BOOKS WITHOUT PASSPORTS

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It is commonly stated that reading (books) is among the best ways to increase one's knowledge about oneself and about other people, places and cultures. At the same time the "common" Swedish reader tends to read books that are mainly from the same cultural sphere as his or her own: books written in Swedish by a "Swedish" author, or books written in English by an English or American author and translated into Swedish. A recent study shows that only five per cent of the fiction that was translated into Swedish during 1999 was written by authors with a background in Africa, Asia or Latinamerica (Ingela Engman 2001).

This situation raises a lot of questions. In this paper I will discuss a few of them, focusing on genderrelated issues and using the 29 books written by authors with a background in Africa, Asia or Latinamerica that were translated into Swedish and published in Sweden in 1999.

- How many of the writers are men/women?
- Does gender influence the ways that publishers introduce and promote the writers? Do critics treat writers differently depending on what sex they have?
- Are the writers from Africa, Asia or Latinamerica described and discussed as "Third World writers" in a manner parallel to Said's description of the relationship between the orientalist and the Orient, or Spivak's and Mohanty's description of the relationship between western feminists and women in Africa, Asia or Latinamerica?

In my thesis (To Give Voice. The Report-Book in Sweden 1960-1980, 2002) I discussed the problem of "giving voice" using (mainly) Said's Orientalism (1978) Pratt's Imperial Eyes (1992) and Spivak's "Can the Subaltern speak?" (1988) as a theoretical frame. One of my main conclusions is that there is a big difference between giving the subaltern a position to speak from and giving voice to, or representing the subaltern. This paper is part of my new project dealing with books translated into Swedish written by authors with a background from Africa, Asia and Latinamerica and focusing on questions that have to do with race/ethnicity, gender and class.