

## SWEDISH HISTORY TEXTBOOKS AS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES (1931-2009)

*Los libros de texto de historia suecos como narrativas constructoras  
de la identidad (1931-2009)*

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to trace meaning conveyed in narratives of Sweden and «Swedishness» in history textbooks published between 1931 and 2009. Its objective is also to show how narratives have been transformed and changed over time, and what factors may have influenced these changes. A third aim is to show which of these narratives are expressed by some contemporary students. The empirical material consists of 52 history textbooks and 54 student texts. The research has a hermeneutical perspective, and draws on methods of narrative theory and conceptual history. It identifies six meta-narratives in the texts: the narrative of neutrality, the narrative of the prosperous country, the narrative of the welfare country, the narrative of the role model country of democracy, the narrative of the stranger, and the narrative of the world's most gender-equal country. Each of these meta-narratives has different narrative forms that contain different protagonists generating, in turn, different categories of sub-narratives. This article argues that, while all textbook narratives are present in the students' texts, they are often constructed in different temporal contexts, and have a slightly different moral perspective.

**Keywords:** History textbooks; Narrative identity; Swedish collective Identity; History students.

**Resumen:** *El propósito de este artículo es rastrear el significado que expresan las narrativas de Suecia y la suecidad en los libros de texto de historia publicados entre 1931 y 2009. Su objetivo es también mostrar cómo las narrativas han mudado y cambiado a lo largo del tiempo, y qué factores pueden haber influido en estos cambios. Una tercera finalidad es mostrar cuáles de estas*

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*narrativas son expresadas por algunos alumnos coetáneos. El material empírico se compone de 52 libros de texto de historia y 54 textos de alumnos. La investigación tiene una perspectiva hermenéutica y se basa en métodos de la teoría narrativa y de la historia conceptual. Identifica seis meta-narrativas en los textos: la narrativa de la neutralidad, la narrativa del país próspero, la narrativa del país del bienestar, la narrativa del papel como país modelo de democracia, la narrativa del extranjero y la narrativa de país más igualitario del mundo desde la perspectiva de género. Cada una de estas meta-narrativas tiene diferentes formas narrativas que contienen diferentes protagonistas que generan, a su vez, diferentes categorías de subnarrativas. Este artículo defiende que, mientras todas las narrativas de los libros de texto están presentes en los textos de los estudiantes, estos se construyen a menudo en contextos temporales diferentes y tienen una moral ligeramente diferente.*

**Palabras clave:** *Libros de texto de historia; identidad narrativa; identidad colectiva sueca; alumnos de historia.*

In 1945, after having avoided involvement in the war, Sweden was already one of Europe's richest countries. During the 1960s, it became one of the richest countries in the world, with a more equal distribution of wealth than most other countries. The egalitarian, democratic, socially safe and thoroughly organized Sweden became a model for many other industrial states.<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt is taken from a history textbook, written at the turn of the century, and still used today in Swedish schools. The students who read these lines today will most probably get the idea that a unique and unprecedented development took place in Sweden during that time. The passage can nevertheless also be perceived as provocative by those students who have experienced other cultures of history, in which Sweden does not occupy this unique position in European post-war history.

Human beings create meaning, orientation towards the future, and notions of belonging, both through the events they incorporate in their narratives, and those events that they choose to exclude. Quotes such as that outlined above therefore generate a diverse range of questions concerning history and its role in the construction of identities. These questions and their answers are the theme of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Sten Elm & Birgitta Thulin, *Epok, Historia, Kurs A* (Malmö: Interskol 2000), 394.

## DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY TEXTBOOK RESEARCH

Since the 1960s, researchers, journalists, and social commentators in Sweden have taken great interest in textbooks in general, and history textbooks in particular. This interest is not unfounded. History textbooks can reveal a lot about a society's self-understanding. They both reflect the knowledge and the values that are regarded as important enough to be transferred to new generations, and articulate beliefs that are perceived as so obvious that they have become invisible. The content of history textbooks, and the changes in such content that can be traced over time, is therefore a very important issue.

However, an analysis of such content can be done on different levels. First of all, textbooks can be studied from a pure discourse or narrative-theoretical perspective. This means that the intentions and premises of the author of the text are seen as less important than the effects of the text in terms of power relations.<sup>2</sup> If you chose a narrative-theoretical perspective it also means that the text is seen as an answer to a historical question, and that the choice of this question has political and moral implications.<sup>3</sup> Such a perspective focuses on the narrative form, that is, the beginning, the middle and the end of the narrative, the events which are given meaning by being integrated in the narrative, and those values and conclusions that point the reader towards the future. This approach has the potential to create a form of analysis that sees narratives as an essential part of the construction of identities.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For example, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), IX-XV, Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning. Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 107.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative volume 2* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, cop, 1985), 55-60, Hayden White, *The Content of Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990) 169-184, Hayden White, *The practical Past* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Paul Ricoeur, «Life in Quest of Narrative» in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge 1991) 28 and 31, Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative volume 1* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, cop, 1984), 92, Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative volume 3* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, cop, 1990), 104, and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1994), 163-166.

The idea that our identities are constantly changing through the stories we tell others and ourselves has become increasingly widespread.<sup>5</sup> Narrative theory emphasizes the active dimension of human identity, and therefore become a path away from a mechanistic view of humanity. It becomes «a work in progress». Such a narrative approach to identity also provides space for differentiated interpretations of human experiences, which, in turn, can be linked with different cultural, social and historical contexts, and thus be related to dominant power relationships. This approach has, on one hand, been contrasted with an approach that sees various identity categories as immutable intrinsic parts of the construction of personalities. On the other hand, it has also been contrasted with a perspective that considers such categories as created, negotiated, and given meaning only through social relationships. In contemporary research the discussion regarding whether these categories are innate or constructed has vanished, as there is relative consensus on the latter definition. However, it is still interesting to discuss if peoples' *notions* of, for example, ethnicity reflect one or the other view. However, a narrative approach to identity is not based on the idea that individuals are completely free to choose their identities, as identities must always be recognized and confirmed through a social context.<sup>6</sup>

The starting point is therefore that by constructing narratives we create and interpret both our identity and our reality through language. Life therefore appears as a variety of conflicting and interlocking narratives. Yet, this does not mean that life and reality can be reduced to narratives. A coherent conception of human existence results from our existential need to ask ourselves where we come from and where we are going. Language is dependent on culture and our location in time, and thus constructs the boundaries of our thoughts. However, it is possible to transcend these boundaries by creating new interpretations, metaphors and linguistic innovations. Our narratives are thus both effect and cause when it comes to our perceptions of the world and ourselves. They both rely on an interpretation of what is perceived as historical reality, and constitute the starting point for political action.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See for example Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1989), 47-48.

<sup>6</sup> Ricoeur, «Life in Quest of Narrative», 20.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), 288.

There is also a second way in which textbooks can be studied: by examining them as one of several links in a historical cultural transmission chain, which means that a procedural perspective is applied to the topic. One can, for instance, study the power relations and social structures of the period in which the textbook was written, and examine in what ways these structures have affected the form of the books, the intentions of the author, and the interpretations that could be made by potential readers. These different stages are, in turn, affected by the boundaries established by the historical flow of what is considered possible to write, or which interpretations are thinkable. That which an author could write about German policy in 1938 was impossible to write 1946.<sup>8</sup>

Paul Ricoeur argues that all texts have a surplus of meaning when interpreted in a new historical, social, or cultural context.<sup>9</sup> The preconceptions that influence interpretation become part of the creation of meaning. This makes visible a third option when it comes to textbook analysis: an approach that focuses on the function of historical narratives for the different agents included in the transmission chain of history culture. A producer of history culture can have a completely different purpose or need than a consumer.<sup>10</sup> When my high school students read about the Munich Agreement from 1938 in their textbooks in the spring of 2014, they interpreted the event in light of what happened on the Crimean peninsula that same year. They then also used their knowledge of the historical events in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s to discuss possible future developments in Ukraine. It did not take long before the students drew parallels between Hitler's and Putin's intentions. While author's use of the Munich crisis was mainly scientific, with ideological elements, the students' use was more political and existential.<sup>11</sup> The students emphasized the similarities between the two events, but took little notice of the differences, and most importantly, constructed a narrative of Swedish

<sup>8</sup> Ernst Söderlund, «Ostpreussen en ö på kontinenten», *Tidskriften Sverige – Tyskland*, 3 (1938): 25-28. Compare Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume I, Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 149.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Om historiens nytta och skada. En otidsenlig betraktelse* (Stockholm: Rabén Prisma, 1998), *passim*, and Klas-Göran Karlsson, «Historia, historiedidaktik och historiekultur» in *Historien är närvarande. Historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning* (Lund: Studentlitteratur 2014), 70-80.

