Last Night in Sweden

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Image of Sweden in International Media

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AUTHOR: Mathilda Linnander
TUTOR: Fredrik Stiernstedt
SEMESTER: VT 18
This is a study of how the image of Sweden is constructed in international media. Using the country as a swinging bat in debates on socialism and progressiveness is nothing new but has had an upswing during recent years as a result of the global rise of right-wing forces. With the help of Critical Discourse Analysis, four articles from the United States and the United Kingdom are analysed. These are then presented according to Fairclough’s three-layered model. With the help of previous research on Sweden in international media, fake news and nation branding, these findings are then explained and put into context.

The study finds that the image of Sweden presented in media tends to follow the narrative of Good Sweden and Bad Sweden. On the one hand is the classic welfare state in the north, which takes care of its people and with high levels of trust between the actors. On the other hand is a country in ruins as a result of letting in too many immigrants. Both narratives rely heavily on stereotypes. The discussion tends to use Sweden as an example, when it is really about ideologies and values. Another result shown by the study is that fake news is a common trace in news about Sweden, not only in alternative media but also in the established elite media. This can be seen as a result of the hardening situation in the media business as well as the rise of right-wing forces.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Sweden, fake news, nation branding, elite media
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1. Introduction and background

“You look at what’s happening. We’ve got to keep our country safe. You look at what’s happening in Germany, you look at what’s happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this?”

Donald Trump, February 17th, 2017

1.1. Introduction

This study investigates how the image of Sweden is constructed in international elite media. Using the country as a swinging bat in debates on values and ideology is nothing new, but has been going on all through the 20th century. Now it is once again on the agenda thanks to people like Donald Trump and the growing right wing moment in different parts the world (Hale, 2003; Rapacioli, 2018). The image of a country is the currency used in political and economic encounters with other countries, to be able to form alliances and network. A country with a bad image will not be as attractive to cooperate with as one with a good image, which is why the perception of a country matters (Fan, 2006; Glover, 2009). The perception of a country is often rooted in the media, since that is where people get their information (Strömbäck, 2014). Communication in the form of news is what holds a society together by telling us what we practically need to know, and in doing so helps us create and identity. No news piece is important per se, but gains its relevance thanks to its relation to the community. People care about things that concern them (Rapacioli, 2018; Strömbäck, 2014).

1.2. Background

1.2.1. Last Night in Sweden

The statement made by the president of the United States on February 17th 2018 at a rally in Florida sparked a debate on what was really going on in Sweden, a small country in the north of Europe (Chan, 2017). On the one hand was the classic image of a successful, socialist country filled with red cottages, moose and blonde, happy people. On the other hand was the image the president referred to, a country where angry youth burned cars and women were afraid to walk the streets because of the risk of getting raped. Depending on their political
sympathies, people would either make fun of the president or praise him for finally letting the world know the truth, something that the mainstream media was refusing to do (Bawer, 2018; Rapacioli, 2018).

Many Swedes turned to Twitter to post photos under the hashtag #LastNightInSweden which soon was trending worldwide, showing photos of people going through their everyday life. This later resulted in a photo book by Peter Karlsson, *Last Night in Sweden: The True Story* of which the first copy was sent to the president himself (Wessel, 2017). Aftonbladet, the biggest tabloid in Sweden, wrote a summary of the night before in English which was aimed directly at the president. The list included points such as a road in the north of the country closing down because of harsh weather, and one of the contestants in the Swedish outtakes for Eurovision Song Contest experiencing technical difficulties (Ekman, 2017).

Others would instead rejoice at the fact that someone was finally brave enough to tell the truth. For years they had tried to make people aware of how Sweden was living a lie, and now they had one of the world’s most notable men joining their movement. Alternative news sites such as Breitbart and InfoWars published long articles explaining the background to Trump’s statement and how he was not, as the mainstream media assumed, focusing on a specific event but rather an ongoing development (Bawer, 2018; Rapacioli, 2018). Mainstream media had been covering it up for years, but now the time had finally come for the world to know the truth about Sweden (Bawer, 2018). This narrative was also joined by Jimmie Åkesson and Mattias Karlsson, party chairman and party group leader of the nationalist party the Swedish Democrats. They published an article in The Wall Street Journal with the headline *Trump Is Right: Sweden’s Embrace of Refugees Isn’t Working* (Åkesson & Karlsson, 2017). The article was shared more than 35,000 times on Facebook, got more than a thousand comments, and was picked up by Breitbart and similar sites. It was however not particularly popular with the Swedish government, who accused Åkesson and Karlsson of intentionally ruining Sweden’s international reputation with false information. Trump later claimed to have been referring to the documentary Stockholm Syndrome by Ami Horowitz from 2016, that had been broadcasted at Fox TV the night in question. The documentary has however been dismissed by several experts, arguing that it was angled, decontextualized and in some aspects just untrue (Rapacioli, 2018).
One might wonder how much a speech by an American president can really influence the image of a small, Nordic country. The answer can be found by looking at a similar case from 1960 when Dwight D. Eisenhower was the president of the United States. In a speech on July 27th, in front of 600 republicans, Eisenhower claimed that Sweden had an extremely high suicide rate. This statement was dismissed by Swedish authorities since it was not based on any facts, suicide rates were actually falling at the time. President Eisenhower later apologised, but the harm was already done and even now, 58 years later, many people across the world consider it common sense that Sweden suffers from the world’s highest rate of suicide. It does not matter that the Swedish suicide rate of 12.7 per 100 000 is lower than the European average of 14.1 deaths per 100 000 and barely above the U.S. rate of 12.6 per 100 000 (Hale, 2003; Rapacioli, 2018). Eisenhower’s statement was based on a Times article about the Swedish sin, where sweeping generalisations were made about the sinful living of the swedes. The reporter talked of sexual liberty, free abortions and overall unchristian lifestyle far from what the conservative president believed in, making Sweden the perfect example for how socialism can be the downfall of a nation (Hale, 2003).
2. Aim and research questions

2.1. Problem Formulation

Sweden is often used in debates on a global level to exemplify both nightmare scenarios and a utopia to strive for. None of these images are rooted in deep analysis, but instead stem from an oversimplified view of a socialist country. Rather than being based on hard facts and scientific reports, the statements tend to rely on articles that fit the ideological standpoint of the speaker in question. In many cases these articles are so called fake news, where a story has been taken out of context and angled to fit a certain narrative. Even if there is a small grain of truth at the root of it, it has been lost along the way. These fake news are often assumed to be found only in alternative news media, when in fact they tend to trickle down to respected and established publications as well. Their readers are the elite of the country, who are in charge of political and economic decisions. Their impression of Sweden could be crucial for the country's international business.

2.2. Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate how the image of Sweden is presented in four elite newspapers from the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The result of that can then be related to how the country is perceived by the elites of those countries.

