationships.

The second type of image analysed includes the 25 photographs and captions used in the Swedish Institute version of the Swedish Dads exhibition. These photographs and captions were based on those used in the Swedish Dads photobook, but one new

photograph was added, and the captions were shortened and adapted. This made it possible to examine which photographs were included in the Swedish Institute version of the Swedish Dads exhibition, as well as to analyse the changes made to the captions. These photographs and their captions were available for download from the ‘Sharing Sweden’ website (Swedish Institute, 2020).

General Type of Material	Specific Type of Material	Description
Photographs and related texts	<i>Photographs, titles, captions, descriptions etc.</i>	45 photographs and captions from the Swedish Dads photobook (Bävman, 2015) 25 photographs and captions from the Swedish Dads exhibition circulated by SI 22 photographs and captions from the Zambian Dads exhibition 25 photographs and captions from the Vana Baba exhibition in Zimbabwe
Documents	<i>Posters, flyers, and introductory panels from exhibitions</i>	Posters and flyers advertising exhibitions of Swedish Dads and Zambian Dads Introductory text to Swedish Dads Introductory text to Zambian Dads
Interviews	<i>Key informant interviews</i>	Five interviews: -A representative from the Swedish Institute who was responsible for the Swedish Dads exhibition -Johan Bävman – Swedish Dads photographer -A representative from the Swedish Embassy in Zambia -Izla Bethdavid – Zambian Dads photographer -A representative from the Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe

Table 1: Overview of the material

The last type of image analysed includes the photographs that were locally produced for the Zambian and Zimbabwean exhibitions. They were collected through a process whereby I emailed embassies around the world to find out if they had made use of photographs of local fathers and children in connection with the Swedish Dads exhibition. I learned that approximately 38 embassies had done so – with embassies in 29 countries hosting photo competitions or making use of other non-professional photographs and embassies in nine countries using photographs taken by professional

photographers³. Many embassies were willing to share these images. I have collected approximately 340 such images.

I initially considered analyzing the 340 images collected from different embassies. However, these photographs were collected and produced under such different circumstances that it soon became apparent that this would not provide a good basis for analysis. For example, it would not be meaningful to compare photographs taken by a professional photographer in one context with photographs submitted through a photo competition organized through social media. Therefore, I chose instead to examine one example where the photographs were taken by a professional photographer and one where the photographs were collected through a photo competition open to the public. This choice has made it possible to provide a more situated examination of particular, local responses to the Swedish Dads exhibition.

For the first example, I chose to focus on the *Zambian Dads* exhibition. I used this as an example of a photo exhibition produced by a professional photographer in relation to the *Swedish Dads* exhibition. The exhibition featured 22 photographs of Zambian fathers and their children, taken by embassy employee and photographer Izla Bethdavid. Each photograph was accompanied by captions that included the father's name, occupation, and city, as well as excerpts from the informal interviews conducted by Bethdavid. I obtained access to these photographs and captions through personal correspondence with Bethdavid. The *Zambian Dads* exhibition was produced by the embassy of Sweden in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. The exhibition was produced through the embassy's collaboration with local partners, and with financial support from the Swedish Institute. Most of the fathers in the photographs were recruited via the Zambia National Men's Network for Gender and Development – a local not-for-profit organization working with men and boys to challenge gender inequalities (ZNMNGD, 2021). The *Zambian Dads* exhibition was particularly interesting to study because it was

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³ In 2 countries – Australia and Switzerland – Johan Bävman was the commissioned photographer, producing collections of 'Aussie Dads' and 'Swiss Dads'.

a unique case where such an exhibition of local fathers and children was also exhibited in Sweden (as discussed in Article II).

For the second example, I chose to focus on the photo exhibition produced in Zimbabwe – a neighbouring country to Zambia. The official title of the exhibition was Vana Baba Vanhasi/Obaba Balamhla/Fathers of Today (including the Shona, Zulu, and English translations). This exhibition was based on a photo competition organized by the Swedish Embassy in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. The exhibition included the 25 winning photographs from the photo competition – each of which was accompanied by a title, a caption, and the name of the photographer. These titles and captions were implicitly written by the father featured in the photograph or the person who submitted the photograph into the competition. The submission guidelines invited participants to participate in the photo competition which was “dedicated to documenting and showcasing the roles of progressive fathers in Zimbabwe today and how fathers relate to and interact with their children” (Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, 2016). The submission guidelines noted that “the project seeks to explore the roles of fathers in Zimbabwe and how their relationships with their partner and child(ren) have changed in the face of a changing and progressively more gender equal world” (Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, 2016).

