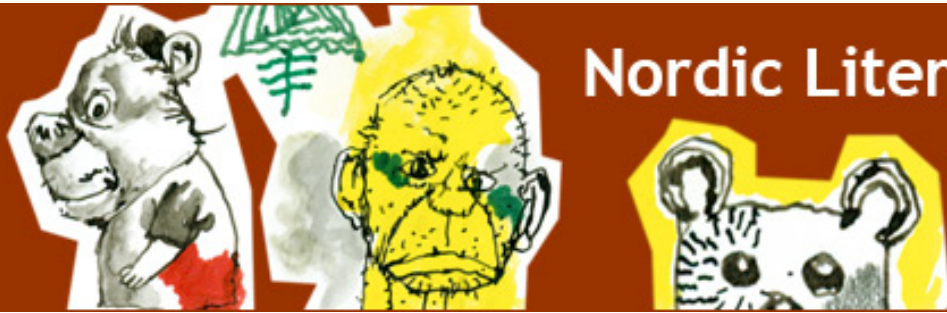


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Azar Mahloujian  
(Photo: Ulla Montan)



Hanna Hallgren  
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## The realism(s) of the multicultural society Knowing that One is Throwing One's Voice

By Hanna Hallgren

Talking about realism in current Swedish literature is, I believe, the same as looking for textual expressions that seriously and playfully embrace attempts to examine different standpoints. It is the realism(s) of the multi-cultural society, which demand that those authors who want to examine and discover the world in writing must reflect on where these investigations are being carried out from. It can be described as a pronouncement's politics of locality, and the realism(s) that are put forward make no universal claims. Instead they make themselves responsible for – that is, make it clear – where they are written from. And also when and how.

One of the differences that can be observed between, for example, 1970's social realism and contemporary multi-cultural realism(s) is a complication of the way that power relationships within society can be understood. During the 1970's it was primarily one suppressed truth under a specific oppression that was to be expressed. The male worker stood chained to his machine, the woman to the stove. The perception that there was a fundamental oppression (concerning, for example, class or sex) formed the basis for a political realism that registered the truth from pretty much a single perspective on the politics of identity. Even if this sketch of 70's social realism is highly simplified (left-oriented women, for example, problematised both class and sex), I still think that this, in contrast to today's multi-culturalism, stemmed from a way of thinking based more on identity than on locality. An author who thinks based on locality (auto)reflects today instead about a series of categories that express societal power symmetries. It's a question of here-now-how problematisation of the significance of categories such as sex, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual preference, age and so on (in the field of gender studies, this is called intersectionality). It's not a case of adding one subordination to another, but of investigating their different dimensions and how they are connected to each other. Nor is it a case of seeking to analyse an endless series of power symmetries. That would be walking yet again into the unwary author's trap („he“ for undetermined gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, class ...). That is, the trap of thinking that you can write about the truth from everywhere (relativists) and nowhere (positivists).

The realism(s) of the multi-cultural society are interested in writing the „other person's“ story, but are at the same time conscious that every subject is multiple and has both otherness and firstness. And that otherness and firstness depend on context. An interesting example of this understanding of the subject, which is characterised by both complexity and agility, is presented in Azar Mahloujian's autobiographical book *Tillbaka till Iran* (Back to Iran, 2004). The existential phenomena that the author deals with include being a woman and an Iranian exile in Sweden, being a woman and an Iranian exile amongst Iranian exiles in Sweden, and returning as a woman and an Iranian exile to Iran after a period of nearly twenty years. In each and every one of these contexts (which themselves comprise several contexts), the meanings of both „woman“ and „Iranian exile“ shift. At the same time, Mahloujian tells me what it means to belong as a Swede in Sweden – by carving out the experiences of someone who doesn't belong.

Not belonging can also be represented stylistically, as for example Alejandro Leiva Wenger does in the collection of novellas *Till vår ära* (In Our Honour, 2001). The experimental language that (dis)organises the syntactic and narrative structure of the novellas builds a resistance „a friction“ that by making belonging more difficult reveals it as conditional. The naïve dream of a mother tongue is similarly questioned; all tongues bear the name of the father, wrote Jacques Lacan, by which he meant that we stand, wrapped in the symbolic order, downcast before the illusion of an original (Swedish or other) language.

One important aspect of the realism(s) of the multi-cultural society is the interest in the meaning for our standpoints of the experience one has lived through. This does not mean that one must bear a particular identity in order to write about that identity's experiences. But part of the process of the

A Leiva Weger  
(Photo: Fanny Zaabi  
Behter)

politics of locality creating responsibility (for itself) is reflecting (stylistically, thematically) on the fact that one at the same time does not do so. Knowing that one is throwing one's voice. What has been called lacking the lack. To refer to Donna Haraway, it's a matter of pointing out that subordinate standpoints are not politically innocent – but that they are preferable. Yes, preferable, because these, according to Haraway, can be regarded as generating partial, localisable and critical abilities. The realism(s) of the multi-cultural society can be seen exactly as corresponding to this type of (post-positivist and post-relativist) epistemology/understanding of the world.

In Sweden, we have a long tradition of investigating the subordinate's standpoint. During the 20th century, there were numerous authors whose books focussed on class- and/or sex-related injustices. These are realisms that produced a presentation/embodiment of the subordinate's experiences. During the last few decades, in my opinion, experiences connected not only to sex and class, but also to ethnicity, nationality and sexual preference have been more plainly represented in Swedish literature. Authors like Gertrud Hellbrand (*Vinhunden – The Greyhound*, 2004), Mian Lodalen (*Smulklubbens skamlösa systrar – The Shameless Sisters in the Scraps Club*, 2003), Johannes Anyuru (*Det är bara gudarna som är nya – Only the Gods Are New*, 2003), Sara Stridsberg (*Happy Sally*, 2004), Daniel Boyacioglu (*Istället för hip hop – Instead of Hip-hop*, 2003), Malin Backström (*Berättelser som inte får vidröras – Tales That Are Not To Be Touched*, 1997), Jenny Tunedal (*Hejdade, hejdade sken – Controlled Appearances*, 2003), Marjaneh Bakhtiari (*Kall det vad fan du vill – Call It What the Hell You Want*, 2005) are just a few examples. The interesting thing about the realism(s) of the multi-cultural society is that they often don't embody just one type of subordination, but several. Because the standpoint is by definition fractured, nowadays power is also perceived as multiple. There are no simple answers, but there are important and complicated questions. My belief is that the multi-cultural society's active politicisation of categories of identity (sex, class, ethnicity etc.) in the long run will make it impossible for authors, as regards their standpoints, to start from themselves as non-localisable or unmarked subjects. Perhaps it is already impossible? For instance, Ola Klippvik (*Sportsmän – Sportsmen*, 2005) and Johan Jönsson (*Momomtrl*, 2005; *I krigsmaskinen – In the War Machine*, 2002) are two good examples of authors who show that it is possible in literary investigations to pose useful questions about the brittle structure of masculinity.

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*Translated by Roy Hodson*