2.3. Research Question

1. How is the image of Sweden constructed in four international elite newspapers?

2. How is this done on a textual, discursive and social level?
3. Previous research

3.1. Sweden in International Media

The majority of the research done on the image of Sweden in international media concludes that there are two ways of reporting on the country. On the one side is the idea of Sweden as a utopia, the so called Good Sweden. This is the stereotypical image that most people have of the country (Berge, 2015; Glover, 2009; Marklund, 2009; Rapacioli, 2018). On the other hand, is the alternative narrative of Sweden as a country in ruins, where progressive values have led to a downfall of society. This downfall is blamed on different things in different contexts, such as sexual freedom and immigration (Hale, 2003; Marklund, 2015; Rapacioli, 2018).

3.1.1 Good Sweden

Good Sweden is the narrative that has been dominant since the 1950’s, where Sweden is portrayed as a technologically advanced country with environmentally friendly and equality focused values. This Sweden is a welfare state that takes care of its people, who are happy and blonde and mostly live in red cottages (Glover, 2009; Hale, 2003). One could claim that Sweden’s whole identity is built around one single year, namely 1978. Ingemar Stenmark dominated the ski slopes, ABBA dominated the music industry, and Björn Borg was the king of tennis. Ingmar Bergman got nominated for two Oscars, and Saab started their production of Saab 99 Turbo, the world’s first production car with a turbo engine (Berge, 2015).

The narrative of Good Sweden dates back to when the Swedish Institute (SI) was founded by the state in 1945. Their mission was to administrate and promote Swedish relations with other countries after World War Two, when the country was in trouble due do its neutrality. SI concluded that Sweden’s reputation had been smeared and needed a restoration, and that was to be done by promoting the Swedish culture and values. According to SI there was an international image of Sweden as a progressive country, but in some cases that progressiveness turned into amorality. It was therefore decided to promote the politico-economic aspect rather than the cultural, since it was found too hard to translate and much less praised than the politico-economic aspect. The country needed to be promoted without provoking anyone. Swedishness was therefore defined as democracy, neutrality, and internationalism; progressive values that SI still stands by today (Glover, 2009).
The image of Good Sweden is often framed as either a social laboratory, a middle way or the Swedish model. These three all present a country where consensus and progressiveness are of uttermost importance, and with a homogenous population. This setting provides a perfect seedbed for testing new political and sociological ideas, and creating ways and models for others to follow (Marklund, 2009). Despite claims that Sweden and the other Nordic countries might actually be more liberal than socialist, the image of Sweden as a socialist utopia is still prospering. This is particularly true in the United States, where the image of the country has not changed much during the last 50 years (Marklund, 2015).

The most common occurrence of Good Sweden in international mainstream media is to report on rankings and surveys, where Sweden tends to place at the top concerning everything from gender equality to English knowledge to best countries to do business in. All marketing and opinions aside, organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank rank Sweden as one of the most successful countries in the world (Gray, 2017; Strömbäck, 2017). This is a position that the country has held for a long time, and the changes over time have been too small to be of any significance (Strömbäck, 2017). Another example of Good Sweden is the image presented in guide books. A study exploring Sweden in German tourist guides showed that the image is based on stereotypes of happy blonde people in red cottages, in a country filled with woods and moose. The books have a heavy focus on Stockholm, but do occasionally mention Småland and Lappland as well (Zillinger, 2005).

3.1.2. Bad Sweden

The alternative narrative of Sweden was for very long defined by the four S’s, sex, suicide, spirits and socialism. This myth was, as mentioned earlier, created by president Eisenhower in the 1960’s and has ever since then been refusing to die. According to Hale (2003), the president had no interest in hurting the country itself, but was willing to do so in order to gain goodwill and promote his own business. Sweden represented the opposite of what he himself believed in, and so it became the target when dismissing “the others” and show how poor their politics were. His statement, partly based on an article in Times Magazine and multiple times debunked by Swedish experts, became part of the common knowledge and has been so for over 50 years (Hale, 2003; Marklund, 2015).
In recent years, a new narrative of Bad Sweden has risen. It is one that tells the story of a country that has welcomed too many immigrants, being too naïve to realise the fatal consequences of that. As a result of open borders and weak politicians, the country is now on the verge of collapsing. Things such as Sweden's third biggest city Malmö being the rape capital of Europe, the country having several no-go zones where police and firefighters won't go, and that the mainstream media is covering up the truth is considered common knowledge. This narrative is becoming increasingly popular, and is frequently used as an example of how naïve it is to believe that social democracy and progressive values will work in reality. The image of Bad Sweden is spread not only through alternative media but also established and respected newsrooms, often as a result of ignorance and bad research due to lack of economic resources (D’Ancona, 2017; Rapacioli, 2018).

3.2. Fake News

A large part of the assumptions and common knowledge of Sweden is based on so-called fake news, as in the case of the suicide statistics or Last Night in Sweden. The concept of fake news was defined by the year 2016, with Brexit and Donald Trump becoming president of the United States. However, according to experts, these two are not the cause but rather symptoms of what kind of society we live in. Both Trump and Brexit rely on emotions rather than reality and have created myths surrounding their respective main messages, Make America Great Again and Take Back Control. Both movements depend on the fact that voters today chose an alternative that appeals to them, and then collect information that confirm those values rather than first collecting information and then choosing an alternative. Thanks to the internet and the algorithms it provides, it is possible for people to only consume information that agrees with their worldview and live in so-called filter bubbles. Inside these bubbles, each person can choose their own reality. There is no longer such a thing as facts, only interpretations (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017). This in turn has resulted in a major loss of trust in any kind of elite, be it politicians, scientists or journalists. Instead they turn to one of the many alternative news outlets, which share their disgust with mainstream media and the political elite. The power to influence and add to the body of common knowledge no longer belongs to experts and elites, but to the ones who yell the loudest (D’Ancona, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). Researchers also believe that the rise of fake news is a result of the hardening situation for established media houses. Cuts in budgets and staff result in less resources to spare for each news article, making it more common to publish news from other sources without thoroughly fact checking them (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017). A study by Cook, Lewandowsky and Ecker (2017) does however suggest that it is possible to
“vaccinate” people against fake news and disinformation by making them aware of the existence of it. The result of their experiments shows that by activating the critical thinking, people can be made more suspicious and less recipient of fake news.

Fake news are mostly the result of decontextualizing and extreme angling. They often contain a small amount of truth at the very bottom, but after a few twist and turns the original message has been lost and replaced with one that fits the new narrative (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). This can be illustrated with a news story of how Sweden banned Christmas lights in order not to offend Muslims. The root of this was a news story by the local TV station SVT Jönköping in 2016 about how the Swedish Transport Administration would not allow Christmas lights to be put on lamp posts in several small towns, because of safety reasons. This article was then picked up by the alternative news site Speisa, which claimed that “safety reasons” was just a way of saying that they were toning down Christian traditions. Their article was then picked up by the two biggest sources for alternative news, American InfoWars and Breitbart, talking about how Sweden was capitulating to an army of Muslim migrants. This in turn led to the British the Daily Mail publishing an article about it, spreading it to their 1.5 daily readers (Rapacioli, 2018). No matter how many times such stories are denied and debunked by experts and representatives of the country, the fake news will continue to live on as part of people’s collective consciousness and on the internet (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017).