This explicit focus on being a ‘progressive father’ was an important consideration in choosing this example – not least because of the strong connection between Sweden’s nation branding and the notion of being ‘progressive’ (cf. Jezierska and Towns, 2018). I was interested to explore how the notion of ‘progressive fatherhood’ would be represented in the Zimbabwean context. The Zimbabwean competition was also clearly structured, and I had access to the original call for entries into the competition, the rules of the competition as well as the 25 winning photographs and their accompanying titles and captions. This information was all available in English, which was another important consideration. The Embassy of Sweden in Harare also owned the copyright to the winning images and was willing to grant me permission to use these images for research purposes.

Documents

I collected approximately 20 documents related to the Swedish Dads exhibitions. Of particular interest were the ‘toolkits’ produced and designed by the Swedish Institute and available for download from the ‘Sharing Sweden’ website (Swedish Institute, 2020). The purpose of these toolkits was to help Swedish embassies to produce the exhibition in a standardized way. Specifically, they contain “instructions for printing, presenting and promoting the Swedish Dads photo exhibition” and could also be used to help embassies “create relevant activities that highlight equality and fatherhood” (Sharing Sweden: 2016-12-17). The toolkits were used to highlight the Swedish Institute’s efforts to circulate a standardized exhibition – as discussed in Article II.

Documents related to the local photo competitions were also collected, for example, the ‘Call for entries’ into the competitions, as well as the lists of guidelines and rules related to the competitions. These documents were generally produced by the local Swedish Embassy (sometimes in collaboration with other local partners). I also looked at the posters and flyers used to advertise the local exhibitions, and documents that were used as introductory panels for the Swedish Dads and Zambian Dads exhibitions. These texts were displayed at the start of the exhibition and explained what the exhibition was about, who produced and paid for it and why it was being shown. These introductory texts were analysed in Article II in order to contextualize the circulation of the Swedish Dads and Zambian Dads exhibitions. Finally, I also gained access to several of the country reports that embassies had written and submitted to the Swedish Institute after hosting the exhibition. Some of these reports were more detailed than others, but they generally provided basic information about the Swedish Dads exhibition (e.g. where it was held, how many people attended it, etc.). In cases where embassies had hosted local photo competitions, these were also generally mentioned in the reports. These reports provided information that contributed to my broader understanding of the Swedish Dads phenomenon.

Interviews

I made use of key informant interviews (Marshall, 1996) with informants who I chose because they were uniquely positioned in terms of their knowledge of the Swedish Dads phenomenon. This included the photographer Johan Bävman, as well as the representative from the Swedish Institute who was responsible for circulating the adapted version of the exhibition. I interviewed Bävman at his studio in Malmö and the representative at the headquarters of the Swedish Institute in Stockholm. The interviews were semi-structured and in-depth, lasting approximately two-hours each. I audio-recorded and later transcribed these interviews and translated key excerpts from Swedish to English since the articles were being written in English. These interviews served to help me to understand Bävman and the Swedish Institute's respective objectives in using the Swedish Dads images and to understand what changes were made by the Swedish Institute as they adapted the content for international circulation. These interviews were analysed in Article I.

I also had an electronic interview with the Communication and Promotion Officer at the Embassy of Sweden in Harare who provided me with additional information about the Swedish Dads exhibition and subsequent photo competition and exhibition held in Zimbabwe. This was also how I gained access to the winning photographs, along with their titles and captions and other documents related to the competition and exhibition. I also conducted two Zoom interviews with the two main people involved with the Zambian Dads exhibition – i.e. photographer, Izla Bethdavid, and a representative from the Swedish Embassy in Lusaka, Zambia. These interviews were used for background information in Article II. I return to questions of anonymization at the end of this chapter, when discussing the ethical considerations of the thesis.

Methods of Analysis

Taking a social constructivist approach that emphasizes the situated, contextual, and subjective nature of visual phenomena (cf. Pink, 2007), I approached representations as 'ways of world-making' which, in turn, have implications for how social realities are constructed (Moscovici 1998; Phoenix, Howarth and Philogène 2017). I was interested

in the ways in which representations variously constructed and represented the world. During the analysis, I was mindful of the relationship between visual images and associated texts – especially because texts such as captions can influence how visual content is understood (cf. Mitchell, 2002; Sjöberg, 2012). Indeed, captions arguably *produce* images in particular ways, prioritizing certain pieces of information over others (Rose, 2016: 237). Similarly, the images themselves could be seen to produce certain versions of reality. In order to grasp both ‘ways of world-making’, I made use of two main methods of analysis – Visual Discourse Analysis (Rose, 2016) and Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019) – each of which is outlined below. The main method of analysis used in the articles was Visual Discourse Analysis, while Thematic Analysis was only used in one of the articles (Article I). Therefore, more detail is provided on the former method than the latter.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns across a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analysis method is compatible with the constructivist epistemology of this thesis, which emphasizes that meaning is socially produced and reproduced rather than being inherent. In Thematic Analysis, a theme represents a pattern identified in the data that is relevant to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82). I took an inductive approach to thematic analysis, identifying themes based on the data themselves – in this case, the material from the interview conducted with Bävman and with the representative from the Swedish Institute. In particular, I was interested in how the themes of the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘exceptional’ related to ideas such as gender-equal Swedish fatherhood and Swedish nation branding (Article I).