<sup>11</sup> Compare Karlsson, «Historia, historiedidaktik och historiekultur», 70-80.

peacefulness, compared with German and Russian expansionism and eagerness to engage in warfare.

This article will mainly deal with the narrative perspective, in order to discuss how Sweden has been portrayed in Swedish history textbooks from the 1930s until the years after the millennium shift, and which parts of these narratives a number of randomly selected high school students recount in their texts. I will also discuss possible explanations for the changes that I have observed. This involves an analysis of both the stories themselves and the authors' intentions, the historical cultural structures, and the historical context when the texts were written. This applies to both the textbook writers and students' texts.

The article is a summary of my doctoral thesis which has a hermeneutical perspective, and derives inspiration of narrative theory, conceptual history, and use of history, primarily from the thoughts of Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Jörn Rüsen, Reinhart Koselleck, Quentin Skinner and Klas-Göran Karlsson.<sup>12</sup> However, this article focuses on the empirical results.

## METHODOLOGY

In the survey that this article is based on, I examined 52 history textbooks, mainly for secondary school, published between 1931 and 2009.<sup>13</sup> Nearly all published high school textbooks from the years in question are analyzed. I have only omitted those where the same group of authors published nearly identical textbooks. I have also chosen to incorporate five older history textbooks for secondary school since this grade was more comparable to later high school during the first decades of the period of investigation. In addition, I wanted to integrate the textbooks that

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation, Time and Narrative volume 1, 2 & 3*, «Life in Quest of Narrative», and *Oneself as Another*; Greimas, *On Meaning. Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*; White, *The Content of Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation and The Practical Past*; Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation* (New York: Berghahn Books 2005); Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004); Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume I, Regarding Method*; Karlsson, «Historia, historiedidaktik och historiekultur».

<sup>13</sup> See Ingmarie Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land... Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar* (Höör: Agerings bokförlag 2012), 70f.

were used when the dissertation was written. The demarcation backward in time was more difficult to do. My final delimitation was based on the aspiration to incorporate an early representation of the First World War and the economic crisis during the 1920s and 1930s, to see how these phenomena were added into different narratives. Every part of the books dealing with Swedish history were analyzed.

The student texts were collected during 2010. All texts were written by students from the same school. The small number of participants does not make the sample a representative one, however, it does allow for some tentative results. The students were given ten different tasks, but it is primary three which are relevant for this article:

1. Describe the development of Sweden during the 1800s and 1900s.
2. Is there anything in Swedish history that you feel proud of and if so, what and why?
3. Is there anything in Swedish history that you feel ashamed of or feel is morally indefensible, and if so, what and why?<sup>14</sup>

When I collected the students texts I was intended to focus on modern history but I soon realized that this narrative borders was impossible to draw.

It is important to emphasize that these students cannot be seen as representatives of anyone else than themselves. I believe that any attempt to select representative informants from different categories is fruitless. Such an attempt often reflects the expectations of the researcher more than anything else.

## THE NARRATIVES OF SWEDEN AND «SWEDISHNESS»

In the following, I will discuss the six meta-narratives on «Swedishness» that I have identified in the material: *The narrative of neutrality*, *The narrative of the prosperous country*, *The narrative of the welfare country*, *The narrative of the role model country of democracy*, *The narrative of the stranger*, and finally, *The narrative of the world's most gender-equal country*.

<sup>14</sup> Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land... Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar*, 70-71 and 282-288.



Each of these meta-narratives is displayed in a different narrative form, over a different amount of time, has different protagonists, that is, winners and losers, which, in turn, generates different categories of sub-narratives.

## THE NARRATIVE OF NEUTRALITY

The narrative of the neutral Sweden has had a great impact on how Swedes perceive themselves. This became especially apparent in the «jubilee year» of 2014, as the term «200 years of peace» was mentioned in a variety of contexts. However, this narrative of neutrality, has taken different forms at different stages during the nineteenth century. The oldest textbooks present a narrative of nationalist neutrality that starts in the middle of the nineteenth century, and places the first half of the nineteenth century in a different narrative: the narrative of the slowly decaying great power nation.<sup>15</sup> In these older textbooks, Swedish neutrality thus depends on an inherent Swedish peacefulness, and a natural affinity between the Nordic brother nations.

The following events are also included in these older books. In the year 1914 there was a great parliamentary crisis in Sweden as King Gustav V intended to arm the navy against the will of the government. The irresponsible Prime Minister resigned in protest and the king chose a new Prime Minister, in order to guarantee peace for the Swedish people. The outbreak of the First World War was also a challenge for the Swedish defence. These problems were overcome however, and Sweden emerged as a stronger nation from this crisis. The most important concepts in this narrative are autonomy and independence rather than neutrality. This creates a different moral compared to later neutrality narratives. The «people» plays a central role in this nationalist narrative of neutrality, and the legitimizing of identity often occurs through circular reasoning: Sweden has managed to stay out of the First World War, or the World Wars depending on when the textbook was written, because Swedes are peaceful and the Swedes have become peaceful as a result of that long peace. This narrative is also strengthened by clear ethno-nationalist ele-

<sup>15</sup> Claes Theodor Odhner & Karl Gustaf Westman, *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia för realskolan: och samhällslära* (Stockholm: Norstedts 1934), 199 and 220, and Ernst Söderlund & Sven Tunberg, *Svensk historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Norstedts 1949), 330.



ments. According to the textbooks, in other countries, war is caused by the mixing of different ethnic groups and nationalism. Nationalism is thus seen as a peacekeeper in Sweden, while it is a cause for war in the rest of Europe. The narrative's climax and resolution of course depends on when the textbook was written. In the books that were published in the early 1930s, one can perceive a hopeful tone regarding the League of Nation's ability to secure peace. In the context of this narrative, Sweden plays a significant role as the promoter of harmony in Europe. Towards the end of the 1930s, and in the 1940s, the tone became more pessimistic. The threatening signs increased and the focus turned to the Swedish defence and a united people without internal divisions: «Behind this government stood a united people, prepared to use all force necessary to defend their freedom and their independence».<sup>16</sup>

After the Second World War a new, more pragmatic, narrative of neutrality popped up in the textbooks. Activist plans disappeared, and a long peace narrative was created. This narrative began with the loss of Finland in 1809 or the Treaty of Kiel in 1914, to then jump to the parliamentary crisis and the First World War. These crises consequently become part of the setback of the parliamentary development in Sweden. As Bergström notes:

Gustav V held a speech for the farmers at the courtyard, which was written by hidden advisors. [...] The King managed to appoint a new government with Hjalmar Hammarskjöld as Prime Minister. As this new government had no direct support in the Parliament, the development towards a parliamentary system was interrupted [...] The higher classes in Sweden were in support of Germany, especially at the beginning of the war. There were groups from different segments of society who worked for «a courageous commitment on Germany». However, these so-called activists were not able to gain wider public support for their cause, and the government was consistently stressing Sweden's neutrality.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Carl Grimberg & Ernst Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens. För realskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget 1940), 245f and 312, and Carl Grimberg & Ernst Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens. För realskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget 1947), 245f, 280f, 306 and 316.