3.3. Why Sweden?

Sweden is a country located at the outskirts of Europe with a population of barely 10 million. Most people do not know much about it, so why would two American presidents mention it in their speeches? The answer is that the real issue is not with the country itself, but rather with its values and what it represents (Hale, 2003; Strömbäck, 2017). The conflict is between conservative and progressive groups, and Sweden is used as an ideal to strive for or a warning example depending on which group is talking (Strömbäck, 2017). Rapacioli (2018) identifies four factors that have made it possible for an alternative narrative of Sweden to be created in international media. The first is that many people tend to view Sweden as a utopia, and not the complex country it is. The second is that even if Sweden is not a utopia, it is still very successful and usually tops rankings (Gray, 2017; Rapacioli, 2018). This in turn results in the third factor which is that Sweden represents highly progressive values, making it a target for those who disagree with those values. The fourth factor is that the internet and how easy it is to spread information gains the ones who want to undermine those values (Rapacioli, 2018).
3.4. Nation Branding

Nation branding is a relatively new phenomena that is becoming increasingly popular in both academia and the business world. There is no set definition of it, but it is commonly referred to as the image of a nation that it wants to convey to the rest of the world. The goal is to compress a whole culture and repack it as something that can easily be sold to the rest of the world. (Fan, 2006)

According to Glover (2009), the image of a country and the existence of it is the very same thing. A nation is simply an imagined community, and cannot exist if there is no collective image of it. Therefore each country strives to increase the knowledge about themselves, and push for a positive branding (Glover, 2009). A country with a bad international image will experience difficulties trading, collaborating and negotiating with other countries, causing both political and economic damage. It is therefore of utmost importance for a country to have a good international reputation, especially among the elite of other countries (Fan, 2006). Since the culture of a country is an abstract and flowing concept, the branding of a country runs the risk of focusing on stereotypes instead. Stereotypes are an over-simplified way of viewing the world, which could have a negative effect on a nation. Rather than being seen as the complex and diverse phenomena it actually is, it gets reduced to something more comprehensible (Hall, 2003).
4. Theoretical frame

4.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

The theoretical approach of this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The reason for that is that the central problem is related to discourse, power and ideology; making it highly suitable for a CDA (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007; Machin & Mayr, 2012). CDA is a cross disciplinary approach, that has its roots in the beginning of the 20th century and is often used within social sciences and the humanities. The theory gained popularity in the 1980’s and has continued to rise ever since (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2007). According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2007), this is a reaction to the social and economic changes taking place at the time, and the advancement of neoliberalism. When fordist mass production turned into flexible accumulation in the post-industrial era, there was a growing interest for the social and political importance of a critical perspective on language (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). Language is a particularly good place to look for signs of ideology and power, because that is where the share our views of the world and what is common sense (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The basic motivation of CDA is to make people aware of what is, how it has come to be and what it can become instead (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). This is done by unburying the ideologies hidden in a text, and bringing forward the hidden message (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

4.1.1. Language

According to CDA, language and society influence each other in equal amounts. Depending on the societal context, a certain language is used. But at the same time the language we use influence how society is viewed, and what is perceived to be natural and common knowledge (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This also applies to non-verbal communication and visual images (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). What sets CDA apart from semiotic analysis is the notion that language is not viewed as a system, but rather as a set of resources. These resources can be used in different ways by a communicator to get their message across, since they are aware of how words and visual elements affect others. What is interesting is how the communicator chose to use the semiotic resources at hand. These choices are not accidents, but active
decisions that reflect the ideology and political interest of the communicator. It is up to them to decide how certain people and events are represented (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

4.1.2. Discourse

CDA views discourse as a social practice, which determines how language is used. Depending on the context, different discourses come into action (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). Depending on which discourse is active in a text, certain ideologies are highlighted while others are downplayed. The dominant discourse decides how people and events are represented, and that in turn shapes the common world view. It also determines what is viewed as natural and common sense. Albeit, a discourse is never natural but always constructed and depending on the context (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Structures created by people can also be changed by people (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007).

Certain discourses represent the interests of certain groups, making power and ideology the two core concepts. Power is defined as access to social resources, such as education and wealth, which results in authority, status and influence. That allows people with power to dominate and control the powerless. Language is used to reproduce this societal order, and legitimise the dominance of the rulers (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Structures that have been created by people are presented as natural and unchangeable, and unequal power relations are mystified (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). Ideology is a shared set of ideas of how the world works, and values influenced by those ideas. The dominating ideology in a society reflects the interests of those in power (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

4.1.3. Hegemony and Common Sense

Hegemony is the notion that the dominant group of a society manages to present their moral, political and cultural values as natural. Their views become part of the common sense, something that is assumed to be true and is not to be questioned (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). These groups can be politicians, the media, religious and secular institutions, and they all use discourse to present their own views as the right way of thinking. Anyone who challenges the common sense will be seen as an outsider and hence be left out of the
community. In some contexts, the punishment for challenging the dominant group might be more severe and result in fines or imprisonment (Machin & Mayr, 2012).
5. Method and material

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

This study is performed by doing a Critical Discourse Analysis to uncover the hidden discourses in the selected texts. CDA stems from linguistics and the study of language, but has taken it one step further by adding social science and taking the context the text was produced in into consideration (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007). It stresses the importance of intertextuality, meaning that no text is created in a vacuum. Instead it is related to multiple other texts and the societal context it was produced in (Bryman, 2011). One of the fundamental ideas of CDA is that every word and picture used in a text is a choice made by the author, nothing happens by accident. These choices are either conscious or unconscious, but are always the result of existing structures and systems that the author is part of. By investigating these choices and why they were made, it is possible to uncover the underlying ideology, values and power structures (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Performing a CDA means carefully analysing these choices and the consequences of them, and doing that in terms of power relations. How does the choices serve the interests of the ruling group and dominating discourse? What kind of world is constructed in the text? Anything that is at first assumed to be natural should be criticised and questioned (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

5.1.2. Fairclough's three-layered framework

According to Fairclough (1992) a CDA analysis is a three-layered process. The following image illustrates how the three layers relate to each other.
The first layer focuses on the text itself, the words, grammar and lexical choices made by the author. The second layer concerns the discursive practice, and the production, distribution and consumption of the text. This explains how certain texts help shape the reader’s understanding of socio-political events and the relationship to the dominant discourse. The third layer adds social practice to the analysis, and puts the text into a context. The relationship between the text and society is not a set one, but an ever-flowing process that can be negotiated and changed. Multiple discourses are often in function and competing for dominance. Depending on the context, certain discourses will be normalised and accepted, while others remain peripheral (Fairclough, 1992).

