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Imagining Sweden in a League of Nations

Narrative, identity, and the possibility of policy in Interwar Sweden

Zigne Edström

Doctoral Thesis in International Relations at Stockholm University, Sweden 2026

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Abstract

In 2022, Sweden abandoned its longstanding policy of neutrality and military non-alignment, a central feature of its national identity, to apply for membership in a military alliance. Yet, this was not the first time Sweden had faced such an upheaval of its foreign policy tradition. A century earlier, accession to the League of Nations confronted Sweden with a comparable challenge: reconciling national identity with membership in an international organisation premised on collective security. This thesis explores how foreign policy narratives in the Interwar years (i.e. 1919-39) reproduced and contested Swedish national identity in the context of Sweden's League membership. Conceptually, it offers International Relations (IR) and constructivist Foreign Policy Analysis a specified apparatus for narrative analysis and identity reconstruction, grounded in a reflexive historical constructivism. It also bridges IR and International History, identifying research about the League of Nations as a fruitful site for dialogue between the disciplines. The thesis carries out close analysis of issue narratives about four Interwar crisis moments – Corfu in 1923–24, Mosul in 1924–26, Manchuria in 1931–33, and Abyssinia in 1935–36 – and reassembles the foreign policy narratives that cut across them. The analysis finds that these crises were narrated in multiple different ways. The narratives presented contrasting spatial and temporal settings, dissimilar portrayals of protagonists and antagonists, and distinctive plots oriented towards diverse futures. These narratives, in turn, reproduced and contested specific imaginaries of Sweden, and the analysis conceptualises these using a layered model of national identity. In the most sedimented layer, the narratives all presented a broadly shared understanding of positions, but nonetheless provided them with different hierarchical meanings. In the less sedimented layer, which involved more detailed self- and other-portrayals, similar traits were often reproduced, but the narration of Sweden's roles and (non-)responsibilities showed greater contestation. The least sedimented layer of programmes further illustrates how different actions followed from diverse reasons and objectives. Across these programmes, Sweden was pushed towards active participation, restrained involvement, radical reform, revolutionary detachment, and regional withdrawal.

Keywords: *Swedish foreign policy, national identity, narrative analysis, League of Nations, Interwar period.*

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PART I

1 Introduction

> An answer shall be given to the question of whether we will abandon our neutral position, which has been a beacon for Swedish foreign policy for more than a century, in favour of an alliance with other states and take upon ourselves the consequences that follow.[1]

These words could have been spoken in the spring of 2022 when Sweden abandoned its long tradition of neutrality and military non-alignment, and applied for membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In February that same year, Russia had launched a full-scale invasion on Ukraine, and, within weeks, a Swedish public that had declined to endorse a NATO membership registered, for the first time, a majority in favour.[2] The Social Democratic Party had entered 2022 committed to the idea that military non-alignment still served Sweden well, but by May the party board had moved away from this position, leading to a broad parliamentary consensus in support for a Swedish membership in the military alliance. Soon after this, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson submitted Sweden's application. A policy commitment that had, in one way or another, steered Swedish foreign policy for two centuries was consigned to history.

The story of Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership could be told as a sudden rupture of a long-standing tradition. Sweden crossed a definitive threshold in 2022, abandoning a historical neutrality and military non-alignment that was deeply sedimented, not only as a policy, but as an ingrained identity construct.[3] Alternatively, the story could also be told as one of a culmination. Sweden had been converging on the military alliance since the end

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[1]Speech given by Arvid Lindman in Malmö on 15 February 1920, translated. In RA [National Archives], Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF [Allmänna valmansförbundet/Högerpartiet – riksorganisationen], Trycksamlingen.

[2]. SOM Institute. 2023. *Swedish Trends 1986-2022.* Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

[3] Hjertström, E. – Hagström, L. 2025. "Changing identity to remain oneself: ontological security and the Swedish decision on joining NATO" *Journal of International Relations and Development* 28:29-54. See also Michalski, A. – Brommesson, D. – Ekengren, A.M. 2024. "Small states and the dilemma of geopolitics: role change in Finland and Sweden" *International Affairs* 100(1):139-157.

of the Cold War and already broken with a neutrality policy for the benefit of European solidarity.[4] From this retelling, the membership was nothing but, what Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson called it on the day of Sweden's accession, a "major but natural step".[5]

Regardless of whether the decision to join NATO is desribed as a sudden rupture or the outcome of a longer process, the historical role of neutrality and military non-alignment in Swedish national identity meant that the emerging narratives about Sweden's membership were not only about joining a military alliance, they were also about national self-understanding and thus about identity. In the debates following the 2022 decision, public statements drew on past memories, established myths, and claimed traditions to make the present policy commitment, as well as Sweden's new identity as a NATO member, intelligible.[6] Particular stories about Sweden were selected and mobilised in support of Sweden's newfound place in the military alliance, as well as by those who remained in opposition to membership.

However, this was not the first time Sweden faced a similar upheaval of its foreign policy tradition, nor was it the first time Sweden put its neutrality policy aside to become a part of an international organisation based on collective security. Over a century earlier, Sweden's decision to become a member of the League of Nations (henceforth the League) was similarly accompanied by stories of abrupt rupture and inevitable culmination. Despite echoing similar to the cries of dissatisfaction in the public debate following the membership application in the spring of 2022, the words cited in the beginning of this chapter were actually spoken more than a hundred years ago on the eve of Sweden's entry into the League in 1920.

The statement, opposing a Swedish membership of the League by referring to Sweden's policy of neutrality, was made by the conservative party leader Arvid Lindman. For him and the opponents, the League Covenant's provisions, and especially the obligation to participate in sanctions, were difficult

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[4] Thorhallsson, B. – Stude Vidal, T. 2024. "Sweden's quest for shelter: 'Nonalignment' and NATO membership" *Scandinavian Political Studies* 47(2):97-281. See also Aggestam, L. – Hyde-Price, A. 2025. "Crossing the Rubicon': Explaining Sweden's decision to join NATO" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 27(4):1267-1291.

[5] Regeringskanslitet. 7 Mar. 2024. "Statsminister Ulf Kristerssons tal till nationen". Washington.

[6] See, for example, Hjerström – Hagström 2025. See also Rosengren, E. – Vastapuu, L. – Bodén, A. – Lyytikäinen. 2025. "Becoming NATO brothers: A feminist analysis of how government officials in Finland and Sweden reconciled national identity with NATO membership" *Cooperation and Conflict* 60(4):752-776.

to reconcile with Sweden's foreign policy tradition. Meanwhile, for the proponents, Sweden joining the League was seen less as an abandonment of the neutrality policy, and more as a step entirely in line with a Swedish tradition of contributing to international peace and cooperation.[7]

Both today's NATO membership and the historical League membership confronted Sweden with a similar problem: reconciling national identity with a new membership in an international organisation premised on collective security. While the Swedish decision on a NATO membership has already received attention in contemporary IR scholarship, less attention has been paid to the Interwar years when both Sweden's foreign policy and national identity were (re)negotiated in the context of its membership in the League. The co-constitutive making of Sweden's foreign policy and national identity in relation to the League is therefore the topic this thesis engages with. Although this presents its own specific research problem, it remains a problem with particular bearing on our present moment; a moment in which Sweden, albeit not for the first time, has to reconcile the move from historically being a neutral or non-aligned state, to becoming a part of an organisation of states coming together to ensure the security of all.

1.1 Research problem, aims, and questions

This section introduces the research problem that is studied in this thesis, namely how Swedish national identity and foreign policy were co-constituted in narratives that also made Sweden's policy in the League imaginable. It begins, however, with situating the research problem in its historical context. The section starts from the world in which the League was born, and in which a simultaneous domestic transformation was changing Sweden's own political landscape. It then turns to the accession debate in 1920 and to the two decades of Swedish conduct in Geneva that followed. This illustrates that while the vote settled the question of membership, it left unsettled the question of what Sweden could be imagined to be and to do in the context of the international organisation. The section concludes by introducing a way to study this. It proposes that Interwar crises were narrated moments in which Swedish national identity and foreign policy, in the context of the League, were being reproduced and contested, and thus moments suitable for starting an empirical exploration of the research problem.

[7] See protocols of the First and Second Chamber of the *Riksdag*, 3-4 March 1920 No. 20/24.

Sweden in a new world order

At the beginning of the twentieth century, large territorial empires dominated the globe, but by the end of the First World War, the German and Ottoman empires had been dismantled, Austria-Hungary eliminated, and, with the Russian Civil War raging, only France and Great Britain remained as major powers on the European continent. This collapse of empires was followed by the breakdown of old political and social structures, and the rise of new movements dedicated either to democratic principles and social reform, or to more modern forms of nationalism and authoritarianism.[8] What had existed before was not merely a structure of empire but a legal regime permitting states to wage war and conquer territory. The aftermath of the war challenged this order as states were, in the words of Harold Nicolson, "journeying to Paris, not merely to liquidate the war [itself], but to found a new order in Europe."[9]

At the peace conference, the yearning for what Woodrow Wilson labelled a "new world order" led to the creation of the League. It was established in Part I of the Treaty of Versailles and was the world's first attempt on an international organisation aimed at promoting world peace, seeking to prevent conflict through obligatory mediation and arbitration, and enforcing its Covenant through mechanisms of collective coercion.[10] Although the term itself was absent from the Covenant, a collective security system took shape. It was based on three pillars: the regulation of armaments, the obligatory settlement of disputes, and collective action.[11] The League itself was given a three-tier structure with an Assembly, a Council, and a Secretariat. Its Covenant introduced two legal novelties: the requirement to submit disputes to arbitration, judicial settlement, or inquiry by the Council, and the possibility of sanctions against a state that went to war in disregard of these provisions.[12]

For the neutral states, the legal innovations introduced following the creation of the League and its Covenant challenged their established way of being

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[8] Berman, S. 1998. *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Overy. R. 2017. *The Inter-War Crisis.* 3rd edition. London: Routledge.

[9] Hathaway, O.A. – Shapiro, S.J. 2019. "International law and its transformation through the outlawry of war" *International Affairs* 95(1):45-62, p. 51. See also Rothstein, R.L. 1968. *Alliances and Small Powers.* New York: Columbia University, p. 222.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Tsagourias, N. 2020. "The League of Nations and Visions of World Order" *International Community Law Review* 22:291-309.