<sup>17</sup> Börje Bergström et al., *Alla tiders historia. Grundbok i historia för gymnasieskolans humanistiska och samhällsvetenskapliga linjer* (Stockholm: Liber Läromedel 1983), 331 and 360.

In older textbooks it was unproblematic to express Swedish sympathies for Germany during the First World War. Yet, the context of history culture changed after the Second World War, which meant that these descriptions were no longer possible. This also meant that the First World War was interpreted on the basis of the experiences of the Second World War. According to these books Swedish public opinion was now on the «good» side, that is, against Germany. With these changes, the narrative became coherent and thereby provided the basis for the creation of new meaning and identity. The narrative's main focus was the Swedes' actions and experiences during the Second World War. This part of the narrative points towards the narrative's resolution and orientation towards the future. The actions described in it were perhaps, no cause for pride. However, they are described as an expression of the attitude of «small-state realism» that saved Swedish lives and made Swedish help to other, more affected groups and countries possible. The following descriptions from 1955 is representative of this kind of meaning production:

The Swedish government must, in certain conditions and after the occupation of Norway, allow the transit of German troops and German military equipment through Swedish territory to Norway. However, our country avoided direct involvement in the war, [...] Sweden could [later] act more independently against Germany and give more effective assistance to its Nordic neighbours. In 1943 German transit through Sweden came to an end. Both Norwegian and Danish refugees who escaped the Nazis got a sanctuary in Sweden, and the same was true for Finns and Baltic people. Between 1944-45 there were nearly 200,000 foreigners in Sweden. During the very last days of the war the cousin of the Swedish king, Count Folke Bernadotte, managed to save many individuals who were persecuted by the Nazi government in Germany, as a result of his skilful and courageous actions.<sup>18</sup>

The assessment of the Swedish actions is here clearly positive, which makes the Swedes' good moral judgment praiseworthy. The quote also illustrates the hidden role of the Holocaust in older textbooks. This will gradually change in the 1980s, as the Holocaust is awarded an increasing-

<sup>18</sup> Kjell Kumlien, *Sveriges historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1955), 426f.

ly central position in the narrative. Summing up the different elements of meaning created by this narrative, it can be concluded that the patriotic rhetoric is centred on the concept of neutrality. While «the people» were the historical agents in the older nationalist narrative, politicians are described as agents in this new narrative. As their wise decisions managed to keep Sweden away from the disaster that suffered the rest of the world, they merit both praise and gratitude.

In 2001 two new history textbooks were published that became influential in the creation of a new narrative of neutrality. An accusatory tendency can now be traced in the description of the Swedes' behaviour during the Second World War. The narrative's introduction has much in common with the pragmatic narrative of neutrality, but its purpose has changed. The Swedish conduct is no longer something to be proud of. Swedish Nazism, eugenics and forced sterilization are new elements in this new narrative of «Swedishness» that does not as easily lend itself to the construction of national pride.<sup>19</sup> This narrative has also been described as Sweden's retroactive entry to the Second World War.<sup>20</sup> On one hand, it incorporates Sweden into the context of European history. On the other hand, it also enables Sweden to regain the moral initiative on a new arena, namely that of confessing one's guilt.

Sweden is increasingly connected to the West and to Europe. In 1994 Sweden and Finland started to cooperate with NATO within the Partnership for Peace. The Swedish nonalignment policy aims to keep Sweden neutral in case of war in its immediate surroundings, yet, neutrality is no longer self-evident according to the security policy doctrine adopted by the parliament with great majority in 2002. [...] During the Swedish EU Presidency in the first half of 2001 Sweden spoke for the EU 81 times in the UN.<sup>21</sup>

To conclude, the narratives on Swedish peacefulness or neutrality have lived on in history textbooks, yet their conclusions and orientations towards the future have changed over time. In the beginning, the narra-

<sup>19</sup> Hans Nyström & Örjan Nyström, *Perspektiv på historien A* (Malmö: Gleerups 2001), 258-260, and Hans Almgren, *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia, Maxi* (Malmö: Gleerups 2005), 426-432.

<sup>20</sup> Klas-Göran Karlsson, *Med folkmord i fokus. Förintelsens plats i den europeiska historiekulturen* (Stockholm: Forum för levande historia 2014), 13-15.

<sup>21</sup> Almgren, *Alla tiders historia, Maxi*, 545.

tive was based on a peaceful people who avoided the militant «others» by applying a small-state realistic moral and finally converting to an accusatory narrative of anti-Semitism, cowardice and betrayal. The solution for the future seems to be to adopt a new European identity.

## THE NARRATIVE OF PROSPERITY AND WELFARE

*History in centre and periphery* is the title of a textbook that was first published in 1973.<sup>22</sup> The editors intended to break with the previous textbook tradition and to create something entirely new.<sup>23</sup> The authors begin their chapter on Sweden's post-war history with three different narratives on the same historical development after the Second World War. The editors introduce these narratives in the following way:

Each summarizing historical text is based on its author's values. Different individuals have different ideas or values regarding what aspects are more important than others. This is reflected in a history textbook in, for instance, the subjects that are addressed, the names or years that are mentioned, or the individual events that are described. Even the way in which the author presents the facts that have been selected can make visible his own values. [...] There is not one single «truth» on how one ought to assess historical development that has been accepted by all.<sup>24</sup>

While the authors do not use the terms story or narrative, I argue that these concepts can be used to describe their message. The idea that students ought to engage with different meaning-making contexts, and practice deciding which of these contexts they consider most relevant, has to be seen as revolutionary for 1973. Previous textbook writers had represented the past as a fixed and established historical development that did not leave space for criticism or different interpretations of the past.

In this book, one can distinguish two main narratives of Sweden's economic and political development, that have succeeded each other in

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<sup>22</sup> Göran Graninger & Sven Tägil, *Historia i centrum och periferi* (Lund: Esselte studium 1981).

<sup>23</sup> Sture Långström, *Författarröst & lärobokstradition. En historiedidaktisk studie* (Umeå: Umeå universitet 1997), 91 and 94.

<sup>24</sup> Graninger & Tägil, *Historia i centrum och periferi*, 208-209.

the textbooks published in the twentieth century. I have chosen to call the older one of these *the narrative of the prosperous country*. This narrative begins with outlining the agricultural changes in Sweden during the nineteenth century that enabled an exceptional economical and industrial development. According to the textbook, Swedish industry developed thanks to the Swedes' technical talents and working skills. In the following quote from 1940 the authors mention «Sweden» or «Swedish» no less than eleven times:

### **Swedish inventions**

Several of the largest industries in Sweden operate largely for export and have the whole world as their market. They are based on Swedish inventions, such as ball bearings and separators, or technical improvements, invented by Swedes, especially in electronics. The settlers on the South American Pampas are cooking their food on Swedish primus stoves, Swedish outboard engines are buzzing on the rivers of Brazil's primeval forests, the Indian in México is talking into a Swedish telephone, and the luxury car that is driving on the motorway in Italy, is rolling on Swedish ball-bearings. There are Swedish matches almost all over the world. In these ways Swedish inventive genius and Swedish precision work contribute to make our country known and respected in the world.<sup>25</sup>

The engineers, the industrious workers and the clever business leaders are thus the main characters of this narrative. This development is also connected to the development of democracy. As the masses got better living conditions, it was also possible to improve their cultural and political education, which, in turn, resulted in larger segments of society making themselves heard and thereby influencing society.<sup>26</sup> Poverty and contentment are also the main themes in this narrative when it comes to legitimizing a Swedish identity. In the presentations of business leaders and politicians, their poor background often are described as honour-

<sup>25</sup> Grimberg & Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens. För realskolan*, 266-267.