5.1.3. Concepts

The following are the tools within CDA that will be used when performing the analysis on the first level.

*Lexical choices* are the choices made consciously or unconsciously by the author to influence and convince the reader. Certain words carry certain connotations, and can be used to present a certain image to the reader. This can for example be done by quoting an expert in the field in question. Depending on the tone and level of formality used by the author shapes the relationship between the text and the reader. The more informal a text is, the more intimate it makes the relationship. (Machin & Mayr, 2012)

*Personalisation and impersonalisation* focus on the participants mentioned in a text. Are they presented as people or as representatives of an institution or nation? Impersonalisation
can be used to add weight to a statement, e.g. “Professor John Smith requires academic staff....” vs. “The University requires academic staff...” This can also be used to conceal who is actually behind the statement or opinion in question. The case is very seldom that a whole nation or institution believes the same thing (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Since the focus of this study is the image of Sweden, extra attention will be payed to how the country is personalised or impersonalised in the articles.

*Pronoun versus noun* is connected to the former concept of personalisation and impersonalisation, and investigates how the author makes use of the “us” and “them” narrative to make the reader agree or disagree with certain ideas. It can also be used to create a divide between groups, and putting them against each other. (Machin & Mayr, 2012)

*Presuppositions* are what is considered to be something everyone knows and can agree on. These do of course vary from group to group and are often deeply ideological and connected to the context. If you do not agree, you are not viewed as reasonable by the group and will be left out (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

*Visual semiotic choices* focus on the accompanying images of a text. This analysis is done on a denotative and connotative level. What the image denotes is what the reader sees at first glance, who or what is pictured. Connotation is the second layer, looking at the deeper meaning of the image. Why has this image been chosen? What ideas and values does it communicate? (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

### 5.2. Critique of the Method

Qualitative studies which focus on a few cases face the problem of only reviewing a small part of the field. This does however not mean that the knowledge presented is useless, it still contributes to the field of knowledge. As long as the study does not claim to achieve something it does not, there is no risk in using qualitative methods (Bryman, 2011). Most of the critique aimed at CDA has to do with the selection of the material. Criticisers claim that the researchers are able to affect the result of the study by choosing a material that resonates with their own views and values, making it possible to manipulate the result. This might happen consciously or unconsciously but nonetheless makes the study value-driven rather
than theoretically-driven. It is therefore important for the author to try to make the material as representative as possible (Machin & May, 2012).

5.3. Material

5.3.1. Newspapers

This study is performed on a sample of four articles from four newspapers. All chosen articles are written in English, because of language barriers and the fact that those newspapers have a large number of readers across the world. Two of the articles are from British newspapers and two are American. To get a picture of how Sweden is represented in international elite media, the study analyses news reports and not opinion pieces. This is to avoid personal opinion and instead focus on the overarching image. This is also part of why the sample consists of some of the biggest newspapers in each country. The other reasons is that these are newspapers that the elite reads, which in turn affects how Sweden performs economically and politically in international settings (Fan, 2006). Even if the material is small, the aim of the study is to reach an understanding of general trends in how the international elite media portrays Sweden.

5.3.2. Articles

The four articles in this study is from the end of 2017, a time period when no particular news event put Sweden on the agenda. The articles are taken from the websites of the newspapers, which had to contain a search function. The criteria when choosing the articles was that they had to have Sweden as the main topic, and it had to be news articles. Travelling stories, sports articles and opinion pieces were excluded from the selection.

The first article is from the British newspaper the Telegraph, a national paper founded in 1855. It is a right-winged conservative newspaper with close ties to the Conservative Party. In 2017 the Telegraph had more than 25 million unique users, making them the biggest source for “quality news” in the United Kingdom (the Daily Telegraph, n.d.; the Telegraph, n.d.). During the chosen period of time, the Telegraph published 13 articles about Sweden, of which five were sport related and three on the topic of travelling. The article chosen for the study is titled *Church of Sweden to stop clergy calling God 'he' or 'the Lord' in bid to crack down on gendered language* and was published in November 2017. The article is one of many in
international press reporting on the same incident, namely that the Church of Sweden allegedly will stop referring to God as a man. According to this narrative, it is part of the church’s strategy to become more inclusive and welcoming of everyone. The article reports on how this was the result of an eight-day meeting and will come into action in May 2018. In the article the decision is defended by a spokesperson of the Swedish Church and the archbishop of Sweden, and criticised by an associate theology professor and the Church of England (Our Foreign Staff, 2017).

The second article is from the Guardian, a British newspaper founded as the Manchester Guardian in 1821. The newspaper has liberal values and falls on the left side of the political scale. Besides the British edition, the newspaper has sister publications in the United States as well as Australia. In 2014 the Guardian was the fifth most read online newspaper in the world (the Guardian, 2017, the Guardian, n.d.). During November and December 2017 the Guardian published 12 articles about Sweden, of which one was sport related and one a travel report. The article in this study is called ‘Sweden sends us to be killed’: young Afghans face perilous deportation and was published in December 2017. Written two years after the autumn of 2015 when a large number of immigrants, especially unaccompanied young boys, arrived to Sweden it investigates what happened to them. The article is written as a window into the everyday life of a group of Afghan boys living in a camp for minors outside Gothenburg. Intertwined in this are facts about the immigration crisis and quotes from Swedish and international officials. The article is part of a series by the Guardian, Der Spiegel, Le Monde and El País which aims to get an insight in the lives of the newly arrived across Europe (Girouard, 2017).

The third article is from the American newspaper the New York Times, a liberal newspaper founded in 1851. It is one of the most influential and prestigious newspapers in the world and has received the Pulitzer Prize 125 times (the New York Times, n.d.). Out of the eight articles published on Sweden during the chosen time period, none were about either sports or travelling. The chosen article is called The Robots Are Coming, and Sweden Is Fine and was published December 2017. It starts in the mine in the north of Sweden, talking to the employees about how their jobs risk being taken over by robots and machines. This does not seem to concern them, because they trust the welfare system of Sweden. A wider perspective is added by talking to union spokespeople and CEO’s of big Swedish companies, who share the same opinion. Rather than robots taking over jobs, the workers will be given new tasks as
machines make their way in to the daily work. This is contrasted against the United States where the fear and resistance of technology is remarkably larger (Goodman, 2017).

The fourth article is from the liberal American newspaper the Washington Post. It was founded in 1877 and played a big role in the Watergate scandal in the 1970’s. It is one of the most influential newspapers in the United States and tends to focus on national politics (the Washington Post, n.d.). During the chosen time period, the Washington Post featured eight articles about Sweden of which one was a travel report. The article used in this study is called Sweden proposes tough sexual assault law and was published in December 2017. It reports on how Sweden is planning to toughen their sexual assault laws following multiple cases of rape and sexual assault, and connects this to the #MeToo movement and the immigration crisis. It is noted that Sweden is not the only country to do so, but part of a global trend. Statistics from studies are intertwined with quotes from Swedish politicians on how they are planning to meet the demands of the people and solve this issue (Noack, 2017).
6. Analysis and result

6.1. The Text
This is the first layer of Fairclough’s model and focus on the text itself. The concepts explained in chapter 5 are used to analyse how the texts are constructed, and why. All choices are assumed to have been made for a reason.