[12] At the initial meetings, the Council began the process of setting up another central organ: The Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) under Article 14 of the Covenant. When the Assembly met for first time in December, it accepted the Statute of the Court, but it would not start its work at the Hague until two year later.

in the world. Neutrality had previously rested on strict impartiality, but the Covenant asked states who had been neutral to enforce collective punishment on aggressors.[13] The ex-neutral states were consulted by the League Commission in March 1919. The Scandinavian states, together with Switzerland and the Netherlands, pressed for the inclusion of the defeated powers, for greater representation of smaller states through a stronger Assembly, and for the creation of an arbitration body to manage disputes before the Council decided on punitive measures. However, in the end, these states secured little beyond their independence of action regarding military sanctions.[14]

The League was remaking the order between states. At the same time, new democratic ideals were remaking states from within. This period saw the consolidation of modern Swedish parliamentarism. Reforms replaced the old political structure with one based on general suffrage, free mass media, and the beginnings of a welfare society. [15] The proportional system introduced in 1911 had fragmented the party landscape. By 1918 five parties were represented in the *Riksdag*: the conservative, social democratic, liberal, agrarian, and communist parties.[16] Forming majorities became difficult, and the 1920s were marked by short-lived minority governments and recurrent parliamentary crises. Importantly, the constitutional changes also transferred power over foreign affairs toward the two parliamentary chambers, creating new openings for parties to challenge the direction of Swedish foreign policy.[17] In other words, Sweden's League debate arrived at the very moment when both the international and domestic orders were being reimagined.

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[13] Hathaway – Shapiro 2019:50.

[14] Westberg, J. 2012. "Den nordiska småstatsidealismens rötter" in Doeser, F. – Petersson, M. – Westberg, J. (eds.) *Norden mellan stormakter och fredsförbund: Nordiskt säkerhetspolitiskt samarbete i det gamla och nya Europa.* Stockholm: Santérus förlag:81f. See also Jones, S.S. 1939. *The Scandinavian States and the League of Nations.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 81.

[15] Petersson, O. 2016. "Constitutional History" in Pierre, J. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

[16] Hadenius, S. 2003. *Modern svensk historia: Konflikt och samförstånd*. 6th Edition. Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg; Möller, T. 2011. *Svensk politisk historia. Strid och samverkan under tvåhundra år*. 2nd Edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

[17] Lönnroth, E. 1959. *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia 1919–1939.* Stockholm: P.A. Norstedts & Söners Förlag, see p. 10-20.

Sweden and the League membership

In the spring of 1920, Sweden was governed by a majority coalition of liberals and social democrats. The political parties had come together to advance democratic reform domestically. They now sought to do the same internationally by making Sweden a member of the League. The government had appointed a committee with representatives from all parties to address its proposition for Sweden to join the newly established international organ.[18] The majority of the committee members – the social democrats, the liberals, and one conservative parliamentarian – were for accession. Meanwhile, the remaining conservatives, the agrarian, and the communist members rejected the proposition. The debate that then followed in the two parliamentary chambers has been described as one of the most ferocious discussions of a foreign policy issue that has taken place in Sweden.[19]

A major concern for the opponents of a Swedish League membership was that it would, in the event of a conflict between the great powers, force the previously neutral state to take a side. They worried that it risked dragging Sweden into future wars. However, warnings were not solely related to the hollowing out of Sweden's neutrality policy. The conservative opponents also considered the League as an organisation by the Versailles powers, for the Versailles powers. They claimed that it would be used to "maintain slavery over the defeated" and "preserve the hegemony of the Allies." For the communists, the League itself represented "capitalism's holy alliance against Bolshevism."[20] The proponent of a membership, on the other hand, saw promise in the organisation. Although they recognised some flaws with its original set-up, they still believed that the League had the potential to develop into a universal association where all nations could meet on equal terms. For them, the League represented a critical part of the development towards more peaceful relations, and Sweden would not benefit from isolating itself from it. More so, they perceived the realisation of international law and the strengthening of disarmament efforts as a historic task and national responsibility.

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[18] Norman, T. 2014. *Hjalmar Branting, freden och Folkens förbund: samt andra studier i svensk och nordisk 1900-talshistoria.* Stockholm: Hjalmarsson & Högberg

[19] The political parties did, generally, agree on some points. They wanted a League that more so than the existing one safeguarded the integrity of its members, and they agreed that the composition of the League was flawed: smaller states should receive greater representation, the rules regulating the League's bodies and the relation between them should be clarified, and the constitution and regulations of a permanent international court should be explicated. They also, broadly, agreed that Sweden should push for the invitation of the defeated powers. They differed substantially, however, on their conclusions regarding a Swedish League membership.

[20] Westberg 2012:83f.

As a result of the proponents parliamentary majority, the proposition for Sweden to join the League was eventually accepted.[21] However, the debates about the League on 3 and 4 March 1920 not only illustrated differences in preferences with regards to the membership. They also showed the narration of competing stories about Sweden as a nation. Although Sweden ended up becoming a League member, its newfound place in the international organisation thus remained far from settled. In the years that followed Sweden had to, not only (re)formulate a foreign policy within the international organisation, but also (re)imagine its national identity within it. A common retelling in contemporary scholarship on the Interwar period is that Sweden would, despite the initial vocal opposition, come to participate vigorously in League activities throughout the Interwar period.

Already in 1922, Sweden assumed one of the non-permanent seats in the Council, and became engaged in strengthening the League's work as an arbitrator. Sweden also contributed extensively to its disarmament efforts, even showing its commitment through a unilateral decision in its own defence plan in 1925.[22] At the same time, Sweden remained sceptical of wider interpretations of collective security. For example, Sweden disputed the Geneva Protocol in 1924, which sought to combine disarmament with stricter requirements for arbitration and more robust assurances of collective action. Sweden regarded the proposed security guarantees as undermining the possibility of assuming a neutral position in case of war.[23] Still, Sweden also became more accepting towards such provisions over time. It contributed with troops to the first international peacekeeping force deployed to supervise the Saar plebiscite and it participated in the use of economic sanctions against Italy in 1935.[24]

Despite these examples there is much that remains unexplored about Swedish foreign policy in the League. This thesis contributes to the field by analysing the conflicting stories of the international organisation, and the complex self-understandings that permeated Swedish society in the Interwar years. The

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[21]In the first chamber the proposition passed with 86 against 47 votes, and in the second chamber with 152 against 67 votes.

[22] Götz, N. 2009. "Blue-eyed angels at the League of Nations: The Genevese contruction of Norden" in Götz, N. – Haggren, H. (eds.) *Regional Cooperation and International Organizations: The Nordic Model in Transnational Alignment* London: Routledge. See also Engh, S. – Ikonomou, H.A. – Nissen, A. 2025. "Scandinavians on the world stage: Rethinking Scandinavian international involvement since the interwar period" *Cooperation and Conflict* 60(4):869-901.

[23] Ottosson, I. 1986. *Krig i fredens intresse eller neutralitet till varje pris? Sverige, NF och frågan om kollektiv säkerhet 1935–36*. Malmö: Liber

[24] Westberg 2012.

focus is on how Swedish League policies were made possible (and challenged), as well as how Sweden would come to resolve (and contest) its national identity in the context of its membership in the League. In other words, this thesis addresses the question of what the self-understanding(s) of Sweden at this time meant for what the nation could be imagined to *be* and to *do* as League member. It studies how such understandings became sedimented and contested in the years that followed the heated accession debate in 1920.

Sweden and Interwar crisis moments

Over the course of the two decades that followed, Sweden would come to conduct itself within the context of the League by instructing its delegates, speaking and casting votes in the Assembly, occupying and participating through a non-permanent seat in the Council, and taking positions on various international issues. However, as the accession debate had already illustrated, the system of collective security that the League encompassed, namely the set rules and methods according to which peace was to be maintained with the security of each member guaranteed through common action, had been far from unopposed.[25] Throughout the Interwar period Sweden would nevertheless have to engage with matters relating to the League's collective security – a system that remained contested both in Sweden and within the international organisation itself.[26]

Moreover, issues that would come to trigger the interpretation and use of the Covenant's articles were often, in Interwar discourse as well as contemporary scholarship, told of as moments of *crisis*. This thesis does not regard such crises as natural occurrences, but as constructed and narrated into being. According to scholarship on crisis narratives, the telling of crises tend to prompt a surge in attempts to make sense of what is happening. Crises are thus

[25] The organisation was notably about more than the means and methods set out to ensure the peaceful settlement of disputes and common action in case of breaches of the Covenant. It also sought the improvement of global welfare through cooperation in economic, labour, social, and health matters (see Tsagourias 2020). This thesis focuses, however, on Sweden's engagements with, and interpretations of, issues related to the League's main task of safeguarding the peace of its members because such matters were commonly narrated as crisis moments.

[26] See, for example, Obiya, S. 2021. "Between 'Coersive League' and 'Consultative League': a reappraisal of debates surrounding the 'Reform' of the League of Nations" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 21:465-492.

narrated moments that stories render as critical or urgent, often instigating interpretive struggles around them.[27] The Interwar period encompassed a number of narrated crises in the context of the League. The (ir)relevance of those moments for Sweden were not given in advance, but had to be constructed in the telling of them. Whether the bombardment of an island in the Ionian Sea, the boundary dispute following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the occupation of a region in northern China, or the invasion in the Horn of Africa was Sweden's concern, and what kind of concern that was made to be, was ultimately a matter of narration.

This thesis argues that to narrate such crises was therefore also to say something about what Sweden could be imagined to be and to do as a member of an organisation often narrated as tasked with addressing them. If identity is understood as constituted in narratives, and if crises are narratively constructed, then the moments during which the League's collective security system was commonly told to be put under pressure were also moments during which Swedish national identity was being narrated. If foreign policy and national identity are, in turn, understood as mutually constitutive, then the stories of crises during the Interwar period were also stories making Sweden's identity and policy in the context of the League imaginable.

The research questions

The research problem that this thesis engages with concerns how Sweden's foreign policy and national identity, in the context of its membership in the League, was (re)produced and contested. The purpose is to investigate how Swedish League policy was narrated into being and made possible, and the thesis does so by recovering the stories giving meaning to moments that were narrated as crises for the international organisation. The main research question addressing this problem is:

- How was Sweden's foreign policy in the context of its membership in the League of Nations made possible, and what alternatives were also imagined?

To engage with this question, the thesis develops a narrative approach to national identity and presents a conceptual framework for exploring Sweden's

[27] Hay, C. 1996. "Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent'" *Sociology* 30(2):253-277.

national identity in foreign policy narratives. Two secondary questions guiding the empirical exploration can thus be formulated in connection to this specific approach. The first asks what foreign policy narratives were narrated across different crisis moments, and the second asks how these narratives concurrently reproduced and contested Sweden's national identity.

- How were crisis moments in the context of the League of Nations narrated in Sweden, and what recurring foreign policy narratives were reproduced across them?

- How did the foreign policy narratives reproduce and contest Sweden's national identity in the context of its membership in League of Nations?