Visual Discourse Analysis

While Thematic Analysis was used to identify key patterns in the material, the main method of analysis used in the articles was Visual Discourse Analysis (Rose, 2016). This is a method for analysing how discourses are produced, re-produced, sustained and challenged through visual and textual materials. Here, the term ‘discourse’ is used in the

Foucauldian sense to refer to a particular knowledge about the world that influences how the world is understood and how things are done in the world (Rose, 2016). Discourses both enable *and* constrain ways of knowing the world and our place within it, and how we may or may not relate to one another (Lazar, 2000: 376). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis makes it possible to examine how the construction of meaning is connected to power imbalances in our society, and how a particular version of reality comes to be treated as ‘true’ while other versions are excluded (Khan and MacEachen, 2021). This means taking power into consideration in data analysis, recognizing alternative forms of knowledge as potentially legitimate, and focusing on difference, absences, and local contexts rather than looking for universals (Khan and MacEachen, 2021). When analyzing my material, I was interested in the uneven power dynamics between nations, as well as the discourses and ideologies embedded within the material and resulting in its circulation between nations. Here, discourses of interest are included, for example, discourses of gender equality, diversity, progressiveness, and international development.

While Foucauldian Discourse Analysis focuses on how particular knowledge about the world is produced through language, Visual Discourse Analysis recognizes that the world is also produced visually – including through the ways in which images and texts are constructed and displayed. Thus, although using Visual Discourse Analysis means paying particular attention to visual images and the ways in which they influence the social world, it is essential to consider the relationship between images and texts and to examine how these elements may combine to reinforce or contradict certain meanings and interpretations (Rose, 2016). Indeed, as mentioned above, texts can be important for understanding images and vice versa. Therefore, analyzing texts related to images is also a form of visual analysis. Visual Discourse Analysis is useful for examining the visual discourses identifiable in images themselves, as well as the broader societal and institutional discourses in which the images and exhibitions are embedded (Rose, 2016). In my analysis, this included situating images and texts in the context in which they were produced, as well as highlighting the contexts in which they were circulated and exhibited.

I went through the empirical material highlighting patterns and themes – in line with Rose’s (2016) methodology. This was particularly useful in helping me to give an overview of a whole data set – such as describing the general characteristics of the photographs in the Swedish Dads or Zambian Dads exhibition. However, grouping images and their captions in this way made it possible to identify broader discursive patterns across the material. For example, in the photographs of Zimbabwean fathers, this helped me to identify visual and discursive strategies through which the fathers in the photographs were represented as being ‘progressive’. I also produced image collages based on themes identified across a collection of images, thereafter, also paying attention to details (Rose 2016). Finally, I used tables to identify similarities and differences between the captions in the Swedish Dads photobook and the Swedish Dads exhibition circulated by the Swedish Institute, with a focus on the discursive connotations and implications of these changes.

When using visual research methods, it is particularly important to be aware of the theoretical underpinnings of the methods and to be explicit about one’s underlying epistemological assumptions as a researcher (Pink, 2007). This is even more important when doing research with photographs because they are often believed to have ‘evidentiary power’, based on the problematic assumption that such images can be treated as direct and neutral reflections of social realities (Kozol, 1998: 662). On the other hand, the idea of using photographs as research material has historically been criticised for being “... too subjective, unrepresentative and systematic”, lacking “...objectivity and scientific rigour” (Pink, 2007: 9). In my analysis, I approached the material (including images, captions, documents, and interview transcripts) from a constructivist standpoint. In other words, I tried to avoid treating these as objective statements of truth, instead approaching them as constructions of reality that were produced in specific contexts and in relation to specific intended audiences. I examined how particular constructions were produced and how these constructions could be understood in relation to the objectives of the person/people/organizations who produced them.

Ethical Guidelines and Ethical Practice

One can distinguish between ‘ethical guidelines’ – the formal rules and laws governing research – i.e. ‘ethics as risk management’, and ‘ethical practice’ – and the more situated negotiation of ethical dilemmas in specific research contexts (cf. Harcourt and Quennerstedt, 2014). In the sense of ‘ethics as risk management’, it is important to ensure that the formal aspects of ethical research are upheld, such as ensuring informed consent is obtained from participants. Therefore, the people interviewed for my research were given information letters outlining the purpose of the research, what their participation would entail, and how the research material would be used. In this way, they were informed of any potential risks or benefits and could make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in the research. In analyzing the interview material, I have also sought to provide a fair account of their views, and to avoid misquoting or misrepresenting the participants.