6.1.1. Lexical Choices
The language used in the articles differs quite a lot. The first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) is the most neutral one, where the language is formal and keeps a distance from the reader. It is a subjective report on an event, and lets both sides of the debate come through. However, it does feature a headline which disassociates from the text itself (Our Foreign Staff, 2017). The headline claims that the Church of Sweden is going to “stop” the clergy from referring to God as a he, but when continuing reading the reader will find that this is not the case. The word “encourage” is instead used, which is way less demanding and open to interpretation than “stop”. The church seems to have provided their employees with a recommendation rather than the “crack down” that the headline makes it out to be. The main text instead talks about how the church is giving the clergy “new options” which has a more positive tone.

In the second article (Girouard, 2017), the language is coloured by strong emotions. The mood is set in the first lines, describing mealtime at the camp. “Smell of spicy chicken, steaming tea pots” and “jovial chatter” paints a picture that everyone can recognise. The ritual of sitting down and eating together is central in people’s everyday life, and connotes safety, belonging and homeliness. This is then contrasted against the “nightmare scenario edging closer”, threatening to ruin this safety. Throughout the whole article, the safety of Sweden is juxtaposition against the danger of Afghanistan. The descriptions of the boys and their situation are designed to get sympathy from the reader, and the boys’ stories are backed up by statistics and comments made by experts.

The third article (Goodman, 2017) uses a language that is filled with images, talking about how the robots are “on the march” and “coming for his job.” Technology is pictured as an unstoppable force moving against the human workers in the industry. In one sentence, the robots are even said to be “coming to finish off the humans.” But when visiting the mines in the north of Sweden, a heavy industry with a long tradition, the workers do not seem to be bothered by that threat. Instead they talk about the safe Swedish welfare system, how they
are “protected” by the union and trust their employers to keep offering them a job. Working in a mine connotes dust, dirt and darkness, but the working environment for the Swedish miners is instead described as a comfortable and clean. One of the workers “reclines in an office chair” while using a joystick, instead of “inhaling dust and exhaust fumes.” The system can be “trusted”, and the company “will take care of us.” This idea is portrayed as being common sense in Sweden, with everyone from the worker in the mine to the CEO’s of big companies to the Minister of Employment and Immigration agreeing. The words “safety”, “take care of” and “trust” are repeated multiple times throughout the article.

The fourth article (Noack, 2017) uses a formal language but is also strongly angled. It repeatedly questions the knowledge of the elite and experts by putting it against research pointing in the opposite direction, and portrays immigrants as rapists. It sets the mood by telling the story of the “shocking incident” where a woman in Sweden was gang raped, an incident that “made headlines worldwide”. Later in the article it is stated that one of the perpetrators was Afghan and “the third was a Swedish citizen of foreign origin”. According to the article, this fuelled the “widespread belief in the country that immigrants are behind a rise in sexual assaults”.

All four articles have strong headlines where Sweden is they keyword. For many British and American readers Sweden is associated with the image of Good Sweden, a stable and safe country with a well-functioning welfare system (Glover, 2009). When it is instead using in combination with charged words such as “crack down”, “killed” and “sexual assault” a dissonance is created which makes the reader want to continue to read (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Strömbäck, 2014). The headline of the third article instead supports the image of Good Sweden by strengthening the image of Sweden as technologically advanced (Glover, 2009; Goodman, 2017).

Three of the articles deal with topics that are strongly charged and even controversial, namely the church, immigration and sexual assault. Many people consider the church to be an institution of utmost importance where things are not to be changed. By saying that this is the latest move to modernise the Church of Sweden, it is implied that this is just one of many changes being done (Our Foreign Staff, 2017).

The issue of immigration has become increasingly charged during the last years. The public opinion has switched from caring and welcoming to more restrictive and sceptic. The second article (Girouard, 2017), showing the point of view of the unaccompanied boys themselves could be seen as an attempt to try to bring back that open and caring mind-set. The group of
boys are always referred to as just “boys”, with the exception of one time when *young man* is used instead. When someone is quoted, his age is mentioned. One of the boys is described as being “…17 but still has the face of a child”, another “speaks softly”. By doing that, the article makes use of the connotations that comes with referring to people as children (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Children are more innocent and more vulnerable than adults, and need to be protected by society and politicians. By not doing that instead sending them back to their countries, the system is letting them down. The situation they are in is described as a “nightmare”, where they “endure sleepless nights” and are “fair game”. The narrative created is one of scared children being hunted by something way bigger and more powerful than themselves. The changed immigration policy is described as “a change of heart”, making it out to be a decision easily made without much consideration of the consequences it might have. The line “…the European Union declared there were ‘safe zones’ in Afghanistan…” (Girouard, 2017) conveys the message that the European Union might be wrong. “Declared” is a considerably weak word, meaning that they might not have a good foundation for this claim. Further, putting “safe zones” in quotation marks shows that it is a concept that might be controversial and could be debated.

The fourth article (Noack, 2017) is instead encouraging the new narrative by adding to the belief that refugees are to be blamed for the majority of the rapes and sexual assaults in Sweden. The article states that the call for tougher sexual assault laws “risks being subsumed” into the attitude of Europe on the immigrants “descending on their countries”. The people of Sweden and the rest of Europe are portrayed as naïve and unwilling to see how the immigrants are ruining their countries. This narrative can also be found at the end of the third article (Goodman, 2017) where an economist from the Research Institute of Industrial Economics in Stockholm gets to voice the possible concerns that Sweden is facing. “Large numbers of immigrants from conflict-torn nations” who lack education and resources means that “there’s a risk that the social contract could crack”. This connotes with the idea of immigrants as a burden that could ruin Sweden (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

All four articles feature people that are experts on the specific question. Spokespeople for different organisations, miners, an archbishop, and the prime minister of Sweden can all be considered legitimate sources for information on the respective issues. There is however a difference in how they get treated in the fourth article (Noack, 2017) compared to the others. The article states that the calls for a change of the law on sexual assault “come after the #MeToo movement has exposed sexual assault cases worldwide”, after having been voiced years ago and becoming a more pressing issue with the rise of immigrants in the country. It is also noted that “Sweden took in more refugees per capita than any other European nation”
(Noack, 2017). That paragraph is however followed by a statement by a representative for Sweden’s embassy in Washington, denying the connection between the law change and 

MeToo and refugees. This pattern is repeated later in the article when a study showing that “46 percent of Swedes believed that ‘refugees in our country are more to blame for crime than other groups’” (Noack, 2017) is positioned against “official statistics, which offer a more nuanced assessment” with mentions of “alleged police coverups of refugee crimes”. Two more times the article makes a statement and which is then followed by a contradicting statement from the government. Despite their claims, public opinion is presented to be that it is the refugees that are to blame for the sexual assaults. This form of discrediting makes the experts, in this case the government, appear as untrustworthy and unreliable.