While the epistemological starting point further detailed in the next chapter of the thesis does not argue for the generalisability of contextual empirical explorations, the research problem of Swedish national identity and foreign policy in the context of the League still holds a wider relevance where a number of contributions can be made.

1.2 Main contributions

This thesis makes three main contributions to current scholarships. The first is an empirical contribution adding to research on Sweden in the twentieth century by returning to the Interwar years. This is a period often framed as formative for modern Swedish foreign policy, identity, and political culture, yet one in which our current knowledge appears scattered and limited. The second is conceptual and moves the overall relevance of the thesis beyond the specific case of Sweden. It contributes to the International Relations (IR) scholarship on national identity and foreign policy, as well as to the scholarship engaged in constructivist Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). The thesis adds to this research by proposing a new conceptual apparatus for narrative analysis and identity reconstruction, grounded in a reflexive historical constructivism. The third is a broader interdisciplinary contribution. The thesis responds to the call for a more substantial conversation between IR and International History (IH) by demonstrating what a study that moves beyond the "eternal divide" between the two fields can look like. It identifies research on the League as a fruitful site for such a dialogue.

An empirical contribution

The thesis makes a first contribution to research on Swedish twentieth century foreign policy and national identity. It adds to this field by providing a substantive archival exploration of how both were co-constituted, reproduced, and contested in Sweden during the Interwar years. As Chapter 3 discusses further, the literature on Swedish foreign policy can be read through a vocabulary of neutrality and (international) solidarity. The scholarship on Swedish national identity (or identity-related concepts), including more critical work on Swedish (and Nordic) nation-building and myth-making, has regarded it as based on welfare, neutrality, and exceptionalist/internationalist conceptions. The literature has further maintained a Swedish culture of consensus on the state's international affairs. An interesting observation can be made here: the scholarship(s) frequently trace the subject matter(s) back to the Interwar years.

Firstly, historians and political scientists alike describe Sweden's balance between national neutrality and international solidarity as a defining characteristic of Swedish foreign policy.[28] Kjell Goldmann has, for example, argued that what makes Swedish policy special is neither neutrality nor internationalism *per se*, but their combination, in which the two dimensions are understood as mutually supportive.[29] The same kind of terminology resurfaces across the literature, alongside associated conceptual pairs such as autonomy/integration, independence/cooperation, and passivity/activity.[30] The story commonly told about Sweden's approach to international affairs is that a gradual development of ideas, stemming from the Interwar years, produced a Swedish self-image of neutrality combined with "a desire to play an active role in the international sphere."[31]

At the same time, in this literature, the Interwar period is often presented as part of an origin story that is asserted rather than explored. This matters

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[28] Wahlbäck, K. 1997. "Neutralitet och solidaritet: ett dilemma i svensk säkerhetspolitik 1920–1996" in Leifland, L. (ed.) *Brobryggare: En vänbok till Nils Andrén.* Göteborg: Nerenius & Santérus förlag.

[29] Goldmann, K. 1991. "The Swedish Model of Security Policy" *West European Politics* 14(3):122-132.

[30] See, for example, Agrell, W. 2000. *Fred och fruktan: Sveriges säkerhetspolitiska historia 1918-2000.* Lund: Historiska media; Kronvall, O. – Petersson, M. 2006. *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i supermakternas skugga 1945–1991.* Stockholm: Santérus förlag; Czarny, R.M. 2018. *Sweden: From Neutrality to International Solidarity.* Cham: Springer; Brommesson, D. – Ekengren, A. - Michalski, A. 2022. *Sweden's policy of neutrality: Success through flexibility?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[31] Biltekin, N. – Müller, L. – Petersson, M. 2022. "Introduction: Pax Suecia, 1814-2020" in Biltekin, N. – Müller, L. – Petersson, M. (eds.) *200 years of peace: New Perspectives on Modern Swedish Foreign Policy.* Oxford: Berghahn Books, p. 3.

because neutrality and solidarity (and associated terminologies) are ambiguous enough to be filled with a myriad of different meanings, where there are nuances over time and at particular moments as to what these terms actually imply. Scholars are often well aware of this and treat them as related dimensions or two sides of the same coin rather than fixed opposites. However, this raises questions about what is obscured, and what is potentially lost, by adopting the terminology in the first place. In order to make sense of Swedish foreign policy, this thesis proposes an empirical exploration of how Sweden's place in the world was narrated into being during the years in which Sweden's so-called policy model's roots are often claimed to be found.

Secondly, a parallel argument applies to the literature on Swedish national identity. Here the themes of neutrality and welfare dominate, together with discussions on Swedish internationalism and Nordic exceptionalism. They are often understood as interrelated myths in the imagining of twentieth century Sweden. In the accounts provided by these studies, it is sometimes argued that Sweden's neutrality actually had little to do with foreign policy, and much more to do with a national self-understanding developed predominantly in the post-war era.[32] Sweden's foundational myths of neutrality, welfare, and internationalism are thus understood as interlinked. They are also seen as mythologies developed *about* the Interwar years, and as really becoming hegemonic and sanctified concepts following the dominance of social democracy in Sweden after the end of the Second World War.[33]

This more critical literature, reconstructing the formation of Sweden's national identity, is invaluable. However, it still leaves the issue of how Swedish identity was constructed and contested both beyond and before these national myths were established by social democracy after 1945 largely unaddressed. In relation to both the scholarship on Swedish foreign policy and on national identity, a combined question also emerges around whether the "unique" Swe-

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[32] See, for example, Af Malmborg, M. 2001. *Neutrality and State-building in Sweden.* Basingstoke: Palgrave; Agius, C. 2006. *The Social Construction of Swedish Neutrality: Challenges to Swedish Identity and Sovereignty.* Manchester: Manchester University Press; Lundin, P. – Stenlås, N. 2010. "Technology, State Initiative and National Myths in Cold War Sweden. An introduction" in Lundin P. – Stenlås, N. – Gribbe, J. (eds.) *Science for Welfare and Warfare: Technology and State Initiative in Cold War Sweden* Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications.

[33] Trägårdh, L. 2002a. "Crisis and the Politics of National Community: Germany and Sweden, 1933/1994" in Witoszek, N. – Trägårdh, L. (eds.) *Culture and Crisis: The Case of Germany and Sweden.* New York: Barghahn; Stråth, B. 2004. "Neutrality as self-awareness" in Almqvist, K. – Glans, K. (eds.) *The Swedish Success Story?* Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation.

dish model of combining neutrality with international solidarity was a Swedish or rather a social democratic policy and identity construct, and to what extent these stories of the nation were actually left uncontested. These questions can be studied by exploring the period onto which these stories have often been projected back to.

A final contribution thus revolves around the question of (party-political) consensus or conflict. The Interwar years have been seen as consolidating a distinct culture of consensus on Sweden's international affairs, and the presence of unity has become both an accepted presumption in the literature and a common reference made by Swedish politicians alike.[34] The scholarly foundation for this view rests to a considerable degree on Herbert Tingsten's classical work. He concluded that the exchange of views on foreign policy in the Swedish parliament during the Interwar years was extraordinarily limited. This understanding has also been reinforced by Erik Lönnroth's portrait of a mostly passive and uninterested foreign policy elite during this time.[35]

While a number of later works have challenged these conclusions about Swedish Interwar political culture on foreign policy, the literature remains scattered. For example, it often centres on a specific issue or event when discussing the presence or absence of debates on foreign policy in Sweden during the Interwar years. The contemporary research on the politisation of Swedish foreign policy has, instead, largely situated itself in the (post-)Cold War context.[36] This thesis also identifies a conceptual problem with this literature since consensus is often defined as the absence of an overt or contentious debate. The concept of *contestation*, on the other hand, does not require open disagreement, but is rather understood as a struggle over meaning that can be easily obscured since it does not necessarily involve open conflict.

In this way, the empirical contribution made by the thesis is closely linked to its conceptual contribution. The thesis explores how a number of crisis moments were narrated across international, governmental, parliamentary, party,

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[34] Bjereld, U. – Demker, M. 1995. *Utrikespolitiken som slagfält. De svenska partierna och utrikesfrågorna.* Falun: Nerenius & Santérus förlag.
[35] Tingsten, H. 1944. *Svensk utrikesdebatt mellan världskrigen.* Stockholm: Kooperativa förbundets bokförlag; Lönnroth 1959. See discussion in: Nygren, O. 2025. *Östersjöfrågan: En studie av svenskt internationellt tänkande 1914-1945*. Södertörn: Södertörn University, p. 21.
[36] See, for example, Björklund, F. 1992. *Samförstånd under oenighet: svensk säkerhetspolitisk debatt under kalla kriget.* Uppsala: Uppsala University, doctoral thesis; Elgström, O. 1982. *Aktiv utrikespolitik. En jämförelse mellan svensk och dansk parlamentarisk utrikesdebatt 1962–1978*. Lund: Studentlitteratur; Karlsson, M. 1995. *Partistrategi och utikespolitik: Interna motiveringar och dagspressens agerande i Catalina-affären 1952 och EEC-frågan 1961/62*. Edsbruk: Akademitryck AB; Norberg, J. 2008. *Ideologiska mål och utrikesdebatt. Svenska riksdagspartiernas argumentation i Vietnam- och Irakfrågan*. Umeå: Print & Media.

and press spaces in Sweden. By doing so, it is able to capture the (potential) contestation of Swedish foreign policy that may be hidden in the stories told about these moments. The conceptual framework therefore adds to the scholarship(s) on Swedish twentieth century foreign policy as well as national identity by being able to explore the parallel possibility of sedimentation and contestation. The empirical contribution is about more than filling a gap or challenging contemporary wisdom about an, at times, mystified period in Swedish international history. The meanings sedimented and contested during the Interwar years did not remain there. Returning to the narrative and identity constructions of this period can thus denaturalise present-day presumptions and understandings of Swedish twentieth century foreign policy and national identity. This illustrates what is at stake in an empirical contribution that also extends beyond Swedish historiography as such.

A conceptual contribution

The thesis also makes contributions that reach past the specific empirical case of Interwar Sweden. The questions asked about Sweden in the League are part of a broader research problem. This problem inquires how the narratives that follow the construction of crisis moments also reproduce and contest a state's national identity. It asks how this also makes its policies in relation to the crises imaginable. This overarching problem formulation does not ask only what a state did in response to the crisis, or why it acted as it did. To do so presupposes what the problem actually questions, namely the lack of a settled identity, the complexity in the construction of any foreign policy issue, and the absence of a pregiven range of policy options. More specifically, the thesis addresses the research problem by drawing upon constructivist FPA and IR research on national identity and foreign policy.