Aside from the formal aspects of ethical research, I have also sought to manage the more situated ethical dilemmas of the research process. Indeed, ethical dilemmas are common in relation to ‘found images’ which, by definition, were not produced explicitly for use in research (Weber, 2008) – as is the case with the exhibition photographs that I analyse. It is therefore also important to reflect on ‘ethics as research practice’ (cf. Quennerstedt, Harcourt, and Sargeant 2014). An example of how I did this related to the choice of whether or not to include a specific photograph in my analysis. During an interview with one of the photographers, I was given quite revealing information about one of the families featured in the photographs. This information provided interesting material for my analysis but would also have exposed information about this family that they had not consented to. I therefore decided not to include this photograph – or the additional information from the photographer – in my analysis. This example shows how I applied ethics in practice by considering the potential ethical implications of using information obtained in one context, in another context that could potentially be harmful to the people featured in the photograph.

It is part of good research practice to seek to be ethically and morally reflexive when engaging in visual research in general (Prosser and Loxley, 2008) and when doing visual ethnography in particular (Pink, 2007). As Pink (2007) notes, in order to use visual ethnography in an ethical manner, researchers need to take a reflexive approach that acknowledges their positionality and engages in self-scrutiny. Similarly, Rose (2012) highlights that researcher reflexivity is important because visual culture research “entangles the researcher as much as anyone else in the practices and performances of looking” (p. 552). In my own case, I have reflected upon my position as a South African living in Sweden and how this has shaped my own research practice. For example, growing up in a postcolonial country has led to an interest in the uneven power relations between nations and how these dynamics play out through norms and ideals related to families. This has also influenced the way I approached the material and the type of questions I sought to answer through my analyses. Being transparent and reflexive about what I as a researcher bring to my analyses is therefore an important part of doing ‘ethics as research practice’ (cf. Harcourt and Quennerstedt, 2014).

Fink and Lomax highlight how the circulation of images in different contexts can distance the images from their creators’ original intentions and “infuse them with unintended meanings” (Fink and Lomax, 2016: 21). Likewise, there is a risk that by using these images in a research context, I am removing them from the contexts in which and for which they were originally produced. The images of Swedish Dads had already been published in a photobook and widely circulated through exhibitions by Johan Bävman and the Swedish Institute. In most of these contexts, the names, ages, and professions of the people in the imagers were displayed with the images themselves. In this sense, there was no real possibility of ‘anonymizing’ these images.

However, when it comes to the winning images from the Zimbabwean fathers’ photo competition and the Zambian Dads exhibition, the matter is less clear. Technically, the Embassy of Sweden and their collaborating partners own the copyright to these images, and I have obtained their permission to use these images. Although the photographers and those featured in the photographs had not explicitly agreed to the use of the

photographs for research purposes, these photographs were submitted into competitions where winning photographs would be publicly displayed (in the case of Zimbabwe), and the *Zambian Dads* images were also explicitly intended for public display. In this sense, it seemed reasonable to conclude that the photographers and the people in the photographs were comfortable with these images being made public. Although these images did not have the wide public circulation connected with the *Swedish Dads* exhibition, they had been shared publicly prior to being used in this research. Bearing these challenges in mind, I have made sure to credit the photographers who took the photographs, and to treat the images of people in the photographs in a respectful manner.

The question of anonymity requires some additional discussion. Prosser and Loxley (2008) note that while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality is a common practice in social science research, this becomes difficult in the case of visual research. This is particularly challenging when the images are to become visible in the public domain through the publication of journal articles, as is the case with my research. One option is to blur the faces of people in the photographs. However, this may not be sufficient to prevent the person from being identified and may even defeat the purpose of including the image in the first place (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Visual methods researchers have also challenged the assumption that all images that identify participants are necessarily ‘unethical’ (Rose, 2016: 360). Some researchers have even argued that the rich information that can be gained from an image overrides the rights to anonymity of the people and places in the image (Wiles et al., 2011). I therefore chose to include the faces of the people in the images, as well as the names of the photographers, as I decided that the positive consequences of acknowledging them and thus not erasing their identity outweigh the risk of not anonymizing.

Another important anonymity question came up in terms of whether or not I should anonymize the material collected during the key informant interviews. While anonymizing interview material is generally common practice in qualitative research, this practice itself raises practical and ethical dilemmas (Saunders et al., 2015). In the context of online research, some scholars have even argued that it could even be

unethical to anonymize research accounts because it can prevent respondents from having the opportunity to respond to how they are represented by researchers (Bruckman et al., 2015).