<sup>26</sup> Per- Erik Brolin *et al.*, *Allmän och nordisk historia för gymnasiet. Norden från äldsta tid och den övriga världen från år 1000* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1964), 390, Martin Bäcklin *et al.*, *Historia för gymnasiet. Allmän och nordisk historia efter år 1000* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1963), 424, and Kumlien, *Sveriges historia för gymnasiet*, 342 and 363.

able and a guarantee for honest and selfless intentions.<sup>27</sup> This brilliant success story continues throughout the decades, with a brief interruption for the Second World War. The political reforms, implemented from the 1930s onwards, were possible because of this economic development. This means that, in this narrative, politicians only get to play supporting roles. As will be shown this narrative disappears in the 1970s, when it is replaced by a welfare narrative with other protagonists. It is worth noting that this narrative of prosperity made a comeback in two textbooks published in 2007, in this case with entrepreneurs, such as the founder of IKEA Ingvar Kamprad, in the leading roles.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1970s, the narrative of prosperity was challenged by *the narrative of the welfare country*. This narrative was first presented in textbooks for primary school at the end of the 1960s, and spread to textbooks for secondary school during the following decade. It, in fact, lives on throughout the entire period that I have focused on in this investigation. The space occupied by the ingenious inventors, the industrious workers, and the enterprising entrepreneurs is shrinking in this narrative, which, in turn, that the development during the nineteenth century is not seen as the basis for Sweden's position as the world champion of welfare. The nineteenth century is instead described as a time of poverty, misery and struggle. The once acclaimed business leaders are now described as greedy capitalists who exploit people for profit:

### **Swedish geniuses and genius industries**

In 1892, Alexander Lagerman constructed a match machine [...] that produced 40,000 pre-filled matchboxes a day. In an instant hundreds of children and women in Jönköping became unemployed. For maintenance, the machine only require «a boy and a girl and a foreman, who however, simultaneously oversaw 2-3 machines». But the youth could not be tall, since he would occasionally have to crawl through the entire machine in order to clean it.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Odhner & Westman, *Lärobok I fäderneslandets historia för realskolan*, 1934, 253.

<sup>28</sup> Lars-Göran Alm, *Milstolpar. Historia A* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur 2007), 241 and 265, and Christer Öhman, *Sekvens. Historia A* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur 2007), 275.

<sup>29</sup> Almgren *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia, Maxi* (Malmö: Gleerups 2002), 360.

In this textbook, the success narrative begins in the context of the political reforms of the 1930s. The narrative's grandiose start includes Per Albin Hansson's, that is, the leader of the Social Democratic Party's «The Peoples Home-speech» in 1928, as well as the social democratic social reforms during the 1930s. These changes turned the old poor Sweden into a faint memory. With a break for the Second World War, the development continued in the post-war period, and Sweden got a unique position as Europe's richest country.<sup>30</sup>

In some of the textbooks Sweden's development after the Second World War is described as a consequence of the fact that the country was able to avoid the war, which is why politicians cannot take credit for the country's advantageous position.<sup>31</sup> Yet, other authors display a much more self-conscious narrative, which emphasizes that Swedish or Nordic social democracy had made the Nordic countries visible in an international context in terms of prosperity, equality, and solidarity with the disadvantaged.<sup>32</sup> The protagonists of this narrative are Social Democratic politicians. In contrast to the narrative of prosperity it is now rather the politicians who have the initiative when it comes to creating an equal society. The positive development of Sweden in the welfare narrative comes to an end with the energy crisis in the 1970s. The future is not as bright anymore, and new dangers are looming on the horizon. However, there is a tendency to locate that decline at a later point in more recently published books. Långström, for example, describes the 1970s as a bright era, and instead, argues that the fall comes in connection with the cuts in the welfare system in the 1990s:

According to the National Board of Health and Welfare, the poor became poorer and the rich became richer in Sweden. Those who were worst off were single parents, immigrants and young people. There went the idea that we all live in paradise in Sweden and in the world.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Sture Långström *et al.*, *Historia. Då, nu och sedan* (Lund: Studentlitteratur 2009), 28, Almgren *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia, Maxi*, 2002, 422 and 36-37, and Sten Elm & Birgitta Thulin, 2000, 394.

<sup>31</sup> Börje Bergström *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia* (Malmö: Gleerups 1983), 425.

<sup>32</sup> Sten Elm & Birgitta Thulin, *Historia, Gymnasieskolan kurs A* (Malmö: Interskol 1995), 313.

<sup>33</sup> Långström, *et al.*, *Historia 1. Då nu och sedan*, 166.



In many textbooks, the murder of Olof Palme in 1986 is regarded as the event that finally crushed the notion of a unique Swedish idyll, isolated from the evils of the world.<sup>34</sup> Some textbooks also suggest that the policy of the welfare state could have negative consequences for the Swedish population. Elm & Thulin chose the following title: «Sterilizations in the People's Home» for their chapter in which they compare sterilization in Sweden with Nazi policies.<sup>35</sup> This element, in a narrative that is otherwise full of praise, coincides with the introduction of the accusatory narrative of neutrality mentioned above. One can see how the different narratives reinforce each other when new elements are inserted in the old narratives and how this creates new meaning within these narratives.

It can be noted that the narratives on prosperity and welfare sometimes converge and reinforce each other, and sometimes challenge each other as they point out conflicting lines of development. However, both stories legitimize Swedish reliability and unselfishness, albeit in different ways.

## THE NARRATIVE OF THE ROLE MODEL COUNTRY OF DEMOCRACY

The textbooks present three different narratives on democracy, with different conclusions and orientations towards the future. In the older textbooks the narrative of democracy is long, starting with the ancient freedom of the farmers who own their own land in an almost mythical Viking Age. This freedom was based on cooperation between the people, here defined as the peasant proprietors, and the king. This trend continued through the centuries. At times, this freedom was threatened, for example during the time when Sweden was a superpower and the nobility gained more power in the seventeenth century, or during «The Time of Freedom» in the eighteenth century when the regent lost his power. In the long term, the united people managed to preserve their self-government, which led to the introduction of municipal laws in 1862 and, the ultimate goal, the right for men to vote for «The House of Com-

<sup>34</sup> Niklas Ericsson & Magnus Hansson, *Samband historia. Historia plus* (Stockholm: Bonnier utbildning 2009), 518, Hans Almgren *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia A* (Malmö: Gleerups 2007,) 371, Långström *et al.*, *Historia 1. Då nu och sedan*, 137, and Nyström & Nyström, *Perspektiv på historia A*, 445.

<sup>35</sup> Sten Elm & Birgitta Thulin, *Epok. Historia A* (Malmö: Interskol 2000) 277.

mons» 1907-1909.<sup>36</sup> It is clear that the narrative sees this as democracy. However, this perspective was gradually challenged in connection with re-releases of old textbooks. Examples of this can be found in these two editions:

Since 1909, when universal suffrage was introduced, the Swedish people have had an increasing influence on the governance of their country. Virtually all adult Swedes now have the right to be involved in the election of Members of Parliament.<sup>37</sup>

The voting rights reform in 1909 did not mean that all adult Swedish citizens were given the right to participate in the parliamentary elections. First of all, women still lacked the right to vote. But many men were also prevented from voting, since the law stated that only those who accurately paid taxes had the right to vote.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these shifts in meaning, the conclusion is the same: democracy is synonymous with freedom, self-determination and independence. It is the people and the king who can be credited for preserving and developing Swedish freedom. If this unity could be maintained all would be well in the future. This is once more a narrative that generates pride and self-esteem.

The second narrative of democracy was first presented in 1949. I have chosen to call it *The Liberals' narratives of democracy*, because delegates of this ideology are the main protagonists, who lead the plot to a happy ending.<sup>39</sup> The narrative begins in connection with «The Time of Free-

<sup>36</sup> Erik Falk & Sven Tunberg, *Lärobok i svensk historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Norstedt 1931), 98, 197, and Erik Falk & Sven Tunberg, *Lärobok i svensk historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Norstedt 1939), 242, Odhner & Westman, *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia för realskolan*, 1934, 23-24 and 131, Grimberg & Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens för realskolan*, 158 and 242-243, and Gunnar Ander, *Historia för treåriga realskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget 1958), 275-276.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Grimberg & Ernst Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens för realskolan*, 1940, 312.