Valerie Hudson has famously argued that FPA's promise lies in its insistence on actor specific and agent-oriented theory. Yet, as David Houghton observes, this commitment has simultaneously left FPA a "theory without a home" and with a body of microtheories unanchored in any broader account of how the social and discursive conditions of action are produced.[37] Houghton's proposed remedy is an increased dialogue between FPA and social con-

[37] Hudson, V.M. 2005. "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1:1-30; Houghton, D.P. 2007. "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Towards a Constructivist Approach" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3:24-45.

structivism. He notes that while FPA is rich on individual but thin on collective construction, constructivism theorises intersubjective meaning yet often privileges structure and leaves agency underspecified. The thesis engages with that tension.

The approach developed in Chapter 2 begins, however, with reformulating the very question that FPA tends to ask. Mainstream constructivist IR and FPA tend to pose *why* questions and seek to explain why a particular foreign policy decision was reached or pursued. This thesis follows Roxanne Doty in posing *how-possible* questions instead. Doty saw a problem with attempting to show that policy decisions were predictable or probable given a certain set of circumstances because such analyses did not consider how a particular decision or course of action was imaginable in the first place. By posing how-possible questions analyses can instead explore how meanings are produced, or, in the words of Doty, how they constitute particular interpretive dispositions that create certain possibilities for foreign policy.[38]

Mainstream constructivist IR and FPA also tend to cast policy as an *effect* of identity. This thesis follows linguistic constructivist and poststructuralist scholars by treating national identity and foreign policy as *mutually constitutive*.[39] From this perspective, foreign policy does not express a prior Swedish identity, instead it intervenes in its production and vice versa. Identity shifts from being an explanatory variable that informs foreign policy to something constituted in and through foreign policy narration itself. This is not to abandon FPA's interest in how state leaders navigate policy choices, but to look back on how the understandings that made certain actions possible also reinscribed certain identity constructions, and the other way around.

The thesis makes a more specific contribution to this literature. It does so by arguing that narratives are an especially suitable way of dealing with the agency related tension between constructivist IR and FPA. Much of the literature on narratives divides between two poles. Agency-centric approaches that are, generally, closer to FPA, rest on an individualist ontology and treat narratives as instruments that actors mobilise and deploy strategically. Structure-centric approaches that rest on a narrative ontology instead see actors as coming into being through narration and as being embedded within discursive

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[38] Doty, R.L. 1993. **"**Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines" *International Studies Quarterly* 37(3):297–320.
[39] For the former, see, for example: Katzenstein, P.J. 1996. *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics.* New York: Columbia University Press. For the latter, see, for example: Hansen, L. 2006. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. London: Routledge.

structures.[40] The framework developed in this thesis builds on a narrative ontolog, but it incorporates the concept of narrative power in a way that acknowledges a bounded agency. In short, narrators are understood as drawing upon a narrative landscape with an agency that is narratively constrained. In turn, they also reinscribe narrative structures.

The thesis then specifies where and how such agency is possible through a layered model of (national) identity. This model draws on the work of Ole Wæver, and the later developments made by Linus Hagström and Karl Gustafsson. In such a model some layers of the identity are more sedimented and thus less open for contestation. Meanwhile, other layers are less sedimented and correspondingly more open to it.[41] The advantage of the layered model is twofold. First, it allows for change within continuity since the presence of contestation varies across layers. Second, it clarifies how agency is both possible and constrained. It indicated that some layers leave little room for it, while others expand the boundaries within which actors can exert agency over the shape of identity. This addresses what Wæver identified as constructivism's "theory of non-change" and its general inability to explain how the same cultural and historical background can sustain contradictory foreign policies.[42]

The theoretical approach subsequently draws upon already established works in linguistic constructivist and poststructuralist IR. The main contribution made to this literature can be found in how the thesis seeks to provide it with a more detailed conceptual and operational apparatus. As Houghton notes, constructivism and (cognitive) FPA each supply a broader framework for thinking about the nature of social life, but neither yields substantive analysis until coupled with a specification of how and by who meaning is produced and contested.[43] This thesis provides that specification through a narrative approach to identity, and goes on to develop a conceptual and analytical framework that can be applied to empirical cases in a straightforward way.

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[40] Hagström, L – Gustafsson, K. 2019. "Narrative Power: How Storytelling Shapes East Asian International Politics" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32(4):387-406; Krulichová, Z. 2025. "Charting the narrative landscape: Distinguishing agency-centric and structure-centric approaches to narrative research in International Relations" *Cooperation and Conflict* OnlineFirst.

[41] Wæver, O. 2002. "Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy: Discourse Analysis as Foreign Policy Theory" in Hansen, L. – Wæver, O. (eds.) *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States* London: Routledge; Hagström, L. – Gustafsson, K. 2015. "Japan and identity change: Why it matters in International Relations." *The Pacific Review*, 28 (1):1-22.

[42] Wæver 2002:22.

[43] Houghton 2007:34.

Within this framework, the thesis moves away from the emphasis on biographical narratives that is common in the national identity literature.[44] Instead it takes particular issue narratives as its starting point. It does, however, recognise that such narratives draw upon, and are enabled by, broader narratives (including a nations' biographical narratives or master narratives about the nature of political life). By beginning with issue narratives, the approach is able to reassemble foreign policy narratives that cut across specific issues over time (here specific crisis moments), yet clarify how the identity constructs in them relays how policies in relation to specific issues are made imaginable.[45] An added benefit with this is that issue narratives can also be understood as less settled than, for example, biographical ones, so that reproduction, contestation, and narratively bounded agency actually becomes empirically discernable.[46]

The conceptual framework is further specified in Chapter 2. This includes discussions of the additional proposal made by the framework for methodological attentiveness to different levels, spaces, and genres of narration. The thesis therefore contributes a set of conceptual and analytical tools. It clarifies the analytical steps through which specific texts are assembled into issues narratives, and issue narrative into recurring foreign policy narratives. It also shows how we can analyse the way in which national identity is (re)produced and contested in these narratives. This set of tools can be adapted and applied by IR scholars and historians alike, also beyond the Interwar years and the Swedish context. The framework developed therefore addresses the relation between constructivism and history specifically. The combination of the empirical and conceptual contributions are intended to speak across two disciplines.

Mainstream constructivism, in "seizing the middle ground" between positivism and post-positivism, has been critiqued by historians for treating history as a repository of cases to illustrate theoretical claims, or as a causal narrative

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[44] See, for example, Steele, B.J. 2008. *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State.* New York: Routledge.

[45] Since the thesis suggests a focus on international rather than national crises, it is able to address a research problem centred on how a nation imagines itself as part of an international organisation specifically, rather than how it understands it self vis-à-vis an external outside more broadly, although these aspects are, of course, still two sides of the same coin.

[46] It is also presumed that, following the narrations of a crisis moment, there will also be a more intense struggle over meaning that rarely surfaces to the same extent with regards to policy matters lacking a crisis framing. See, for example, Hay 1996:253-277.

linking the evolution of meanings to outcomes.[47] This has distanced many historians for the work of constructivist IR and FPA scholars who arguably have engaged too uncritically with the so-called "problem of history". This thesis treats narratives as the medium through which meanings are assembled into specific stories about reality. This means that history itself is not understood as a neutral record of facts either, but is rather a form of narrative construction in which historians themselves shape the past into stories. The thesis therefore urges a reflexive historical constructivism that allows for a better dialogue between the researcher and their historical material, as well as been IR scholars and our disciplinary "brothers" in IH.

An interdisciplinary contribution

In 1997, a special issue of *International Security* called for an intensified interdisciplinary dialogue between IR and IH, and, in particular, Diplomatic History (DH).[48] The contributors sought a discussion on the differences and complementary opportunities between their fields, and argued for more institutionalised cooperation between them.[49] Their conversations still revealed a division of labour between theory-building political scientists and historians seeking to recover the past for its own sake. This was a division based on their *idiographic* and *nomothetic* orientations, and here Jack Levy observed that scholars who were exceptions to this distinction were "sometimes tolerated, but more often marginalized and rarely […] seen as role models in their fields", and that doctoral dissertations straying from disciplinary identities in this way did not generally advance the academic careers of their authors.[50]

Given recent trends, this is likely no longer the case (fingers crossed), and the current environment appears more open to work that not only speaks across but transcends such divides. Halvard Leira argues that the end of the Cold War ushered in what has been labelled the (re)turn of history to IR.[51]

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[47] Leira, H. – de Carvalho, B. 2016. "Construction Time Again: History in Constructivist IR Scholarship" *ERIS* 3(3):99-111.
[48] Elman, C. – Elman, M.F. 1997. "Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Differences and Crossing Boundaries" *International Security* 22(1):5-21.
[49] The project was later turned into a book edited by Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman which developed further on the "bridges and boundaries" of historians and political scientists in the study of international relations. Elman, C. – Elman, M.F. 2001. *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, political scientists, and the study of international relations.* Cambrigde: MIT Press.
[50] Levy, J.S. 1997. "Too Important to Leave the Other: History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations" *International Security* 22(1):22-33, p. 30.
[51] Leira, H. 2015. "Introduction: Doing Historical International Relations" in Leira, H. – de Carvalho, B. (eds.) *Historical International Relation, Volume 1: Doing Historical International*

Since the turn of the century, Historical IR has grown and developed as its own interdisciplinary bridge between IR and IH, and has contributed to a much-needed reflexive engagement with H/history in the former discipline. It has, for example, led to discussions around IR's historicity and *how* scholars incorporate history into their work.[52] IR has increasingly embraced (or returned to) methods, such as genealogy and process tracing, that rely more on primary archival sources. Historical IR has also reflected on the historiography of the discipline itself and challenged established myths, including by bringing to light IR's imperialist origins and Eurocentrism.[53]

Historical IR has, in addition, brought the "problem of history" back to IR.[54] In 1999, Thomas Smith challenged the IR discipline for resting upon an outdated Rankean notion of the possibility of knowing history "as it really was".[55] Nick Vaughan-Williams later pointed to the lack of reflection on what was actually meant by history in the so-called historical turn in IR.[56] The latter also showed how opposing camps tended to rely on caricatured understandings of each other where traditional historians were accused of theoretical naivety and critical historiographers were cast aside as anti-historical. John Hobson and George Lawson further demonstrated that historians and IR scholars with similar ontologies do not necessarily share common ground. Differences and commonalities can be found in how history itself is treated.[57]

These debates and conversations create further arguments for why IR scholars should engage directly with history as a field of empirics, but also

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Relations. London: Sage. Scholars have questioned this framing of a *turn* to history. Firstly, the term is frequently used to describe various debates dating back nearly five decades. Secondly, history has always been a part of IR. Many of those regarded as early key thinkers in IR were notably international historians. See Lerner, A.B. – Hayes, J. 2026. "Historical IR and the promise of renewed dialogue between IR and history" *Cooperation and Conflict* 00(0):1-25.