Recent debates on questions of anonymity have highlighted the potential risks of ‘masking’ in ethnographic research – i.e. the practice of hiding or distorting identifying information about people, places, and organizations with the intention of protecting research participants (Jerolmack and Murphy, 2019). One of the risks of such masking practices is that it can give subjects a false sense of security due to the implied promise of confidentiality, which cannot be guaranteed (Jerolmack and Murphy, 2019). Another factor is that sometimes subjects may want and even expect to be referred to by name (Jerolmack and Murphy, 2019). While a degree of masking can be ethically and practically warranted, it should not be treated as a default option for ethnographers to use unquestioningly (Jerolmack and Murphy, 2019). With these debates in mind, I did not treat anonymization as a default option, but have chosen to use the real names of photographers. In the case of the photographs of Zimbabwean fathers, I have included the names of the photographers so as to credit their work. This was also the case with photographers such as Johan Bävman and Izla Bethdavid. It is also relatively easy to connect the names of these photographers to the titles of the exhibitions – i.e., Swedish Dads and Zambian Dads. In this sense, it would not be very effective to anonymize them by referring to them indirectly as ‘the photographer of Swedish Dads’.

In this chapter, I have described the methods and methodology on which this thesis is based. This included collecting an eclectic mix of material through a visual ethnography. This material included photographs and captions, documents, and key informant interviews. Based on a social constructivist methodology, this material was analysed using thematic analysis and visual discourse analysis. I have also highlighted the ethical guidelines which have informed my ethical practice in conducting this research. In what follows, I present summaries of the empirical articles of the thesis.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

ARTICLE I

Mitchell, S.J. (In Print) “Extra(Ordinary) Swedish Dads: Branding the ‘Exceptional’ Swedish Nation through Visual Representations of ‘Everyday Fatherhood’”. *Culture Unbound*

This article focused on the transformation of the Swedish Dads photobook into the Swedish Dads exhibition that was circulated transnationally by the Swedish Institute. The analysis was structured around constructions of fatherhood in relation to themes of the ordinary/everyday in relation to the exceptional/extraordinary. Here, involved and child-centred fatherhood was constructed as ‘ordinary’ and ‘not so special’ – implicitly when compared to involved and child-centred motherhood. However, when the Swedish Dads exhibition was adapted and circulated by the Swedish Institute, the basis of comparison shifted from comparing Swedish fathers to *Swedish mothers* (where they were constructed as ‘not so special’) to comparing Swedish fathers to *fathers in other countries* (where they were constructed as ‘exceptional’ due to the ‘unique’ Swedish parental leave system). In this way, involved Swedish fathers – and by extension, the Swedish state that provides the infrastructure for their involvement – were constructed as ‘exceptional’ in an international context, thereby contributing to Swedish nation branding. The article also highlighted some of the concrete changes made when transforming the Swedish Dads photobook into the Swedish Dads exhibition and the implications thereof. Some changes to images and captions were found to construct Sweden as an ethnically diverse but culturally integrated nation, while other changes served to imply that the fathers represented in the images represented the average rather than the exceptional Swedish father.

ARTICLE II

Mitchell, S.J. (Under review) “Bridging and equalizing global fatherhoods: Swedish circulations of images and ideals” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*

This article traces the transnational circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition by the Swedish state – via the Swedish Institute and Swedish embassies – to 54 countries. Many embassies that hosted the Swedish Dads exhibition also made use of photographs of local fathers of children – as was the case in the Zambian Dads exhibition, which was also circulated in Sweden.

Like the photographs in the Swedish Dads exhibition, the photographs in the Zambian Dads exhibition were found to reflect the ideals of involved and child-centred fatherhood. However, these photographs were also found to extend these ideals beyond the context of the middle-class nuclear family (implicit in the Swedish Dads photographs) to include rural and less affluent settings, as well as larger families. The Zambian Dads exhibition was circulated in Sweden using similar venues to those used for exhibiting the Swedish Dads exhibition in Zambia. However, while the Swedish Dads exhibition was circulated by the Swedish Institute to promote Sweden and gender equality abroad, the Zambian Dads exhibition was circulated by the Swedish Development and Cooperation Agency (SIDA) as a means of showing the Swedish public the kind of development work Sweden does in countries like Zambia.

The article highlights that while the Swedish Dads exhibition explicitly communicates a message about gender equality, it also implicitly communicates certain family ideals – including the ideals of involved and child-centred fatherhood. The circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition could be seen to globalize the Swedish ideal of gender-equal fatherhood to everyone – regardless of national contextual divides or local class divides. However, the use of photographs of local fathers and children was found to serve as an essential ‘contextual bridge’ between the Swedish context and the local contexts in which Swedish Dads was exhibited. Overall, the article highlights the complex ways in which family ideals, photographs, and state power become entangled.