In the first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) the archbishop is said to be “defending the decision”, indicating that this is a controversial move. It is also highlighted that she is the first woman to hold the position of archbishop in Sweden, further cementing the Church of Sweden as progressive and equal. The associated theology professor uses strong words when criticising the change, and claims that it could “undermine” the doctrine of the holy trinity and result in Sweden being left out of the global Christian community. This is backed up by the statement by the spokesperson for the Church of England, saying that they have “always” referred to the holy trinity as men, and “continues to do so”. It is understood that they believe that what the Church of Sweden has done is wrong.

All articles except for the third one uses Sweden as an example of a bigger, global process. At the end of the first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) it is added that modernising the church and making it more inclusive is not a move exclusive to Sweden, but rather a global phenomenon. Church of England is used as an example, as they have “published guidelines” for children which includes exploring their “gender identity”. The second article (Girouard, 2017) points out that Sweden is not alone in their stand on sending refugees back to their own countries, partly by talking about the European Union but also by highlighting the immigration policies of other European countries. The fourth article (Noack, 2017) explains that Sweden “is the latest country to look into tougher laws against sexual offenders, responding to a growing awareness of the prevalence of such cases”. The third article (Goodman, 2017) instead contrasts Sweden against the rest of the world, and particularly the United States, to show how different it is. For example, the article provides numbers showing that 80% of the Swedes are positive to technology, while 75% of the Americans are scared of it. This is done in combination with statistics saying that using technology leads to higher productivity. By showing those numbers, it is indicated that the United States has a lot to learn from Sweden and that socialism results in higher productivity in the long run. Unlike
the rest of the world, the article says, the Swedish workers do not view technology and robots as a threat but rather a possibility. Sweden is portrayed as a safe place where you do not have to worry, thanks to powerful unions and a socialist tradition which values trust and government support.

6.1.2. Personalisation and impersonalisation

A common feature for all four articles is that they have a strong headline where Sweden is mentioned, and presented as a power of its own. “Sweden proposes” (Noack, 2017) and “Sweden is fine with it” (Goodman, 2017) suggests that the country itself has a will and power to act, instead of looking at the people behind the statements (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This pattern is repeated in the main texts, where Sweden remains impersonalised in most cases. The fourth article (Noack, 2017) quotes the prime minister, who could be considered a representative for the country with his support of the new law. The underlying message does however seem to be that the country has been too naïve and welcoming, and is now facing the consequences for that. As in the second article (Girouard, 2017) all of Sweden is presented as having the same view.

The group “immigrants” or “unaccompanied children” are often impersonalised and turned into an anonymous group or just a number. The second article (Girouard, 2017) does however turn that narrative around by giving the group names, faces and individual stories. They are turned into people that do the same thing as the reader, e.g. eating, studying and hanging with their friends. In doing so, there is a bigger chance of the reader sympathising with them. This can be compared with the third and fourth article, where immigrants remain an anonymous group. The third article (Goodman, 2017) manages to personalise almost every group it mentions. Employees, the government, researchers, employers and the union all gets a representative presented with full name and title. The only group personalised in the fourth article (Noack, 2017) is the Swedish government in the form of the prime minister. A spokesperson for the Swedish Embassy in Washington is mentioned, but not by name. Except for that, “swedes” and the elite in form of the government remain anonymous.

6.1.3. Pronoun versus noun

Since all four articles are written about Sweden by a non-Swedish person for a non-Swedish audience, there is a certain level of us and them present in all of them. The first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) highlights this by putting the statement of the Church of Sweden against
their own nation church, the Church of England. This makes Sweden appear different and creates a clear division between the two. The approach of the fourth article (Goodman, 2017) is similar in how it presents Sweden and Scandinavia as unlike any other country in the world because of their willingness to accept technological advancements. The whole article is based around the idea that this is something unique that the rest of the world could learn from. The second article (Girouard, 2017) instead makes the division between Sweden and Afghanistan. The Swedish population is portrayed as having everything, while the Afghan boys have nothing. The boys are however portrayed in a way that makes them human and equal to the readers, who can be assumed to be part of the elite in richer countries. Unlike the fourth article (Noack. 2017) where immigrants are made out to be a threat and part of “them”, the afghan boys are presented in a way that makes it possible to include them in the “we.”

6.1.4. Presuppositions

All four articles stem from different presuppositions, both about Sweden and the world. In the first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) the presupposition and common sense is that the church is an old institution filled with traditions. Changing something within the organisation of the church is remarkable enough to write an article on. There is also the presupposition that Sweden is a progressive country, at the cutting edge of development. The same presupposition is present in the fourth article (Goodman, 2017) where Sweden is assumed to be a prosperous country with a working welfare system and willing to accept new technology. It is also taken for granted that the future will bring more technology and machines, and that the world will have to find a way to handle that. The second (Girouard, 2017) and fourth (Noack, 2017) article has competing presuppositions. In the second one, it is obvious that Sweden can and should share their resources with the less privileged, and that all humans should have the same rights. Closing their borders and sending people home is not the right way to go. The presupposition of the fourth article is instead that immigrants do not have the right to stay in Sweden, since they are behind a majority of the rapes and crimes committed in the country. The open borders have only had negative consequences, and a much stricter immigration policy is needed to protect the citizens.

6.1.5. Visual semiotic choices

The first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) is illustrated with a photo of Sweden where a church in Stockholm is the main focus. The background shows the city on a summer’s day, with water and a lot of green vegetation. The city surrounding the church appears open,
green and filled with old buildings. The photo has a clear connection to the text, illustrates the old institution of the church in the middle of a modern city. The church has been standing there for years, looking the same. Should that really be changed now?
The second article (Girouard, 2017) features photos of the boys that are the main focus of the text. One of the photos shows the scene described in the introduction, where the boys are on the floor having dinner together. It strengthens the feeling of homeliness and belonging, and how these boys have the same everyday rituals as the reader. The other photos are close ups of the boys themselves, where two of them seems to have been taken in school. Showing the boys in school shows that they are part of society, and do something sensible with their lives.

It is the third article (Goodman, 2017) that features the most photos and only some of them are commented on here. The photos show men working alongside technology in mines, in clean and light environments which conveys the message that Sweden is fine with the advancements of the robots. The people in the photos appear to be relaxed and happy. One photo is an overview of the facility in the north, showing a big factory in an open landscape with a wheel loader in the foreground. Surrounding it is snow glittering in the setting sun, conveying a feeling of peace and quiet. Another photo shows a viewing point in Stockholm, where tourists are taking photos with the sunny city in the background. Sweden is a place worth visiting that people want to be associated with.