[52] Lawson, G. 2010. "The eternal divide? History and International Relations" *European Journal of International Relations* 18(2):203-226.

[53] Buzan, B. – Lawson, G. 2013. "The Global Transformation: The Nineteenth Century and the Making of Modern International Relations" *International Studies Quarterly* 57:620-634.

[54] In short, a problem creating a divide between historians rising to defend the traditional way of approaching history as discovery and bringing the past back to life, and the argument of history as invented rather than discovered.

[55] Smith, T.W. 1999. *History and International Relations.* London: Routledge. Smith notably emphasised the constructionism associated with Michael Oakeshott which sees history as the "historian's experience" rather than something objectively verifiable, where "history is not the autonomous body of evidence empirical researchers envision; it is theory-laden, present-centred, and the source of a rainbow of interpretations", p. 190.

[56] Vaughan-Williams, N. 2005. "International Relations and the 'Problem of History'" *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 34(1):115-136.

[57] Hobson, J.M. – Lawson, G. 2008. "What is History in International Relations?" *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 37(2):415-435.

with the contested nature of the past itself. Yet, despite all this progress, Historical IR has not established a robust dialogue with IH. It has arguably been more concerned with critiquing mainstream IR than with engaging historians.[58] What appears to still be missing, almost three decades after the special issue in 1997, is thus a significant conversation between the disciplines, and scholars actually moving beyond established divides. The construction of a divide also presupposes a deeply problematic separation between history and theory, reproducing the impression that theorists cannot do history and that historians cannot do theory. But as Lawson put it, IR scholars are all historians, just as historians are all theorists.[59]

The interdisciplinary contribution made by this thesis responds directly to these already started conversations. It offers a path for how IR scholars can approach history and archival source material, and argues that constructivism is especially suitable for an engagement with Hhistory. Rather than relying on secondary interpretations or treating the past as a repository of illustrative cases, the thesis works from primary sources to explore how crises were narrated and how the identity constructions in these narratives made policies imaginable within the historical context that it engages with. It does so with a reflexive account of how the material is gathered, what spaces and genres of narration it encompasses, and what the processes of engaging with the material subsequently also excludes and silences. The thesis also offers a suggestion for how IH can make use of the theories and methods advanced within constructivist IR and FPA. The conceptual framework developed in this thesis also provides historians of foreign policy and identity with an analytically structured way of moving from individual stories in specific texts to broader claims about identity and the boundaries of the politically possible, also without flattening the particularity and open-endedness that historians often champion. The contribution, in other words, is not another call for dialogue, but a demonstration and a study designed from the outset to be useful on both sides.

Research about the League: A fruitful site for dialogue

In addition to bridging divides, the thesis seeks to make a more specific contribution to the study of the League. The historical institution has notably gained renewed interest in IH in recent decades, but notably far less so in IR. One reason for this asymmetry might lie in the close connection between the Interwar period and IR's own disciplinary history. The prevailing biographical

[58] Leira – de Carvalho 2016.
[59] Lawson 2010:222.

narrative of IR is that it all started in this context when academics sought to establish "blueprints for peace" following the First World War.[60] In conjunction with the outbreak of the Second World War, E.H. Carr published the classic *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in which he painted a bleak picture of the League as an idealist ivory tower.[61] His verdict that the failures of collective security rested upon a moral facade and a disregard of power politics became a commonly accepted understanding among the post-war realists who were later told as the reigning champions following the so-called First Great Debate.

This disciplinary history has since been challenged and debunked. However, much like the myths of the nation, disciplines have their own stories of origin. One consequence of this narrative appears to have been that Interwar international relations and the League disappeared as a specific interest for IR scholars. Instead the organisation was used in reference; as an early example of liberal institutionalism or a foil for contrasting older and newer approaches to global order.[62] It also remained a piece of evidence used to support the realist thesis. As neorealism emerged as a prominent school, Interwar international relations became a common prelude demonstrating that international institutions could not prevent war under anarchy. Interwar cases, however, mostly appeared as anecdotal rather than empirical examples, with the League itself remaining in the margins.

Within IH, by contrast, the "neglect" of the League has lessened since the late 1980s. Susan Pedersen understands this revived attention to the historical organisation as a present-minded response to ongoing international events. For instance, she suggests that the collapse of the Soviet Union made Interwar debates on reconciling stability with new claims to sovereignty relevant again. Similarly, the breakup of Yugoslavia turned scholars attention toward the League's minorities protection system.[63] In the early 2000s, the pessimistic

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[60] Little, R. 1999. "Historiography and International Relations" *Review of International Studies* 25:291-299.

[61] Carr, E.H. 1939. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations***.** London: Macmillan Press. For contrasting examples, see Mitrany, D. 1944. *A Working Peace System: An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Claude, I.J. 1964. *Swords into Plowshares: The Problem and Progress of International Organization*. 3rd edition. New York: Random House.

[62] Consider, for example, Ruggie, J.G. 1998. *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalisation.* London: Routledge. See also Bull, H. 1977 [1995]. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics.* 2nd edition. London: Macmillan Press, p. 49; Wight, Martin. 1991. *International Theory: The Three Traditions.* Leicester: Leicester University Press, p. 361f.

[63] Pedersen, S. 2007. "Back to the League of Nations" *The American Historical Review* 112(4):1091-1117.

narrative of the League was thus increasingly rewritten, and a rich, multifaceted historiography emerged.[64] This was in part also stemming from the emergence of Transnational Histories and Global Histories, which led to new attention being given to the League's work beyond its collective security "failure" (e.g. on economic regulation and international health).[65]

In this vein, Patricia Clavin has explored the League's economic policy as a site for global and regional cooperation. Meanwhile, Pedersen has studied the League's mandates system as institutionalised imperial control, but also as a political space for its contestation.[66] The growing body of research has also increasingly moved away from a Eurocentric focus. It has explored non-European states' relations to the organisation, and adopted postcolonial lenses to show how the League exemplified a form of colonial governance.[67] These developments have also led to a renewed interest in the League's own social-bureaucratic history, including in the participation of Scandinavians to the League's internal work as well as Scandinavians as custodians of the League's imperial world-making.[68]

IR, however, has been slow to latch on to this renewed interest. This thesis therefore identifies work on the League as a particularly fruitful place for an intensified interdisciplinary dialogue. It brings to the League scholarship a

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[64] See, for example, Iriye, A. 2002. *Global Community: The Role of International Organization in the Making of the Contemporary World.* Berkely: University of California Press; Laqua, D. 2011. *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars.* London: I.B. Tauris; Mazower, M. 2012. *Governing the World: The History of an Idea.* New York: Penguin Press.

[65] See discussion in Gram-Skjoldager, K. – Ikonomou, H.A. 2019. "Making Sense of the League of Nations Secretariat – Historiographical and Conceptual Reflections on Early International Public Administration" *European History Quarterly* 40(3):420-444.

[66] Clavin, P. 2013. *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946*. New York: Oxford University Press; Pedersen, S. 2015. *The Guardians: the League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire.* New York: Oxford University Press. See also Steiner, Z. 2007. *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[67] See, for example, Legg, S. 2014. "An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies" *Journal of Historical Geography* 43:96-110; Goto-Shibata, H. 2017. "The League of Nations as an actor in East Asia: empires and technical cooperation with China" *International Relations of Asia-Pacific* 17(3):435-461; Hughes, C.R. 2021. *East Asians in the League of Nations: Actors, Empires, and Regions in Early Global Politics.* Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

[68] See, for example, Ikonomou, H.A. – Rasmussen, M. 2021. "Scandinavian Legal Internationalism and the Creation of the Permanent Court of International Justice" in Morris, P.S (ed.). *Transforming the Politics of International Law: The Advisory Committee of Jurists and the Formation of the World Court in the League of Nations.* London: Routledge; Engh – Ikonomou – Nissen 2025:869-901; Ikonomou, H.A. 2026. "Custodians of Imperial Worldmaking? Scandinavian Officials & the League's Global Ordering" *Scandinavian Journal of History,* 1-29. See also the "INNER_LEAGUE" project at the University of Copenhagen.

perspective that remains underrepresented even within the new historiography. This perspective involves examining how the international organisation was interpreted beyond its own halls and beyond the understandings of its major powers. It brings to IR an empirically grounded engagement with the very institution around which the discipline's origin myth was constructed. This institution is not approached as an anecdote or a data point, but as a lived experience in which the meaning attributed to the League was continuously reproduced and contested. Finally, it brings, to both fields, a demonstration of how a conceptual framework based on insights from constructivist IR and FPA, together the archival craft and reflexive engagement with history in IH scholarship, can be combined into a single study.

The interdisciplinary contribution of the thesis is thus threefold. First, it practises what three decades of bridge-building rhetoric has called for by delivering a study that transcends rather than merely speaks one way across the IR-IH divide. It takes the so-called problem of history seriously, treats history reflexively rather than as a repository of cases, and combines the historian's sensitivity to particularity and open-endedness with IR's conceptual explicitness. Second, it provides transferable pathways in both directions. It offers a framework that IR scholars can adopt to carry out reflexive and archivally grounded historical engagement, as well as a framework that historians can use as a conceptual and analytical toolkit. Third, it re-establishes Interwar international relations and the League as a serious object for IR inquiry. In doing so, it seeks to reconnect IR with IH by speaking to the latter's historiographical renaissance with regards to the study of the international institution.

1.3 Roadmap to the thesis

PART I of the thesis consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the research problem, the research questions, and the main contributions of the thesis. Chapter 2 develops a framework for addressing the research questions. It situates the approach in constructivism and sets out the reflexive historical constructivism upon which it rests. The second chapter also theorises the relation between identity and foreign policy, presents a layered model of identity, and develops a narrative approach to identity. It then introduces the research design, including the crisis moments that the thesis engages with and the spaces of narrations that are explored. It also presents the key analytical steps: a narrative analysis moving from specific texts, to issue narratives,

to foreign policy narratives, followed by the reconstruction of the identity elements in them. The chapter ends with a discussion of the exclusions and limitations that follow from these choices.

PART II also includes two chapters. Chapter 3 begins with introducing the context of Sweden's twentieth century foreign policy more in-depth, and reviews the current literature on Swedish foreign policy, national identity, and the question of consensus or conflict surrounding the same. This is done to situate the reader in the Swedish context and in the contemporary debates surrounding it. The chapter also illustrates why revisiting the Interwar period holds the potential to provide new insights to these scholarships. Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the four crisis moments that the empirical exploration focuses on. It does so by drawing on established scholarly interpretations of these cases and the dominant narratives through which they have commonly been understood. It also integrates documents from the League Archive and the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to introduce the official Swedish policy surrounding each case. This overview should not, however, be read as neutral accounts of what happened, but as narratives in their own right that the subsequent chapters further complicates.