ARTICLE III

Mitchell, S.J. (2021) “Representing ‘Progressive Fatherhood’ in post-colonial Zimbabwe: Binaries, Ambivalences and Ambiguities”. *Families, Relationships and Societies*

This article examines how ‘progressive fatherhood’ was represented in the context of a photo competition and exhibition organized by the Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe in relation to the Swedish Dads exhibition. The analysis highlights three ways in which progressive fatherhood was constructed. Firstly, fathers were represented as being progressive in navigating notions of tradition and modernity – being able to navigate which ‘traditions’ to uphold and which ‘modern’ attitudes to embrace. Secondly, fathers were represented as being progressive through social fatherhood – where father figures were not limited to the context of biological fatherhood but could also include other male relatives or community members. Thirdly, fathers were represented as being progressive through challenging traditional gender roles themselves or by encouraging their sons and daughters to challenge traditional gender roles.

While the Swedish Dads exhibition represented implicitly middle-class fathers in the context of nuclear families, the representations of Zimbabwean fathers and children functioned as a means of ‘talking back’ to these ideals. The analysis showed that these representations challenged and broadened the ideal of ‘progressive fatherhood’ to include extended families and community members, as well as including less affluent contexts. Considering that Zimbabwe is a former European colony and that the discourse of ‘progress’ was used to justify European colonialism, the article concludes that the meaning of ‘progressive fatherhood’ may be very different in Zimbabwe compared to in Sweden. The article highlights the importance of conceptual specificity and historical and contextual sensitivity when constructing and representing ideals such as ‘progressive fatherhood’.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the construction and circulation of images and ideals of fatherhood across contexts. To achieve this aim, I examined the construction and transnational circulation of photo exhibitions featuring images and ideals of fatherhood. This chapter includes a thematized discussion of the key findings and contributions of the thesis, as well as a discussion of potential opportunities for future research.

Situating Swedish Fatherhood Ideals

This thesis contributes to the interdisciplinary field of parenthood studies by problematizing the potential universalization of fatherhood ideals that emerged in a very specific socio-political, economic, and historical context. The Swedish ideals of involved and child-centred fatherhood emerged through decades of political negotiations that resulted in a parental leave system that facilitates Swedish fathers' involvement with their children. This is connected to the dual-earner/dual-carer family model that has been promoted in Sweden since the 1970s. In this sense, the exporting of these fatherhood ideals to other countries can be problematic – particularly when those countries may lack the 'infrastructure' (cf. Molander et al., 2019) to support the dual-earner/dual-carer family model (Article I). On the other hand, exhibiting images of involved fatherhood in diverse national contexts could help to normalize men's involvement with their children, and to help share parental responsibility between parents. Circulating representations of fathers on parental leave may even encourage political changes to increase the access for men (and women) to take parental leave in different countries.

Negotiations of Childhood and Fatherhood Ideals

Representations of fathers are often examined in relation to notions of masculinity and in terms of their implications for the gendered division of care between parents and, by extension, the implications for gender equality in society more broadly (Lazar, 2005;

Marshall et al., 2014; Prinsloo, 2006; Vavrus, 2002). However, this thesis also shows how representations of fatherhood and childhood can have implications for other forms of inequalities – such as the unequal power dynamics between nations in terms of constructing and circulating family ideals.

Child studies scholars have problematized the universalization of Western childhood ideals – particularly when this has meant that the privileged and protected childhoods of children in the ‘minority world’ are treated as a norm against which ‘majority world childhoods’ should be judged (Punch, 2003). Historically, Western ideals of childhood and parenthood have been exported and universalized – often through the work of international development organizations (Haukanes and Thelen, 2010; Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012). While the Swedish Dads exhibition *explicitly* constructs a specific idealised image of fatherhood and childhood in Sweden, it *implicitly* communicates a political message about what progressive and involved fatherhood should look like in Sweden and elsewhere. Considering the historical universalization of Western ideals of childhood and parenthood, this thesis problematizes the transnational circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition by looking at the potentially universalizing effect of Swedish fatherhood ideals (Article II). This could mean that fathers who do not have the means to live up to these ideals might be positioned as deficient – as has been the case when parents in the global South have been expected to provide a childhood that adheres to universalized Western ideals (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012).

At the same time, the transnational circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition has been found to open up ‘new discursive territories’ (Molander, Kleppe, et al., 2019) – making it possible for fathers around the world to reflect on their fathering and fatherhood in new ways. Furthermore, the exhibition could also inspire fathers and others to work towards gaining increased access to parental leave in ways that may reshape local constructions of childhood, parenthood, and fatherhood. These findings are in line with research emphasizing the paradoxes of international development work, where efforts can be “simultaneously beneficial and debilitating, helpful but dangerous” (Sweis, 2021:

3). However, this thesis also shows what happens when images and ideals are circulated across national contexts. For example, in the case of Zimbabwe, fatherhood and family ideals were negotiated in relation to the local context (Article III). In the case of Zambia, contextual bridging was used to facilitate the transnational circulation of fatherhood ideals (Article II). Furthermore, the circulation of the *Zambian Dads* exhibition in Sweden was also used as a means of promoting ideals – in this case, to encourage Swedish fathers to be more gender equal and to take more parental leave (Article II).