The image at the top of the fourth article (Noack, 2017) shows a police officer handing out bracelets. The word “Polis” is in big letters at the centre of the photography and no faces are shown. The text beneath it provides the reader with context, saying that these are bracelets with the hashtag #TafaInte (Don’t Groppe) being handed out to visitors at a festival in Sweden. The case itself is not mentioned in the article, but is rather used as an example of how common rapes are in Sweden. It can also be seen as a comment on why Sweden needs tougher laws. Police handing out bracelets with a hashtag appears as a naïve and weak way of handling the problem.

6.2. Discursive Practice

As mentioned in chapter 5, the texts are from four different newspapers and have been chosen to get a wide representation of international elite media. They are produced in the two biggest English-speaking countries which dominate the international media, and reaches a big readership. All four articles are available online for free and can be found via Google, making them easy to access for the general public. The articles have all made people engage
in discussions on the respective issues and thereby added to the general opinion, which can be seen in the amount of comments and shares. The first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) has 130 comments where the general opinion is that the Swedish Church has fallen victim to Swedish progressiveness and political correctness. The second article (Girouard, 2017) does not display any comments, but has 3,752 shares on Facebook, which shows that it is a matter that people care about. The third article (Goodman, 2017) has 397 comments, where most of them seem to agree with the author in believing that Sweden should be seen as a role model. It is the comment section with the longest comments, showing that the readers of this article have really taken the time to write a long, thought through reaction. The fourth article (Noack, 2017) has 29 comments where most are more or less racist.

Even if these articles were published by news sites that are considered to be reliable and established media, two of them have later been deemed fake news. The first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) is from the conservative British newspaper The Telegraph, which explains the standpoint on the church as an institution that should follow traditions and not be modernised. The common sense is that the church is a conservative institution that follows old traditions and not current trends in society, which is exemplified by the spokesperson of the Church of England. When contrasted against that, Sweden appears to be diverging and not part of the common sense which could in turn lead to them being left out of the community (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Our Foreign Staff, 2017). The Telegraph is far from alone in reporting on this, the change made by the Church of Sweden was picked up by news sources all over the world. Some claimed, as the headline of this article suggests, that the priests were forbidden to refer to God as he, and would instead use the gender-neutral “hen”. This was picked up by not only the right-winged press but also appeared in established newspapers such as The Independent and The Telegraph. It was however debunked by representatives from the Church of Sweden, calling it fake news and clarifying that the word “hen” was not in the handbook at all. What had actually happened was an update of the handbook for the church service, where “he” had been replaced with “God” in a few places. This has then been picked up by Danish media, who decontextualized and angled it, making it fake news. That news story was then spread across the world when others used the Danish newspaper as a source instead of making their own interviews with representatives of the Church of Sweden (D’Ancona, 2017; Löfgren, 2017; Öhrn, 2017). When reading the article, the fact that it has been discredited by the Church of Sweden is nowhere to be found.

The headline of the fourth article (Noack, 2017) is currently Sweden proposes tough sexual assault law but the URL shows that is was originally named Amid MeToo movement and
fear of immigrants Sweden proposes tough sexual assault law. There is also a short notification at the end saying that article has been updated with the statement from the embassy in Washington, saying that such a connection does not exist. Despite being a liberal newspaper with the slogan “Democracy Dies in Darkness” the Washington Post decided to keep a heavily biased article which had been debunked by officials. When first reading the article, it appears to be neutral and simply reporting on a course of events taking place in Sweden and Europe, but when analysing it, it turns out to be angled, decontextualizing and critical of the experts. All three are aspects which characterises fake news (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). The fact that the Washington Post has chosen to rely on second hand sources can be explained by the geographical distance between Sweden and the United States, making it less likely that the reporter himself has visited the country. It could also be the result of a lack of resources concerning economics, time and staff (D’Ancona, 2017).

The second (Girouard, 2017) and the fourth article (Goodman, 2017) are both published by liberal newspapers, which is reflected in how they portray Sweden. Even if the images shown of the country are very different, the values echoed are similar. They both portray Sweden as clean and safe, and a country that can afford to take care of its citizens. It is implied that all humans have value and a right to feel safe. Both articles report on how the country takes care of their own, but do not consider their resources to be enough to share with people from other countries.

6.3. Social Practice

All articles are published by established media outlets with a big number of readers and with the power to influence. Being part of elite media, it is very likely that they will be read by influential people who have the power to decide whether to include or exclude Sweden from trade and other international interactions. A majority of these international actors may never visit Sweden themselves but only rely on second hand sources.

The Sweden presented in the first article (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) is a progressive country striving for equality. But in their wish to become inclusive and equal, they are however running the risk of losing touch with traditions and being left out of the community. The article is a product of the common sense in the United Kingdom and other more conservative countries where the church is viewed as untouchable. By presenting Sweden as a country where this is not the case, it raises questions of whether socialism and progressiveness can be
taken too far. As mentioned before, the church and religion are charged topics and attract the attention of people. They add to the discourse of Bad Sweden, a country that is losing its roots and traditions by being too inclusive and neutral (Rapacioli, 2017). As in the example with the Christmas lights, the denial by officials does not matter and barely reaches international press. Sweden making God gender neutral and referred to as “hen” is an established fact both on the internet and in the collective memory. Presented in a different way and context, this news could fit the narrative of Good Sweden, a country where everyone has the same rights and religion is not above everything else. In a more left leaning context, this could be presented as something to strive for.

The fourth article (Noack, 2017) adds to the same narrative, where Sweden is naïve to believe that socialism and progressiveness can work in real life. Here the country is presented as starting to change their mind, but only after an increasing number of rape and sexual assault committed by refugees. The statement by the embassy has been added, but is presented in a context where it seems untrue. By constantly questioning the experts and officials, the article discredits them and presents an alternative truth. Sweden is presented as a country with a weak government, favouring equality and political correctness over protecting their own people. This is a narrative that fits the stereotypical image of Bad Sweden in the United States, voiced by president Trump and president Eisenhower. Socialism and open borders have resulted in the downfall of society (Hale, 2003; Marklund, 2015).

The third article (Goodman, 2017) fits the classic image of Good Sweden, a socialist country with a well-functioning welfare system that takes care of its citizens. This is a society where no one gets left behind thanks to unions and the government. The employees are trusting and the employers earn that trust by keeping their promises. In this country, technology is seen as a possibility and not a threat. Socialism is portrayed as something good that will make society thrive, both on a collective and individual level (Glover, 2009; Hale, 2003). But at the end of the article, it becomes clear that this safety net is not for everyone. If too many immigrants are accepted into the country, the system runs the risk of collapsing. This statement has similarities with the basic idea of Bad Sweden, where immigrants could ruin everything and Sweden has to be protected from them (Rapacioli, 2018).

The Sweden in the second article (Girouard, 2017) is a country which has the ability to help others, but has chosen to not do so. This country has lost its humanity which it previously has been known for and is now sending children to their death. The discourse of Good Sweden is present, but referred to as being very restrictive. Only some people are allowed to take part of the safety and resources, despite the fact that the country has enough to share. In doing so, a
new narrative of Bad Sweden is created. In this case, the act of being bad is to be too restrictive and closed rather than open. By portraying immigrants as humans instead of prowlers, and not reducing them to numbers and stereotypes, this narrative suggests that the right thing to do would be to let them stay and benefit from the Swedish welfare.