PART III of the thesis encompasses four chapters presenting the five recurring foreign policy narratives that the empirical analysis identified, and shows how each of them constructed Sweden's national identity (Chapters 5-8). Each chapter proceeds through the same three steps. The chapter first examines the spatial and temporal *settings* of the narrative and the narrative act of *positioning* Sweden within them. The chapter then looks at the *characters* that populate the narrative and the *portraying* of the Swedish self and its others that follow. The chapters also explores the *emplotments* that select and explain events, including the *connecting* of Sweden to a past, present, and future from which its policy programme emerges. All chapters end by summarising the issue narratives that were reassembled into the respective foreign policy narratives presented in each chapter.

PART IV contains two concluding chapters. Chapter 9 presents the key findings and re-addresses the research questions formulated in this introduction. It compares the foreign policy narratives and the identity constructions that they produced. The chapter also reads Sweden's policy during each of the four cases against these findings. It does so to identify what paths taken, as well as not taken, were imaginable, and thus made possible, in Interwar Sweden. Chapter 10 closes the thesis by returning to the present. It brings the findings back to the contemporary scholarships and debates, and considers what they imply for the stories that have been told about Swedish twentieth century

foreign policy. It also suggests paths for future research and considers implications for where we find ourselves in the present.

2 Narrative, identity, and the possibility of policy

The research problem addressed in this thesis concerns how Swedish national identity and foreign policy were co-constituted in narratives that also made Sweden's policy in the League imaginable. This chapter develops a suggestion for how this problem can be explored. The chapter begins by situating the theoretical and methodological approach in linguistic constructivism. It discusses the overarching ontological and epistemological premises upon which the research carried out in this thesis rests. The chapter then describes an approach to theorising the link between national identity and foreign policy, as well as to conceptualising identity. This approach develops a narrative understanding of the construction of identity and possibilities for foreign policy. Following this, the next section introduces the research design, including the selection of crisis moments and the spaces of narration that the thesis engages with. This section also specifies the analytical moves carried out in the thesis. It describes how the analysis proceeds from assembling specific texts into issue narratives to identifying the broader foreign policy narratives that cut across them, then subsequently engages in identity reconstruction. The chapter ends with a reflexive discussion on the limitations of the theoretical assumptions and methodological choices made.

2.1 Constructivism as the point of departure

Defining what constructivism actually entails had been described as "a fraught exercise in a crowded field." [69] Claiming that research takes a constructivist

[69] Barkin, J.S – Sjoberg, L. 2019. "Understanding and Classifying Constructivisms" in Barkin, J.S – Sjoberg, L. (eds.) *International Relations' Last Synthesis? Decoupling Constructivist and Critical Approaches.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 43. Constructivism is thus used to cover an incredibly broad movement encompassing everything from Weberian interpretative sociology and symbolic interactionism to poststructuralism(s) and hermeneutics.

position does not say much in and of itself. Constructivism in the social sciences encompass centuries of intellectual developments, where this development has not had a single, coherent trajectory. Constructivism is used to describe a metatheoretical stance about reality and how scholars can interpret that reality. It is also a social theory about the role of knowledge and knowledgeable agents in the constitution of reality. Then, in addition, it is a theoretical and empirical perspective in IR. The latter form of constructivism relies on the former two and maintains that the study of international relations should be based on social and/or linguistic ontological and epistemological foundations.[70] This section discusses how the theoretical and methodological approach taken in this thesis is positioned in relation to broader debates within constructivist IR. It locates this approach in what can be called a linguistic constructivism which holds that social reality is constituted by structures of language, not merely described by them.

Constructivism and history

Constructivism was initially brought in to challenge the dominant "neo-neo" theories of the IR discipline. At this time, it was essentially an argument about the importance of history and historical change. Its emergence is often credited to Nicholas Onuf's *Worlds of Our Making*. For him, the practical realities of daily life reside in constitutive processes linked by history rather than logic.[71] Friedrich Kratochwil likewise advocated for an attentiveness to history as a radical alternative to the positivist argument.[72] Christian Reus-Smit later credited constructivism with bringing history back to IR. He observed how many of these scholars turned to historical inquiry to highlight the contingent meaning and evolution of international practices and social structures.[73]

However, that claim has also been contested. Early constructivists have been called out for stopping short and using history mainly to invalidate neo-

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[70] Adler, E. 2013. "Constructivism in International Relations: Sources, Contributions and Debates" in Carlsnaes, W. – Risse, T. – Simmons, B. A. (eds.) *Handbook of International Relations.* 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications, p. 114.

[71] Onuf, N.G. 1989 [2012]. *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations.* London: Routledge. See also Onuf, N.G. 1991. "Sovereignty: Outline of a Conceptual History" *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 16(4):425-446.

[72] Kratochwil, F. 1986 "Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality: An Inquiry into the Formation of the State System" *World Politics* 39(1):27-52.

[73] Reus-Smit, C. 2008. "Reading History through Constructivist Eyes" *Millennium* 37(2):395-414.

realist structural determinism and to criticise the "historical amnesia" afflicting IR in the early 1980s. Responding directly to Reus-Smit, Halvard Leira and Benjamin de Carvalho examined how constructivists have actually done history.[74] They found that although history was at the core of their agenda, early constructivists rarely went through the sources themselves. Instead, they relied, uncritically, on the work of historians. They therefore never engaged properly with the "problem of history" and often operated at the same general level as the neorealists they sought to critique.

Early constructivism proposed the idea of the double construction of reality and knowledge. This offered an opening into these important conversations. But then, as the programme was mainstreamed, it reverted back to a more traditional view of history. Onuf and Kratochwil had challenged prevailing notions of science. However, scholars like Emanuel Adler and Alexander Wendt, in "seizing the middle" ground between ontological and epistemological positions, came to accept scientific explanation and the possibility of *knowing* history.[75] Critics argue that constructivist IR was thereby purged of its early critical potential and lost its reflexivity about the social construction of knowledge.[76] It also fumbled a chance to restart conversations with historians who had become more estranged from IR following its entrenchment of (neo)positivist epistemology.

At the same time, the second generation of constructivist IR scholars did begin producing historical case studies. They explored how ideational and normative processes had come to shape and change the world. However, they used these findings mainly as leverage to re-engage with conventional IR. In other words, they were often driven by a progressive view of history organised around, for example, norm evolution. As Leira and de Carvalho note, this produced a smothering of historical narrative and an underlying logic in which Western history became "global in scope and universal in application."[77] Their engagement with the conventional thus came at the cost of the double hermeneutics.

The thesis responds to these challenges to constructivism and history. It does so by refraining from adopting an understanding of history as progression

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[74] Leira – de Carvalho 2016. See also Kressler, O. – Steele, B. 2016. "Constructing IR: The Third Generation" *European Review of International Studies* 3(3):7-13.
[75] Adler, E. 1997. "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics" *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3):319-363; Wendt, A. 1999. *Social Theory of International Relations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[76] McCourt, D. 2016 "Constructivism's Contemporary Crisis and the Challenge of Reflexivity" *European Review of International Studies* 3(3):40-51.
[77] Leira – de Carvalho 2016:108.

and avoiding repeating the previous reliance on secondary interpretations of historical cases. Rather than offering another overarching story of how the world works, it subsequently aligns with the long-standing claim made by historians that the world is much messier and more complex than mainstream IR has been willing to admit.[78] The thesis therefore shares with historians a greater appreciation for historical open-endedness and a preference for local and particular stories over the grand narratives of human and social development that tend to be used by IR. However, it nonetheless argues that linguistic constructivist IR can go hand-in-hand with this mission.

The narrative construction of reality

IR scholars have increasing turned to narrative as a way to make sense of international politics. This development is often framed as a "narrative turn" which has "opened the discipline to insights from the humanities."[79] This turn has been closely connected to constructivist concerns with the role of language and meaning-making. But still, IR scholarship on narrative has largely focused on instrumentality and the deliberate and strategic use of stories to advance (usually state) interests.[80] This means that actors and the world outside them are commonly seen as possessing meaning *prior* to being narrated. A contrasting perspective instead emphasises how actors narrate within already existing narrative structures that simultaneously enable and constrain them. In this narrative tradition, actors themselves are understood as being given meaning and coming into being through narration.

The latter approach is structure-centric, as opposed to actor-centric. It rests on an ontology in which language is seen as constitutive of social reality and where narratives are embedded within broader discursive structures that limit actors' capacity to alter them.[81] The thesis follows this *narrative ontology*. This means that it understands narrative agents as inseparable from an already narratively ordered space where they are granted limited agency over narrative

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[78] Leira – de Carvalho 2016:111.
[79] Freistein, K. – Gadinger, F. – Groth, S. 2025. "Studying Narratives in International Relations" *International Studies Perspectives* 26(4):434-455, p. 434.
[80] See discussion in Holland, J. – Mathieu, X. 2023. "Narratology and US Foreign Policy in Syria: Beyond identity binaries, towards narrative power" *International Studies Quarterly* 67(4):1-12.
[81] Krulichová 2025. See also Ringmar, E. 1996. *Identity, interest and action: A cultural explanation of Sweden's intervention in the Thirty Year War.* Cambridge: Cambride University Press, p. 74; Browning, C.S. 2008. *Constructivism, Narrative and Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Findland.* Bern: Peter Lang, p. 46f; Berenskoetter, F. 2014. "Parameters of a national biography" *European Journal of International Relations* 20(1):262-288.

construction.[82] From this perspective, the possibility of identity or policy *change* requires seeing narrative as both structured and unstable. Although narratives attempt to construct themselves as stable, inconsistencies leave open the possibility of destabilisation.[83]

Even if it builds on a narrative ontology, the conceptual framework developed in the following section still acknowledges possibilities for change and agency. These are especially captured through the concept of *narrative contestation*.[84] Narratives do not exist independently of the human agents that narrate them into being, even if these agents do not exist independently of already produced narrative structures either. It is precisely through this mutual constitution that a narratively bounded agency and a capacity for contestation becomes possible, albeit a capacity which is narratively constrained.[85] This relates to the understanding of *narrative power* that is adopted within the framework used in this thesis. In actor-centric approaches, based on an individualist ontology, power often becomes about narrative agents being able to persuade others to do something they previously would not do. For example, actors can persuade others to accept policies that contradict their real interests. From a narrative ontology, however, such interests are themselves products of power. Narrative power, in this framework, is understood as being not merely about getting others to do something, but about shaping what becomes possible and imaginable to do in the first place.[86]