<sup>38</sup> Carl Grimberg & Ernst Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens för realskolan*, 1947, 307.

<sup>39</sup> Kumlien, *Sveriges historia för gymnasiet*, 393; Bäcklin et al., *Historia för gymnasiet. Allmän och nordisk historia efter år 1000*, 1963, 444; Brolin et al., *Allmän och nordisk historia för gymnasiet. Norden från äldsta tid och den övriga världen från år 1000*, 394; and Ivan Borg & Erik Nordell, *Historia för gymnasiet. Årskurs 2* (Stockholm: Läromedelsförlaget, 1967), 413.

dom» in the eighteenth century, which is here interpreted in an increasingly positive manner. This period in Sweden is seen as the cradle of the parliamentary system. In the nineteenth century liberal forces worked for extended voting rights, and finally managed to implement them in 1921. Since the democratization process was managed from the top by the political elite, that, for the most part, consisted of Liberals and sometimes Social Democrats, this narrative has less potential to legitimize broad-based national self-esteem and identity.

I have chosen to call the last sub-narrative of democracy, which is still included in modern textbooks, *The democracy narrative of popular movements*. This also begins with «The Time of Freedom» yet, introduces new historical agents to the narrative in the late nineteenth century. As its name suggests, it argues that large groups of people in Sweden, that became involved in popular movements like the temperance movement, the church revival movement, and the labour movement accomplished the development towards democracy in Sweden.<sup>40</sup>

People's movements have been the backbone of Swedish democracy. The emerging political parties had their roots in the people's interest organizations, the revival of the church, the temperance, and the trade union movement. Several social movements started in protest against the existing social order. They were governed by direct democracy. Out of this grew demands for universal suffrage and a parliamentary form of government.<sup>41</sup>

The narrative continues after 1921, which means that new challenges are introduced. The murder of Olof Palme and the entrance of Sweden into the EU were situations in which democracy could be threatened. As the initiative has returned to the people, the narrative gains greater importance for a narrative identity. Since the work towards democracy was driven by a dedicated and active population, it is also possible to insert this process into a narrative of «Swedishness». To conclude, democracy has been a recurring theme in the narratives, but the concept has been defined in different ways in different periods. The question which party

<sup>40</sup> Lars Hildingson *et al.*, *Två sekel. Lärobok i historia för gymnasieskolan. 3- och 4-åriga linjer, årskurs 2-3* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur 1978), 157, and Nyström & Nyström, *Perspektiv på historia A*, 277–282.

<sup>41</sup> Elm & Thulin, *Epok. Historia A*, 274.

was in charge of pushing the development forward affected both the creation of meaning and the orientation towards the future.

## THE NARRATIVE OF THE STRANGER

Identity legitimizing narratives are both based on a definition of the «self» and the «other». When defining *we*, there must also be someone who is not included in that *we*. In the national narratives these «others» play an important role by providing a contrast. Even these narratives can be traced back throughout the centuries. As soon as historians start writing about the Swedish kingdom, there is naturally also something outside of that kingdom, and someone who is threatening this realm.

Older textbooks primarily talk about intruders. Foreign bailiffs, militant neighbours, and Russian evil interests are examples of phenomena that can harm Sweden. However, there are also good foreigners, who through their similarity with the industrious and capable Swedes can both contribute to the country and integrate easily in society. The most prominent example of this in the older books are the Walloon labour migrants during the seventeenth century.<sup>42</sup> In these older textbooks, there are also strangers within the country who must repent and be brought up to be good Swedes. Kumlien wrote in 1955:

In the 1840s *Lars Levi Laestadius* in Karesuando began his preaching among a unique ethnic group, the Lapps (Sami), of which many, not only in Sweden but also in Norway and Finland, converted to sobriety and a peaceful form of living thanks to him.<sup>43</sup>

The first time refugees are mentioned in the textbooks is in 1939.<sup>44</sup> The older books describe it as self-evident that these refugees should return to their home countries once the danger is over. As shown above, the authors of the books that were published after the Second World War also wrote about the refugees who came to Sweden during the war, but even in these

<sup>42</sup> Odhner & Westman, *Lärobok I fäderneslandets historia för realskolan*, 1934, 102; Odhner, Westman & Forssell, *Lärobok I fäderneslandets historia för realskolan*, 1954, 124, 144, 236-237 and 340.

<sup>43</sup> Kumlien, *Sveriges historia för gymnasiet*, 323.

<sup>44</sup> Falk & Tunberg, *Lärobok i svensk historia för gymnasiet*, 1939, 261.

cases they are treated as temporary guests.<sup>45</sup> One can see that all these different groups of «strangers» serve to legitimize the narrative of the good and an able Swede, the evil intruders by allowing themselves to be thrown out, the able workers by being assimilated, the uncivilized by adapting, and the victims by gratefully letting themselves be helped.

The concept of immigrants was launched in the textbooks in the 1970s. Those who were not categorized as Swedes are now integrated into a new context. These textbooks introduce two different groups of immigrants. First, immigrants who, like the enterprising Swedes in the nineteenth century, came to a new country to create a better future for themselves and their children through hard work, and second, those who fled war and disaster, and therefore need help. These two categories are generally kept separate in the texts.<sup>46</sup> Concepts like multiculturalism have been incorporated into the narrative in recent decades, but the authors are ambiguous on whether this is a positive or problematic development. It is noted, however, that the Swedish parliament has clearly distanced itself from those small but vocal groups in Sweden that advocate racist violence.<sup>47</sup> However, it must be noted that I have not included any textbooks that were published after the Sweden Democrats entered the parliament in 2010, a party that uses more xenophobic rhetoric, in my survey. It remains to be seen how this new experience will affect the narrative's conclusions and moral in future textbooks. However, as I will show below, this experience has had a great significance for the stories created by the young people included in the framework of my survey. In sum, it becomes clear how well this narrative constructs a moral of «helpfulness», although negative and less honourable forces also have become part of the narrative.

<sup>45</sup> Grimberg & Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med det övriga Nordens för realskolan*, 1947, 319; Söderlund & Tunberg, *Svenskhistoria för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget, 1949); 421, Kumlien, *Sveriges historia för gymnasiet*, 427; and Gunnar Ander, *Historia för den treåriga realskolan* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget, 1958), 384.

<sup>46</sup> Börje Bergström *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia. Grundbok i historia för gymnasiet, femte upplagan* (Stockholm: Liberläromedel 1999), 448-449.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Almgren *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia A* (Stockholm: Liberläromedel 2002), 540. and Hans Almgren *et al.*, *Alla tiders historia A*, (Stockholm: Liberläromedel 2007), 375.

## THE NARRATIVE OF THE WORLD'S MOST GENDER EQUAL COUNTRY

The idea that Swedish women are living the world's most equal life becomes visible in various parts of the public debate. The assumption is not entirely uncommon among young people either. The question then is where this idea has originated. The textbooks could be one possible answer to this question. I have identified three different sub-narratives in the material that I have chosen to call: *The narrative that almost does not exist*, *The narrative of Swedish equality*, and *The narrative of dashing hopes*.

As its name suggests, the first narrative is almost invisible in the older textbooks. History textbooks are part of a larger context, and since women had a marginalized position in society in general, it is hardly surprising that they do not appear in the history textbooks. Those few textbooks that mention the situation that women found themselves in, claim that women *were granted* greater equality in the nineteenth century, mainly because they needed to be taught how to support themselves and not be a burden for their male relatives.<sup>48</sup> In 1954, some authors wrote that «they must begin to educate women to be more independent, so that they, when so required, could support themselves outside of the home.»<sup>49</sup> The women referred to here are in other words members of the lower middle class, as working class women were already a significant part of the labour market, and better off women did not have to work out of economic reasons. This almost invisible narrative ends happily with the introduction of suffrage for women in 1921. Consequently, the matter is not worth any further attention.