Out of four articles, two fit the narrative of Bad Sweden and the two others have traces of it. This is a consequence of the rising right-winged movement and increasing amount of fake news, which is no longer exclusive to alternative sources but also exists in established media. Other publications tend to refer to these media houses since they are considered to be reliable, which in turn leads to a further spreading of the fake news and establishing them as true.
7. Conclusions

7.1. Conclusions

This study has investigated how the image of Sweden is constructed in four articles from international elite newspapers. The aim was to add to the existing body of research considering Sweden in international media.

The overall image presented by these four elite newspapers suggests that Sweden is a country built on progressive values and socialism. In two of the articles this is portrayed as something positive, while the two others focus on the negative consequences. The two dominating narratives of Good Sweden and Bad Sweden reflects the current political climate. Populism and right-wing parties are on the rise, as a result of people's discontent and mistrust of "the establishment." New technology and new values create a world of changes, and anyone who does not adjust to that gets left out of society, feeling betrayed and abandoned. They have to find something else to put their trust in, and an enemy that can be blamed for their misery. Mainstream media, immigrants and the elites are all equally bad in this narrative.

Sweden is, as it has been for almost a century, a hot topic regardless of which discourse is in power. Since the articles are from newspapers based in the United Kingdom and the United States, it can be assumed that Sweden is seen as somewhat exotic. Marklund (2009) talks about how Sweden is often viewed as a seedbed for political and sociologic ideas by other countries, a statement that seems to be true according to this study. Geographical and cultural distance makes it interesting to read about the small country in the north.

In the first and fourth chapter it was stated that Sweden is often used in international debates as a swinging bat, an example of different phenomena. Depending on the sympathies of the speaker, it can either be presented as something to strive for or as a warning example (Glover, 2009; Hale, 2003; Rapacioli, 2018). The results of this study further strengthen that statement, as all articles use Sweden as an example of a certain event. This can easily be seen by looking at the third (Goodman, 2017) and fourth (Noack, 2017) article. In the third article Sweden is portrayed as an ideal to strive for, a sanctuary where everyone is taken care of. The fourth article paints a picture of a completely different country, where the inhabitants are scared and the politicians are not doing anything.

As seen in all articles except for the third, the topic of discussion is rather an event in the world that Sweden itself. Immigration, socialism and religion can all be discussed while using Sweden as an example. Immigration for example was the main focus of two of the articles,
but from different angles. In a third one it was mentioned briefly at the end. These two angles fit different ideological standpoints, where immigrants are either seen as a threat that should be eliminated or humans that should be given help and protection. Immigration is one of the most discussed questions of our time, and the public opinion on it has changed during recent years. This change can easily be illustrated with Sweden, which started out as one of the most accepting countries but then became increasingly restrictive. This can then be discussed either from the angle of the second article (Girouard, 2017) personalising the group and claiming that it is wrong to deem some lives to be more valuable than others, or from the angle of the fourth article (Noack, 2017) where immigrants are equalised with rapists and criminals.

The problem when discussing Sweden is however that these facts are not always true. Fake news is not limited to alternative media, but is common also in established publications. As stated by D’Ancona (2017) and Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook (2017), the power to influence common knowledge is no longer limited to experts but can be done by anyone who makes their voice heard. In this study this is exemplified with the case of the Church of Sweden (Our Foreign Staff, 2017) and the toughened sexual assault laws (Noack, 2017). Both have trusted alternative sources instead of the official ones, resulting in articles that qualify as fake news since they are angled and decontextualized (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). The article by Noack (2017) takes it even further by repeatedly questioning the officials, another defining trait for fake news (Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). The fact that established media publishes fake news will lead to individuals as well as other media actors believing that it is true, adding further to the news being accepted as true and common knowledge. It is therefore a problem that the newspapers themselves do not acknowledge that they have made a mistake and published fake news.

According to previous research (e.g. Glover, 2009; Marklund, 2009; Rapacioli, 2018) the discourse of Sweden can be divided into Bad Sweden and Good Sweden, where Bad Sweden has become more popular during recent years. This study proves that to be true, but also adds a new narrative found in the second article (Girouard, 2017). This discourse adds a new dimension where things are not as simple as there being a Good Sweden and a Bad Sweden, and where the meaning of “good” and “bad” does not follow the same definitions. This discourse stems from a humane ideology, where every person has the same value and rights. A young boy from Afghanistan should have the same right to protection and an education as a Swedish boy, and refusing him that makes you bad. According to this way of thinking, being bad equals denying someone something because they are not born in that country. In this discourse the definition of Bad Sweden, with open borders and progressive thinking, would
actually be good since it means letting people in. It does however strongly disagree with the Bad Sweden discourse’s idea of immigrants as bad. This discourse would in turn be deemed as naïve by the supporters of Bad Sweden. Believing that cultures can be mixed and resources should be shared is exactly what led Sweden to the ruined state it is in today, according to those groups. Publications as InfoWars and Breitbart would most likely tear this discourse apart.

When discussing a country, which is a complex being with multiple different discourses in action, it is often reduced to a few stereotypes (Hall, 2003). This is also the case with Sweden. Reality is of course not as simple as Good and Bad, and none of the narratives can be said to be true. The nation branding is no longer done solely by the country itself, but also heavily influence by the image created in the media. It is therefore of utmost importance to make sure that their portrayal of the country is as close to the truth as possible. As mentioned earlier, this is repeatedly done by different officials and representatives for Sweden but often ignored by the news outlets themselves. This problem will grow bigger as more people get the ability to publish their opinions, making it even harder for a country to control the public image of themselves.

7.2. Further Research

In the same way that this study builds on the research of others, it can hopefully work as a stepping stone for further research. The knowledge can always be deepened and widened by stepping further into the field. When performing this study, it has become obvious that this is an important topic that should be further investigated. It can be done from many different angles, and either by going into detail or looking at a larger picture. It can also be done by performing the same study in a different context, for example in a different time or on a different sample. This could affect the result hugely.

As this is a very limited study based on only four articles, it could be worthwhile doing a larger study where more articles are analysed. By including a bigger sample, more conclusions could be drawn and the body of knowledge could grow remarkably. In that kind of study a deeper analysis of the different newspapers and countries could be done, putting a bigger focus on why they portray Sweden in a certain way.

Another way to go would be to zoom in on a single event, and how that is represented in international media. Take for example the case mentioned in this study, of the Church of Sweden changing the recommendations on how to refer to God. Which countries and
newspapers found this remarkable enough to write an article on? How did these articles construct the event? Who was quoted? Did they use first hand sources or second-hand sources? Which newspapers published the correction made by the Church of Sweden?
8. References


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