Narrative power thus operates *through* the narrative, or the production of systems of meaning that are formed by a narrative agent when they engage in narration. Power is not something that a narrative agent inherently possesses, but something that can be found in what the narratives themselves *do* in producing the fields of possibility in which action takes place. Being able to contest meanings then depends on the sedimentation of these meanings – how they become partly stabilised and reproduced over time.[87] Some narratives, such as the biographical narratives of nations or the master narratives on how the world itself works, are often more sedimented and fundamental to how the

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[82] See discussion in Hagström – Gustafsson 2019.
[83] Wæver 2002; Wæver, O. 2005. "European integration and security: analysing French and German discourses on state, nation, and Europe" in Howarth, D. – Torfing, J. (eds.). *Discourse theory in European politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
[84] Linus Hagström and Karl Gustafsson, also following a narrative ontology, argue that narratives can still be rejected. Narrative power is thus accompanied by a degree of narrative resistance, what I instead refer to as narrative contestation, see Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:396f.
[85] Hansen 2006:21. See also Spencer, A. 2016. *Romantic Narratives in International Relations: Pirates, Rebels and Mercenaries.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 32.
[86] Spencer 2016:26f; Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:395; Krulichová 2025:5.
[87] Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:396.

world and the national self can be understood. Meanwhile other narratives, for instance related to specific policy issues, provide more room for contestation. This does not mean that narrative agents do not hold any agency (or power) in producing and contesting narratives. However, when, where, or by whom it is possible to narrate (i.e. to perform the act of telling stories) is also narratively laden. For instance, narrative structures produce an understanding of what counts as foreign policy or scientific knowledge. They delimit who (or what subjects) can participate in the narrative production of these understandings. The act of narrating and the power of narratives consequently do not stop within the confines of what we as scholars observe. As Stefano Guzzini points out, scholarship likewise participates in the boundaries of the possible.[88]

The narrative construction of knowledge

Within the narrative history tradition, international relations are not only studied through narrative, but seen as constituted by it. Geoffrey Roberts, for instance, sees international history as a domain of actions, events, and contexts where specific stories can be told about particularities, while their intersections can be captured in general narratives.[89] Roberts understanding resonates well with mainstream constructivist conceptions of causal narratives. In this understanding, historical narratives are not merely descriptive but are integral to explanation. In order to explain a given context, constructivist historical analyses often trace how subjective and intersubjective meanings evolve over time.[90]

Mainstream constructivists tend to adopt epistemological assumptions that sit in the middle ground between structuralism and individualism, and between materialism and idealism. This allows approaches seeking (quasi-)causal relationships.[91] This move has generated two kinds of criticism. Critics point to the way these constructivists confine identity to the ideational and measure it against material factors. As Ole Wæver notes, if the ideational is

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[88] Guzzini, S. 2000. "A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations" European Journal of International Relations 6(2):147-182, p. 174f.
[89] Roberts, G. 2006. "History, theory and the narrative turn in IR" *Review of International Studies* 32:703-714. See also Suganami, H. 1999. "Agents, Structures, Narrative" *European Journal of International Relations* 5(3):365-386. For Suganami, although he is often referred to the later English School, international politics is socially constituted. Knowledge of it therefore requires historical, interpretative, and narrative approaches. Suganami thus rejected scientific realism and emphasised historical specificity in how causal explanations are constructed.
[90] Adler 2013:102. See also discussion in Pouliot, V. 2007. "'Sobjectivism': Toward a Constructivist Methodology" *International Studies Quarterly* 51:359-384.
[91] Adler 1997; Wendt 1999.

reducible, it returns to being a secondary, residual or ad hoc variable, and offers only a weak account of causal explanation.[92] Additionally, critics rejecting the pairing of constructivism with scientific realism also note a tension between an interpretive ontology and an epistemology aspiring to objective, generalisable knowledge.[93]

Although constructivism is ultimately about social construction, the mainstream often takes reality as (partly) given by arguing that scholars can recover actors' meanings while ignoring how an account of the same is itself constructed by the researcher.[94] Moreover, if identities are constituted through historically situated practices, then historical inquiry should be central. However, in practice, history has often been treated as an unproblematic repository of empirical cases illustrating theoretical claims.[95] History is rarely treated as the constitutive realm in which meanings are actively produced and disputed. In searching for patterned regularities, constructivist scholars risk disregarding the unending struggle over meaning which has occurred throughout history.

This thesis moves away from the mainstream constructivist approach to historical narratives as causal stories. Instead, it follows a line of reasoning developed by Roxanne Doty. Doty argues that showing that a decision is probable given certain circumstances fails to consider how this decision was made possible in the first place. The causal approach, she suggested, tends to presuppose a particular subjectivity and close off inquiry of how actors came to be understood as certain kinds of subject (e.g. as civilised nations or security threats).[96] Instead, Doty proposed posing *how-possible* questions. By taking this approach, this thesis can explore how narratives produce meanings that create certain possibilities and exclude others. The study of narrative in historical analysis then becomes about how a myriad of overlapping and paradoxical stories shaped the way international politics was imagined.

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[92] Wæver 2002:22. See also Palan, R. 2000. "A world of their making: an evalutation of the constructivist critique in International Relations" *Review of International Studies* 26:575-598; Zehfuss, M. 2002 [2009]. *Constructivism in International Relations: the politics of reality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A similar critique is also put forward by Guzzini who argues that such a move "narrows the ontology to individualism, conceives of ideas as objects, and imposes a vision of ideas as relevant only if causally efficient", 2022:37.

[93] Hynek, N. – Teti, A. 2010. "Saving Identity from Postmodernism? The Normalization of Constructivism in International Relations" *Contemporary Political Theory* 9(2):171-199; See also discussion in Peltonen, H. 2017. "A tale of two cognitions: The Evolution of Social Constructivism in International Relations" Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional 60(1).

[94] See Zehfuss 2009:36.

[95] Leira – de Carvalho 2016.

[96] Doty 1993:298.

As Hayden White pointed out, academic history writing has itself been about assembling scattered occurrences into meaningful stories. For him, history was never a neutral record of facts but a form of narrative construction in which historians inevitably also shaped the past.[97] This perspective notably restores the early constructivist critique of science and knowledge production. This critique argues that the observing subject and object cannot be separated, but are mutually implicated.[98] In other words, history is just as much formed by how the observing scholar poses questions, uses theoretical concepts, and deploys analytical categories. To observe history can therefore not be seen as a neutral act, because history is also constructed through its observation.

Scientific knowledge is itself socially constructed. This thesis therefore stresses a reflexive relationship between the construction of knowledge and the creation of social reality. Reflexivity from this perspective turns the researcher's attention back on themselves; their assumptions, positionality, and the power involved in producing knowledge.[99] In short, a reflexive researcher recognises that they are a part of the world they study, and that their own writings are a part of constituting that world. This epistemological point of view raised its own challenges for the research project described in this this thesis. Discussion of these is deferred to the chapter's concluding discussion below.

2.2 Theorising policy, identity, and narrative

Conversations about the relationship between national identity and foreign policy occupy a central place within constructivist IR scholarship.[100] Main-

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[97] White, H. 1973. *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; White, H. 1987. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

[98] Kurowska, X. – Kratockwil, F. 2012. "The Social Constructivist Sensibility and CSDP Research" in Kurowska, X. – Breuer, F. (eds.) *Explaining the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy: Theory in action.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

[99] Kessler, O. – Capan, Z.G. – Leira, H. – Kustermans, J. 2025. "Historicizing theory at the end of the world" *European Journal of International Relations* 31(4):1-25. See also Jackson, T. 2016. *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations.* 2nd edition. London: Routledge, chapter 6 Reflexivity.

[100] In early conceptualisations of identity in the social sciences it often referred to the construction of an individual self, but in this thesis identity is used to refer to collectives. From a linguistic constructivist perspective, individuals do not possess identities prior to social interaction because they become identifiable (and identify themselves) through the discourses available.

stream constructivists conceptualise identity as a relatively stable set of socially and historically developed understandings of the state that shape its interests and guide foreign policy behaviour. Meanwhile, linguistic constructivsts and poststructuralists have challenged this view by emphasising the mutually constitutive relationship between identity and policy. This section of the chapter engages with these debates to position the framework developed in this thesis within them. It seeks to clarify how this thesis specifically theorises the link between identity and policy.[101] Rather than treating identity as a variable explaning policy outcomes, this thesis focuses on how foreign policy narratives, and the representations of the national self in them, shape how policy becomes imaginable. This section of the chapter therefore also discusses how identity can be conceptualised, and details a layered model of identity. By further specifying how identity can be understood as constituted in narratives, it develops a theoretically informed narrative approach to identity.

National identity and the possibility of foreign policy

Constructivism has traditionally theorised the link between national identity and foreign policy in the following way. The identities of states are seen to shape their interests, and subsequently to provide guidance for their foreign policies.[102] In other words, foreign policy behaviour has been cast as an *effect* of identity. It does not treat identity as independent of interest, since identity constitutes interest. However, this understanding still suggests that identity can be analysed as something separate from policy and action, because otherwise the causal logic collapses. It also suggests that identity must, at a given point in time, be stable in order to exert a causal effect. Instead, the theoretical framework developed in this thesis draws on linguistic constructivist and poststructuralist IR scholars. They turn this logic on its head.

From the perspective developed by linguistic constructivists and poststructualists, foreign policy is not understood as the result of a pre-existing identity,

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Language thus provides the categories and meanings through which people understand themselves and others (including identities such as woman, scholar, or Swede).

[101] The subsection gives limited attention to system level approaches to identity, such as Alexander Wendt's approach, and to individual and cognitive models often found in FPA.