The narrative of the equal Swedish woman appeared in the textbooks in 1973. Authors still wrote that women were *given* authority and the right to study, but the topic is steadily devoted greater attention. Reforms that had improved the status of women in society are listed, and the moral is that these reforms have led to a unique situation of gender equality

<sup>48</sup> Grimberg & Söderlund, *Sveriges historia i sammanhang med den övriga Nordens för realskolan*, 1940, 278-279.

<sup>49</sup> Odhner & Westman, *Lärobok I fäderneslandets historia för realskolan*, 1934, 217, and Odhner, Westman & Forssell, *Lärobok I fäderneslandets historia för realskolan*, 1954, 291. The formulation is slightly changed in 1954.

in Sweden.<sup>50</sup> This good situation is not only the highlight of the narrative, it also provides a resolution and orientation towards the future. The definition of who had the right to enter the labour market started to widen. Now all female adult citizens in the country have these rights, which is why the conclusion of the narrative is altered.

I have chosen to call the newest narrative of equality: *The narrative of dashing hopes*, since its conclusion is not so hopeful and joyful anymore. In this narrative, the authors begin to pay attention to the fact that different women are living under different conditions even in Sweden, and that it is not possible to generalize the group's ability to create an independent life.<sup>51</sup> This narrative also expresses disappointment and distrust for the future. Those measures that were taken have had little effect, and the conclusion is therefore that there is still much left to do for women to be liberated.

Fathers can also take parental leave, but they do so to a much lesser extent than mothers - elk hunting time is, by the way, the period when most fathers take parental leave. At the turn of the century in 2000, women are still underrepresented in the boards of companies and trade unions, in political parties, and so on, and women are also behind in wage negotiations. In the home, it is still women who bear the primary responsibility for the children and the household. Factual equality between genders has still not been achieved.<sup>52</sup>

This final narrative provides no cause for pride. This might be the reason why it is almost invisible in the students' narratives that I will discuss in the following.

<sup>50</sup> Göran Graninger *et al.*, *Vägar till nuet. Från fortiden till våra dagar. Historia för gymnasieskolan*, (Solna: Almqvist & Wiksell läromedel 1992), 409; Bengt Åke Häger, *Grepp om historien, del 3. Tiden efter 1945 samt exempel på tematiska studier* (Lund: Studentlitteratur 1979), 52; Elm & Birgitta Thulin, *Historia. Gymnasieskolan kurs A*, 315; Robert Sandberg *et al.*, *Epos. Historia för gymnasieskolans kurs A* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 2006) 307; Nyström & Nyström, *Perspektiv på historia A*, 436; and Alm, *Milstolpar. Historia A*, 405-406 and 427.

<sup>51</sup> Christina Carlsson Wetterberg, Sverker Oredsson & Lars Andersson, *I historien spegel. Långa linjer och tvärsnitt* (Göteborg: Akademiförlaget 1995), 356.

<sup>52</sup> Almgren *et al.* *Alla tiders historia*, 2002, 539.



## MANAGERS, MEDIATORS AND INNOVATORS – STUDENTS’ STORIES

What happens with these narratives of Sweden and «Swedishness» when they meet the students? Which narratives, or parts of narratives, the students recollect? Of course, it is also interesting to examine where the students have picked up these stories, yet, this is not an easy aspect to examine. We are usually not aware of the way in which we create our worldviews, and which sources have affected us. It is nevertheless useful to ask students where they think they have picked up narratives.

Those students that I chose to be my informants attended a mid-sized public secondary school, located in a small town in the south of Sweden. They were from four different classes. All four classes had worked with the same textbook, but had had different history teachers. All in all, the group included 27 boys and 27 girls.

The three different stories of neutrality that I have identified in the textbooks are all represented in the students’ texts. In the same way as in the textbooks, the nationalist neutrality narrative expresses the notion of unique Swedish peacefulness, which is why it is a source of great pride for several of the students. They also connect peacefulness, economic growth, and democracy in a way that makes the different narratives reinforce and confirm each other.<sup>53</sup> For example, Amanda writes: «I am also proud that we remained neutral in the war».<sup>54</sup> This use of the pronoun *we* creates a connection with previous generations, which in turn generates a moral continuity between her and the Swedes who were alive during the Second World War.

Few students recall *The pragmatic narrative of neutrality*. This is not a narrative that covers a long time period, since it exclusively concerns itself with the Swedish actions during the Second World War. Several of the students reflected on how this pragmatic approach has benefited the country:

The Second World War [...]. A time that favoured Sweden, at least in retrospect. When most other European countries were rebuild-

<sup>53</sup> Per, IV:5, Katarina, IV: 2 and Kajsa, I:8. (The texts can be found by the author.) (All names are fictional.)

<sup>54</sup> Amanda, II:13.

ding their bombed cities and taking care of their dead and wounded, Sweden was a quiet and strong country with a relatively good economy.<sup>55</sup>

These students nevertheless also reflect on the negative consequences of neutrality, and it is therefore difficult to draw a clear dividing line between a lightly accusing pragmatic narrative and an apologetic accusatory narrative.

The accusatory narrative of neutrality is most common in the students' texts. However, one should note that elements of this narrative mostly show up in the section in which the students had to answer the question if there was anything in Swedish history they feel ashamed of. The same student who presented a very supportive narrative of peace in one part of the text could later present an accusatory narrative when answering the supplementary questions. This demonstrates that the creation of meaning depends on the context, and that the way we design our questions is essential for the answers we receive.<sup>56</sup>

*The narrative of the prosperous country* is the most dominant in the students' texts. This makes visible both similarities and differences in relation to the comparable stories in the textbooks. It is clear that some students are influenced by the welfare narrative in the textbooks when they construct their prosperity narrative. Swedish success is dependent on economic growth, but that development is placed in the twentieth century. Instead, the nineteenth century is a time of poverty and misery. An interesting observation is the tension that becomes apparent when it comes to explaining historical change. On one hand, it is often the anonymous force of «development» that lacks visible actors which lead to change. On the other hand, the narratives include a recurring theme of freedom, success and wealth. However, who created this freedom and wealth for whom is usually not discussed. *The narrative of the prosperous country* does not seem to have the same ability to create communities across generations as *the narrative of neutrality*. The students usually note that «*They* were poor» during the nineteenth century. The symbolic pronoun *we* is reserved for people whose living conditions were similar to

<sup>55</sup> Lotta, IV:8.

<sup>56</sup> Per, IV:5, Måns, I:14, Jonas, I:5, Karl, II:15, Alexandra IV:6, Tine, I:1 and Lotta, IV:8.

their own.<sup>57</sup> The poor old Sweden thus becomes the contrasting narrative against which they legitimize their own narrative identity.

The students' welfare narrative also borrows elements from other narratives. Several students present a long narrative that begins with the struggle of the workers in the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> This fight led to the good conditions that young people can observe in present Swedish society. Some of them, however, express that this success narrative is currently threatened by cuts in the welfare system.<sup>59</sup> There is often a clear correlation between the labour movement's emergence and the democratization of Sweden in these narratives. Thereby, *the welfare narrative* converges with *the narrative of democracy*. There are also students who problematize the welfare system's impact on the population. Britta writes:

Another thing that has affected us, I think, is that we can always cope. If I compare Sweden to a country like China that has a huge population and where knowledge is the key to a successful life, Swedes (here I am pretty categorical) are extremely lax. We have benefits for this and that and I think that that can sometimes be hindering, since we do not have anything we have to fight for. I myself I feel that it is not the end of the world if I do not get a job - I will manage in the end. As it is, I do not struggle as hard as I could, at least compared with a Chinese girl or guy at my age. Having basic security is good thing, but today I think that the security of Sweden makes us a lazy people.<sup>60</sup>

In summary, one can see that the students present both the prosperity and welfare narratives, but that they often change temporal dimensions and agents between the two narratives. However, the moral and orientation towards the future is consistently positive and full of expectation.