This thesis also contributes to research on the visual culture of fatherhood as it is represented through images and exhibitions. While studies of exhibitions tend to disregard the practical circumstances in which exhibitions are shown (Heath and vom Lehn, 2004), this thesis emphasizes the importance of these contexts in contributing to the meaning attributed to photo exhibitions and the images they include (cf. Cartwright and Sturken, 2009; Martins, 2020; Rose, 2016). The *Swedish Dads* exhibition was circulated to 54 countries – each with unique socio-political and economic conditions and norms and ideals of childhood and parenthood (Lind et al., 2017; Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012). The images in the *Swedish Dads* exhibition were presented to audiences in a wide range of local and national contexts, and these contexts in turn shaped how the images were looked at and interpreted. For example, the exhibition may have been framed as art when seen in a gallery, viewed as an advertisement for Sweden when seen in a shopping centre, or interpreted as a lesson in Swedish values and parenting when encountered at educational institutions (Article II). These different venues highlight how the images of Swedish fatherhood could take on different meanings depending on the context in which they were exhibited. Contextual bridging became important where standardized material and local content coexisted, thereby enabling negotiations of fatherhood and childhood ideals.

Previous studies have emphasized that the circulation of ideals is not a straightforward process (cf. Haukanes and Thelen, 2010: 23). When ideals are exported from one country to another, they may be resisted, adopted, or adapted to suit local conditions (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012: 192). This thesis shows how such local

negotiations take place in practice. For example, representations of fatherhood and childhood in Zimbabwe were found to extend the ideal of ‘progressive fatherhood’ beyond the context of middle-class, nuclear families by representing progressive fatherhood through modernity, social fatherhood, and gender role reversal (Article III). These findings are also significant considering that involved fatherhood has often been seen as a middle-class ideal (Vavrus, 2002; Plantin, 2007). Analyses also showed how exhibitions featuring representations of local fathers and children could extend the ideals of involved and child-centred fatherhood to rural settings and contexts with larger families – as seen in the *Zambian Dads* photographs (Article II). Such representations challenge the universalized nuclear family ideal (Auer et al., 2020; Oyèwùmí, 2002).

Furthermore, photographs of local fathers and children were used as ‘contextual bridges’ between the Swedish context – where the *Swedish Dads* images originated – and the local contexts where the images were exhibited (Article II). Without such bridges, the *Swedish Dads* exhibition could risk becoming controversial and undermining the nation branding objectives behind its circulation (cf. Molander, Kleppe and Östberg, 2019). For example, in a context where the breadwinner model of fatherhood and masculinity is dominant, then images of *Swedish Dads* at home with their children might seem out of place. Swedish fathers being with their children at home instead of out working to provide for their families may well give an exotic or strange impression. In such cases, these images of *Swedish Dads* might be so far removed from the local context as to create a negative rather than a positive brand association.

By making use of photographs of involved local fathers and their children, this ideal was potentially made less ‘foreign’ – making it possible for local fathers and families to recognize themselves in the images rather than having the impression of something strange and foreign being imposed on them. Such efforts could be seen to downplay the potentially paternalistic connotations (cf. Oloruntoba, 2020) of a wealthy, developed, European nation circulating its fatherhood ideals around the world – including to developing nations in the global South, such as Zambia and Zimbabwe. Similarly, Swedish embassies’ use of photographs of involved local fathers also served to create a

sense of ‘reciprocity’ (cf. Sumiala and Valaskivi, 2014) in the circulation of fatherhood images. Instead of a one-way circulation of images and ideals from Sweden to other countries, people in those countries were given the opportunity to ‘talk back’ to the Swedish Dads images and ideals (Article III) and even to have such images exhibited for a Swedish audience – in the case of the *Zambian Dads* exhibition (Article II).

The Swedish State’s use of Visual Culture to Communicate Family Ideals

This thesis also makes it possible to draw parallels between the Swedish state’s historical and contemporary use of visual culture to achieve political objectives concerning children and families. Previous studies have shown how the international circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition could be seen as a continuation of decades of work by the Swedish Institute to use images of Swedish fathers to brand the Swedish nation as progressive and gender-equal (Jezierska and Towns, 2018; Klinth, 2018). However, the current thesis also makes it possible to draw parallels between the Swedish state’s contemporary use of images and exhibitions to deliver political messages of children and families in the *international arena* and the state’s historic use of images and exhibitions to communicate political messages about childhood and parenthood *domestically*. For example, studies have shown how the Stockholm Exhibition of 1897 was used to disseminate a specific world view with the ambition of educating, civilizing and nationalizing visitors (Ekström, 1994). This included using exhibition displays as a means of educating visitors, such as schoolchildren and workers (Ekström, 1994).