It is hardly remarkable that democratization is part of the students' narratives of Sweden. Democracy is an important concept of moral education in Swedish schools. However, that which is a bit surprising is that

<sup>57</sup> For example Isak, III:2.

<sup>58</sup> Karolina, I:6, Amanda, II:13, Filip, II:7, Lisa, II:3 and Gustav, IV:7.

<sup>59</sup> Karolina, I:6.

<sup>60</sup> Britta, I:10. Se även Sandra, I:3, Eva, II:11, Oscar, IV:3 and Rebecka, I:11.

the students believe that Sweden is a democratic pioneer. When asked of proudness, 15 students mentioned democracy. Democracy is also often seen as an exceptional Swedish freedom.<sup>61</sup> The concept of freedom has a central role in the students' stories, and it is also more or less frequent in the textbooks.

*The narrative of democracy is, along with the narrative of prosperity, the most powerful narrative in the material. However, the students' narrative of democracy is different from those presented in the textbooks in a number of ways. Democracy is presented as a result of industrialization, and sometimes even of Swedish neutrality, which creates a different meaning. Per writes:*

When we reach 1939, Germany has once again captured the thoughts of a Greater Germany and invades the rest of Europe. Sweden, now indirectly a good friend of the super power Germany, does not become involved but contributes with a large amount of iron for weapons production. Sweden chooses to introduce the draft for all men, and with all of the men busy defending the country, the women have a greater chance to show what they are capable of and they take over the factories and estates. Not long after the war, women's rights in society increased dramatically and they also received the right to vote.<sup>62</sup>

In this quote one can see how Per links the advantages that Sweden stayed out of the war with democratization. There are some great mistakes in the narrative. Women managed to get the right to vote in Sweden in 1921. A possible explanation for the chronological misconceptions in this quote is that the creation of meaning controls the development of events rather than vice versa. This makes visible how the meaning of a narrative can «transform» its historical content in a way that I, as a history teacher, perceive as problematic. «Incorrect» stories are nevertheless as legitimizing for the creation of identity as correct stories. The narrative contributes to the construction of national confidence and a

<sup>61</sup> Anna, III:3, Rebecka, I:11, Sandra, I:3, Tine, I:1, Måns, I:14, Kajsa, I:8, Axel, II:9, Amelia, II:2, William, II:1, Eskil, II:8, Viktor, III:4, Pontus, II:10, Linnéa, III:5, André, I:7, Emelie, II:4, Erik, II:14, Per, IV:5, Hanna, II:16, Katarina, IV:2, Jonas, I:5, Lotta, IV:8, Gustav, IV:7, Johannes, I:4, Karolina, I:6, Robert, I:13, Filip, II:7, Lisa, II:3, Amanda, II:13 and Karl, II:15.

<sup>62</sup> Per, IV:5.

positive view on the future, which is representative for many of the students' narratives.

Another idea that is highlighted in these narratives is the view of Swedish equality as unique that includes the responsibility to spread that equality to other countries.<sup>63</sup> Some students present a narrative of democracy that has a similar structure as *the narrative of the popular movement* in the textbooks.<sup>64</sup> The most prominent feature of the students' narratives of democracy is that they have the potential to strengthen national confidence and the notion of Swedish uniqueness. This narrative thus becomes a fundamental element in their constructions of narrative identities.

The narratives of those who are not a part of the big narrative of prosperity and democracy, the «others», are almost completely absent in students' texts. When they do occur it is almost exclusively in a context that expresses shame over the fact that the Populist Party *Sweden Democrats* entered the Swedish parliament in 2010.<sup>65</sup> The students who note that they were not born in Sweden, and those who, in their own words, do not see themselves as «completely Swedish», do also not give much space for this aspect in their stories.<sup>66</sup> This can be interpreted in different ways. A positive interpretation would be that the students see everyone living in Sweden as part of a Swedish historical development, and therefore do not consider it useful to distinguish between groups with respect to how long they, or their parents, have lived in Sweden. A less positive interpretation is that they do not see these «others» as part of Swedish history.

However, to summarize, it can be noted that when «the other» is mentioned, it is usually described in the same way as in the textbooks: as a victim in need of all kinds of help or protection. Only a few students argue that the «other» has contributed in a positive way to Swedish society throughout history.<sup>67</sup> However, this narrative generates no pride,

<sup>63</sup> Isabelle, IV:11 and Erik, II:14.

<sup>64</sup> Karl, II:15, Amanda II:13, Karolina, I:6 and Lisa, II:3.

<sup>65</sup> Lisa, II:3, Gustav, IV:7, Stina, III:1, Britta, I:10, Anna, III:3, Tine, I:1, Eva, II:11, Lina, IV:1, Amanda, II:13, Karl, II:15, Jon, II:6, Amelia, II:2, Katarina, IV:2, Isak, III:2, Mattias, IV:4, Erik, II:14 and Rebecka, I:11.

<sup>66</sup> Adam, IV:14, Alma, IV:7, Fia, IV:10 and Isak, III:2.

<sup>67</sup> Isak, III:2 and Erik, II:14.

as «the Swedes» have failed when it comes to these responsibilities. The narrative of the stranger thus converges with the accusatory narrative of neutrality in terms of meaning and orientation towards the future. The students demand improvement. These moral defects are seen as even more remarkable as they were committed by Swedes. Amanda writes:

The first thing I that came to my mind was that the *Sweden Democrats* managed to enter the parliament this year, although it may not be something that plays a critical role in a global perspective. I know that many countries have been shocked that a xenophobic party managed to gain foothold, particularly in Sweden, as Swedes are seen as an advocator of humanitarianism abroad.<sup>68</sup>

Only five students give notable attention to issues of gender equality. Students often write about women's suffrage, but this aspect is not included in the greater narrative. It is therefore not given any importance when it comes to students' constructions of meaning. Among the few students who wrote about gender issues more explicitly, four concluded that gender equality in Sweden is unique, which is why it can be seen as a model for other countries.<sup>69</sup> Only one student presents the idea that there is still more to do when it comes to the issue of gender equality.<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

In the following, I will discuss two questions: why have the stories in the textbooks changed during the twentieth century? And: why do the students not present the same narratives as the authors of the textbooks? To be sure, these questions do not have any definite answers. I nevertheless argue that it is useful to discuss some tentative explanations.

As I have pointed out at the beginning of this article, regarding the textbooks one can trace and outline various factors of change on different levels: intentional, historical context and history culture. The question thus becomes: what is possible to write in a textbook in a particular

<sup>68</sup> Amanda, II:13.

<sup>69</sup> Lisa, II:3, Karl, II:15, Maria, IV:18, Alma, IV:17 and Hanna, II:16.

<sup>70</sup> Hanna, II:16.

time on a particular topic? For example, the idea that women needed to be brought up to greater independence, as expressed in the 1950s, would be impossible to write today.