The Swedish state has also used photo competitions and photobooks to deliver a political message about how families in Swedish society should look and function (Hallberg, 2017; Hallberg and Sandin, 2021) and used a photograph of a Swedish father and child to encourage Swedish men to take parental leave when it was first introduced in the 1970s (Johansson and Klinth, 2008). The Swedish Dads phenomenon includes many of these elements – such as photobooks (e.g. the Swedish Dads photobook produced by Bävman, 2015); exhibitions (e.g. the Swedish Dads exhibition circulated by the Swedish Institute) and photo competitions (e.g. the photo competition organized by the Swedish

Embassy in Zimbabwe). In this sense, the Swedish state's international circulation of an exhibition of Swedish fathers and their child(ren) is an extension of the state's historic use of visual culture to achieve political objectives.

Swedish Dads, Nation Branding, and International Development work

Finally, previous studies have highlighted how the Swedish Dads exhibition has contributed to the branding of the Swedish nation as progressive and gender equal (cf. Jezierska and Towns, 2018; Klinth, 2019). However, less attention has been paid to the way this exhibition has been used in relation to the Swedish state's development objectives. This thesis shows how Swedish nation branding and development work become interconnected (Article II). By positioning Swedish fatherhood as an ideal to inspire other fathers and countries to be more gender-equal, the Swedish state could simultaneously work towards achieving its international development goals in relation to gender equality internationally while also promoting their nation brand as a nation that promotes gender equality domestically.

The thesis also highlights how seemingly mundane representations of fatherhood and childhood were used to achieve larger objectives. The analysis in Article I showed that Bävman's representations of involved and child-centred Swedish fathers constructed them as 'ordinary' and 'not so special' – implicitly when compared to involved and child-centred Swedish mothers. When the Swedish Institute transformed and circulated the Swedish Dads exhibition these seemingly mundane representations of 'ordinary' Swedish Dads were used to construct an image of the Swedish state as being exceptional in an international context (Article I). This finding builds on previous studies which show how 'ordinary' Swedish citizens have been used in international campaigns to promote Sweden (Christensen, 2013; Pamment and Cassinger, 2018). However, the analysis in Article II also highlights how 'ordinary' citizens of other countries were effectively recruited into a Swedish nation branding campaign through their participation in local photo competitions. The circulation of the Swedish Dads exhibition and the subsequent production and circulation of exhibitions such as *Zambian*

Dads were also related to Sweden's international development objectives (Article II). In this way, apparently ordinary photographs of fathers and children were used to contribute towards high level objectives relating to Swedish nation branding, foreign policy, and international development. In this way, the thesis highlights connections between the private and the public realms, helping to narrow the gap between the domestic and the political spheres and showing how they become entangled and interconnected through photographs representing families.

Future Research

This thesis also opens for further investigations of how images and ideals related to fatherhood, childhood, and families circulate transnationally. The Swedish Institute has recently developed a range of additional toolkits which could be interesting to examine in terms of how they are used as a means of 'sharing Sweden' abroad. This includes toolkits on the topic of 'Children's literature' – promoting Swedish children's literature through a poster exhibition and creating a playful space for children, and 'Never violence' – an exhibition and guide to create a local project to eliminate violence against children together with Swedish expert organizations, such as Save the Children Sweden, UNICEF Sweden, and the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden. Future research could examine, for example, how the figure of the child is constructed in such toolkits and exhibitions, and how these notions are circulated and navigated when they land in specific local contexts where notions of children and childhood might be quite different from the Swedish context. Future studies could also examine how *other nation states* make use of visual representations of families to communicate political messages – including but not limited to objectives related to nation branding and international development. Such studies could help to shed further light on how the seemingly private sphere of the family is shaped by national and transnational political discourses, and vice versa.

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Articles

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From 2016 to 2019, the Swedish state – via the Swedish Institute and Swedish embassies – circulated a photo exhibition called ‘Swedish Dads’ around the world. The exhibition featured photographs of Swedish fathers at home on parental leave with their young children. This exhibition was based on a photobook by the same name that was adapted for international circulation. The exhibition was circulated to fifty-four countries with the goal of promoting Sweden and gender equality abroad. This meant that it was shown in countries with potentially very different conditions from Sweden in terms of the availability of parental leave, as well as in terms of material conditions and family ideals. Many Swedish embassies hosting the exhibition combined it with photographs of local fathers and children – as was the case in Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the case of ‘Zambian Dads’, this exhibition was also circulated back to Sweden. But what happens when fatherhood images and ideals are circulated across national contexts – how are these ideals constructed and negotiated in specific local contexts? These are some of the questions addressed in this thesis, which takes theoretical inspiration from parenthood studies, visual culture studies, and nation branding studies.

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