Other factors that had a great influence on the books are the historical events and change processes that affected the premises of writing, and thereby created a new horizon for the narratives. World wars, the economic crisis in the 1930s, the fall of communism, and Sweden joining the EU are examples of such events. The textbook writer Hans Almgren has said in an interview: «When I look back at the books I participated in for nearly 30 years, it becomes clear how each new era poses new questions to the narrative and how different phenomena and events are focused and interpreted in light of present-day debates and events».<sup>71</sup>

The history cultural context has also had a significant influence on both continuity and change that can be observed in the textbooks. The authors have worked in a history cultural context, both in terms of culture of history in general, and the genre in particular. In the 1960s a new objectivist writing was introduced in the textbooks, which resulted in the elimination of the most nationalist aspects.<sup>72</sup> This trend also led to the disappearance of many of the «heroes» such as kings, from the plot. It could be expected that his development would lead to less prescriptive narratives, yet, their moral and orientation towards the future remained, albeit in a subtler form. The sudden change that occurred in the introduction of *the accusatory narrative of neutrality* can be explained by the debates that took place during the late twentieth century in Sweden. The release of Maria-Pia Boëthius book *Honor and Conscience - Sweden and the World War II* and the Prime Minister Göran Persson's outrage over Swedish students' lack of knowledge about the Holocaust in 1997 that resulted in the founding of the Living History Forum, are such history cultural phenomena that underlie this new narrative.<sup>73</sup> However, this narrative does not entirely replace the old, which can be seen as an example of how newer history books often feature several different stories or

<sup>71</sup> Hans Almgren, «I huvudet på en läromedelsförfattare» in *Att spegla världen. Läromedelsstudier i teori och praktik*, ed. Niklas Ammert (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2011), 343.

<sup>72</sup> Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land... Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar*, 264-278.

<sup>73</sup> Maria-Pia Boëthius, *Heder och samvete. Sverige och andra världskriget* (Stockholm: Ordfront 1999), and «Forum för levande historia», <http://www.levandehistoria.se/english> (accessed June 29, 2016).



perspectives in the same textbook. Even the narrative of the welfare society, presented in the 1970s, can be explained in terms of history culture. Concepts like solidarity and equality had become more common in the public rhetoric in the 1960s. This narrative came to be challenged during the 2000's. In 2002, *The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* published an investigation of history textbooks that argued that industrial development had too little space in the textbooks.<sup>74</sup> The entrepreneurs' entry into the narratives can be interpreted as a result of these reviews.

The narrative that seems to have been most easily influenced is *the narrative of democracy*. The school investigations, launched in the 1940s, stressed that the main role of the school was to educate democratic citizens. This new agenda was implemented without delay in the history textbooks. A narrative that has shown a higher degree of rigidity is the narrative of the stranger. Multiculturalism was a concept that became part of the public rhetoric during the 1970s, but it was not until the end of the 1980s and early 1990s that the concept was integrated in the textbook narratives. Even when analysing issues of gender equality, the history cultural debate influenced the textbooks. Hans Almgren writes:

When it comes to women's lives and conditions the authors of textbooks have been forced to continue their own education. The turning point for me came at a conference at *Kulturhuset* in Stockholm sometime in the early 1990s. When a male history teacher - one of the very few men in the room - held up ATH [*All Times History*, the book Almgren is a cowriter of] and shouted that he would certainly not allow his students to touch this textbook even with a ten foot pole, to which the entire audience cheered wildly, I realized that something had to be done.<sup>75</sup>

Another factor is that the government gave the *National Institute for Study Materials* a mandate to review history textbooks from a female perspective in 1990. The review concluded that «the feminine» was present in about three percent of the text, and 10-15 percent of the images.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Anders Johnson, «Den felande länken», [www.svensktnaringsliv.se](http://www.svensktnaringsliv.se) (accessed May 5, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Hans Almgren, «I huvudet på en läromedelsförfattare», 350.

<sup>76</sup> Anne Marie Berggren, *Kvinnoperspektiv på läromedlen i historia, religionskunskap och konst- och musikhistoria samt ämnet social- och familjekunskap* (Stockholm: Skolverket 1991).

These factors likely accelerated the change that can be seen in *the narrative of dashing hopes*.

To sum up, it usually takes about ten years for an issue to move from the public debate to history textbooks.<sup>77</sup> Topics and issues from media debates will be negotiated and balanced against other aspects, such as genre traditions and commercial considerations, before they are introduced into the narratives. This slow process problematizes the assumption that students derive their stories from history textbooks.

So why do the students use the narratives that they use? Most students that were part of my survey told me that they mainly derive their narratives from their families. Yet, they also pointed out that they are influenced by their teachers and the media. The textbooks are only mentioned on place eight in the survey.<sup>78</sup> The transmission of values and narratives is thus not a linear process. Narratives are constantly interpreted in new contexts, and changed and communicated in a way that is both complex and difficult to grasp. Mattias writes: «It is impossible to say that only one of these options has affected me and my narratives. I think that all my narratives are derived from all these options. Every day we renew and update these stories when we learned something new».<sup>79</sup>

This should be taken into consideration when discussing the textbooks' central place in education. That which I have seen in the study is that students' political and ideological positions greatly affect their narratives. They choose to insert the events and phenomena that legitimize the ideological points that they want to express into them.<sup>80</sup> Besides this ideological tendency, the narratives are also influenced by history and history culture. The following student quotes illustrate this clearly:

I also had no idea that Norway and Sweden had been part of a union sometime 200 years ago. It is strange that I have not heard of this before because it is something that can be remarkable for

<sup>77</sup> Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land... Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar*, 269.

<sup>78</sup> Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land... Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar*, 378-386, 493.

<sup>79</sup> Mattias, IV:4. Fia, IV:10.

<sup>80</sup> For example Lisa, II:3.

the history of Sweden but it could be that maybe it was just for a short period, or that it was a dark time in the history of Sweden which means that it is not relevant. I would probably have benefited more from knowing such «major» events than learning about all of Sweden's kings from 1750-1900 and how they died from pea soups, masquerades and buttons.<sup>81</sup>

[W]hen you read history at school you tend to concentrate on older history, and when talking about the 1900s I think you focus on the World Wars and the Holocaust, and I notice now that I hardly have any idea about what happened between the Second World war and when I was born.<sup>82</sup>

These students provide two insightful and valuable cultural historical reflections. The girl's thoughts about what she really learned in her history lessons, makes visible the importance of the narratives she has heard during the first years of school. Although the chronology has been forgotten, teaching has created a notion of what you should know when you know anything about the history of Sweden. Her reflections on the selection principles also say a lot about her view on the function of history teaching: if the past is dark and not that glorious, it is not relevant. The sources analysed also shows that the students' views on the nineteenth century is a mixture of steam engines and «Emil in Lönneberga country»: on one hand a society in which everyone was extremely poor, and on the other hand an idyllic fairy tale world with red wooden cottages and happy animals. Students rarely discuss any kind of relationship between these worlds, or the fact that different people lived under different conditions.<sup>83</sup> It generally seems that students have difficulty processing experiences that are not coherent with their large meta-narratives. The aspects that do not fit into them become disjointed memory skills.

One important conclusions of my study is that the various topics discussed in the public discourse reach students before they reach the textbooks, which is why they affect their interpretation of the books. The

<sup>81</sup> Fia, IV:10.

<sup>82</sup> Lotta, IV:8.

<sup>83</sup> Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land... Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar*, 383.

stories conveyed by the students come from many different directions, and have been interpreted and changed based on the students' historical context, history culture and political world view. Identities are, in other words, constructed in a complex way and must therefore be analysed with similar complexity. ■

### Note on the author:

Ingmarie Danielsson Malmros is a senior lecturer in history didactics at Malmö University, Sweden, where she works in the history teacher program and teaches aspiring history teachers. In 2012 she defended her PhD thesis: *Once Upon Time There was a Country... Narratives About «Swedishness» in History Textbooks and Students' Worldviews*. The thesis concerns itself with the way in which authors of Swedish history textbooks between the 1930s and the 2000s have constructed narratives on Sweden and Swedish identity in various ways, and the way in which a group of high school students reconstructed these narratives in 2010. She is also the co-author of the university textbook in history didactics: *History is present. History didactics as theory and application* (2014). Before becoming a senior lecturer, Danielsson Malmros worked for 25 years as a high school history teacher. Her research interests concern topics regarding the philosophy of history, the use of history, identity constructions in relation to history, and history education. Theoretically, she is mainly inspired by Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White and Reinhart Koselleck.

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