[102] Jepperson, R.L. – Wendt, A. – Katzenstein, P.J. 1996. "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security" in Katzenstein, P.J. (eds.) *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics.* New York: Columbia University Press. See also Price, R. – Reus-Smit, C. 1998. "Dangerous Liaisons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism" *European Journal of International Relations* 4(3):259-294; Barnett, M. 1999. "Culture, Strategy and Foreign Policy Change: Israel's Road to Oslo" *European Journal of International Relations* 5(1):5-36.

instead it intervenes in the very (re)production and (de)stabilisation of identity. Identities are thus simultaneously a product of, and a justification for, foreign policy. The two are in a mutually constitutive relationship.[103] Foreign policy is not a response to an external world, but rather a discursive practice that produces the boundaries between an "inside" and an "outside", making a state's identity possible in the first place.[104] Two implications follow. Identity cannot be taken for granted and serve as the starting point of an analysis of foreign policy, since identity and policy produce each other. Because identity is always in the process of being reproduced, one cannot assume a single, stable identity from which a causal argument can be made.[105]

This understanding of the relationship between foreign policy and national identity often draws on the ideas of critical thinkers like Richard Ashley and R.B.J Walker. They asserted that foreign policy is a "boundary-producing" practice and that identity depends upon difference, or on the distinction of a self from an other.[106] William Connolly likewise stresses that identity is constituted through relations of difference so that the construction of external others stabilises internal political unity.[107] Foreign policy discourses then maintain these distinctions by defining threats, dangers, and differences, and by representing external actors as others against which the state itself can be defined. Later development of these ideas have clarified that difference does not need to be antagonistic or threatening. Instead, it can also be found in the difference between the self and its associated others.[108]

This theorisation of foreign policy and national identity also challenges how the former can be conceptualised. In this vein, scholars such as Doty and Lene Hansen have argued for a broadening of the study of foreign policy beyond specific decisions and temporally and spatially bounded events. They suggest we should move it more towards analysis of the wider processes

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[103] Hansen 2006:26.
[104] Campbell, D. 1992. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 9.
[105] Wæver 2002.
[106] Ashley, R.K. 1984. "The Poverty of Neorealism" *International Organisation* 38(2):225-286; Walker, R.B.J. 1993. *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[107] Connolly, W.E. 1991. *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox.* Ithaca: University of Minnesota Press. See also Shapiro, M.J. 1997. *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
[108][108] Hansen 2006:39. See also Hopf, T. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 & 1999.* New York: Cornell University Press, p. 7; Rumelili, B. 2007. *Constructing Regional Community and Order in Europe and Southeast Asia.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

through which foreign policy is constructed and imagined. They therefore suggest expanding analyses beyond official texts to broader foreign policy debates, media discourse, popular culture, and marginal political discourses.[109] Foreign policy is thereby reconceptualised as a dispersed set of discursive practices, including the production of foreign policy narratives in various spaces of narration. It is no longer confined to the narrow domain of state decision-making.

At the same time, the interpretations that state leaders and representatives make, the policies they pursue, and the actions they take, are understood as intimately linked to foreign policy narratives and the construction of national identity. The key here is how narrative and identity provide certain possibilities for what policies and actions are deemed reasonable and even thinkable. They can also be seen to delimit possibilities within the narrower context of state decision-making. Narrative is thus not only a condition for social *being*, but also for social *action*.[110] Jutta Weldes, for example, reconstructed identity as it appeared in the wider social context, and argued that such discourses informed how state leaders made sense of particular events (in her work, the US decision-makers during the Cuban missile crisis). At the same time, Weldes showed that discourse has several scripts that are by no means homogenous. We therefore cannot predict, in a generic manner, which script will inform responses to world affairs.[111]

What this means is that national identity is neither an external cause nor an internal reason for foreign policy and action. This is because those reasons are multiple and often paradoxical or even conflicting. In line with the ontological position established earlier in this chapter, (narrative) agents are nonetheless understood as operating within the (narrative) boundaries of the imaginable, also with regards to how the nation and its foreign policy can be imagined. In the following sections, the thesis therefore builds a conceptual framework for how to explore these boundaries, and thus how Swedish national identity and foreign policy within the League was articulated and made sense of, in both official texts and in the wider political debate in Sweden at the time. It does so by turning to the identity and narrative constructions that made certain paths reasonable and thinkable. It understands them as doing so by attaching particular meanings to Sweden and its participation in the international organisation.

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[109] Doty 1993:303; Hansen 2006:64.

[110] Somers, M. 1994. "The narrative construction of identity: a relational and network approach" *Theory and Society* 23(5):605-649, see p. 621.

[111] Weldes, J.1999. *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 219

Identity as social, relational, and layered

Identity as a concept emerged in the social sciences in the mid-twentieth century and gained ground in IR after the Cold War, At this time, questions about collective identities spurred constructivists to explore the salience of identity for explaining historical change. As Srdjan Vucetic points out, the concept posed a dilemma: define identity narrowly and you risk merely relabelling existing categories such as role or subject position, but define it broadly and you risk a totalising claim on everything coming out of culture.[112] Some have therefore argued that theorising and conceptualising identity is impossible, either because identities are too fragmented and contingent to be analytically meaningful, or because identity collapses into the discursive resources out of which it is formed. Two established approaches to identity are briefly considered here. Then the thesis moves on to describe how, despite the difficulties, it theorises and conceptualises identity.

The mainstream constructivist conception of identity is exemplified by the way Peter J. Katzenstein and his co-authors understood it. They saw the state as a social actor embedded in social rules and conventions that constitute its identity and supply the reasons behind its interests. In Katzenstein's edited volume, identity is theorised as contextual and progressive; as inseparable from its historical process and cultural setting. At the core of identity is the domestic and global institutional environments and the social interaction that occur within those contexts over time.[113] Michael Barnett likewise understood identity as fundamentally social and relational, and as contingent upon interactions with others within institutional contexts.[114] Identity is thus seen as part of a cultural-institutional structure within which actors define their interests and options for action. From this identity emerge relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about the self.

Another approach to identity is inspired by psychology and cognitive models. For FPA scholars, the emphasis is often on individual decision-making and how state leaders respond to international events based on their belief systems, (mis)perceptions, historical analogies, or role conceptions.[115] Some IR scholars stressing the importance of collective identities also relate them to

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[112] Vucetic, S. 2017. "Identity and Foreign Policy" in Erin, H. (ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.* Online edition, New York: Oxford Academic.
[113] Jepperson *et al* 1996.
[114] Barnett 1999:9.
[115] Hudson 2005; Houghton 2007.

individual level cognition to show how they have an effect on leaders' decisions.[116] Ted Hopf, albeit criticising social psychology for not developing useful theories of social identity, also built upon it by arguing that societies consist of a social cognitive structure within which many discursive formations operate that are constituted by identities.[117]

This thesis moves beyond both these suggestions for two reasons. First, they assume an identity existing prior to language, which actors possess historically, socially, or cognitively, and which functions as a stable attribute carried into social interactions as a tool for interpretation and action. For linguistic constructivists, identity holds no meaning prior to being represented in language and its construction is never completed. Second, because these perspectives imply a coherent collective, and a stable internal self-understanding, they struggle to make sense of identity change and contestation. In the conceptualisation drawn on here, there is no single self, but rather many competing representations of it.[118]

Hopf, by also drawing on linguistic constructivism, notably still manages to work around this tension by illustrating that identity discourses are never homogeneous. He regarded social cognitive structures as establishing "boundaries of discourse" within a society.[119] For Hopf, identities are thus products of social interactions with others and are cognitively necessary for individuals to make sense of the world. However, at the same time, they are also embedded in the structures of everyday life, where these structures both enable and discourage particular understandings of the external world.[120] The most important mechanism for identity (re)production for Hopf was habit, namely the everyday reproduction of self and other relations through a collection of discursive practices.[121]

In this framework of this thesis, the identity of a collective is similarily understood as *social.* This is because *language* is inherently social. Language and identity are formed through processes of socialisation, and make up a structure that enables as well as limits, particular understandings of the world. Identity is therefore produced intersubjectively, but it is not only socially

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[116] Hall, R.B. 1999. *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems.* New York: Columbia University Press, see p. 33
[117] Hopf 2002:3f
[118] See discussion in Wæver 2002:22.
[119] Hopf 2002:10f
[120] Hopf, T. 2009. "Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split" in Abdelal, R. – Herrera, Y.M. – Johnston, A.I. (eds.) *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, see p. 280f.
[121] Hopf 2002:10f

agreed upon, it is constituted and maintained in discourse.[122] On an individual level, identity provides axes of interpretation through the shared meaning-making processes within a group, community, or society. It presents a way for a collective self to interpret its surroundings that is continuously (re)produced.[123] A national identity thus produces, and is produced by, intersubjectively constructed understandings of a national self based on narratives about a collective past, present, and future.

Treating identity as social implies that it is formed in interactions. The way that many individuals collectively form identity results in various and overlapping constructions of the self. Identity is also formed in relation to others which similarly leads to numerous self-constructions. This means that identity is, in the framework of the thesis, correspondingly understood as *relational*.[124] Identity is constituted by distinguishing the self's identity from that of others, and responding to who the self is in relation to alternative representations.[125] Being a small state is, for example, meaningless without having a conception of what non-small state identity looks like.[126] This difference can be located both spatially and temporally, emerging in dialogue with a historical self or an external other.[127] Difference is consequently not necessarily oppositional. The other does not have to be threatening. Other-portrayals thus vary in their degree of otherness and can allow for positive associations as well.[128]

Finally, in this thesis identity is also understood as *layered.* As opposed to seeing identity as stable or fixed, it is open for contestation as different portrayals of the self continuously play out and interact. However, identity is not treated as totally fluid either, since its function as a social structure provides constraints for what it is possible for the collective self to imagine. Identity is therefore seen as constituted on multiple levels. The "less institutionalised layers interact with and build on layers that are more institutionalised."[129] Some

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[122] Hansen 2006:18f.
[123] Hopf 2009:281.
[124] Relationality is not unique to linguistic constructivist and poststructuralist takes on identity. Although it was Ashley who first suggested that foreign policy could be understood as a specific sort of boundary-producing political performance, it has become widely acknowledged in constructivist takes. Barnett, for instance, also formulated a relational definition of identity, see 1999:9.
[125] Neumann, IB. 1996. *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations.* London: Routledge; Guillaume, X. 2011. *International Relations and Identity: a dialogical approach*. London: Routledge, see p. 37.
[126] cf. Hopf 2002:7
[127] Guzzini, S. 2022. "Visions of itself' in Foreign Policy Analysis: From the Role of Ideas to Identity and Recognition" *Teoria Polityki* 6:33-57.
[128] Rumelili 2007:21; Hansen 2006:41.
[129] Hagström – Gustafsson 2015:6.

layers of identity are more solidly sedimented, more fundamental to it, and thus less open for contestation and resilient to change. However, these layers enable different constructions of the self in less sedimented layers. Contestation always needs to engage with what is already in place, but the layers are also connected. The shallower layers can reproduce, as well as rewrite, the more sedimented elements of collective identity.[130]

A layered model of identity

The remainder of this section is devoted to developing a layered model to analyse identity. This model, and its so-called *identity elements*, should be understood as analytical tools that can be used to explore the content and contestation of national identity in a given context. While I draw on a theoretical understanding of identity as social, relational, and layered, the identity elements established here have been reached abductively. The layered model is inspired by the work of Ole Wæver, and later developments by Karl Gustafsson and Linus Hagström.[131] It is developed in conjunction with a narrative understanding of identity to which I return in the following subsection. Although the layered model is general, the specific content, including what is present in different layers, cannot be unproblematically transferred across contexts. The meanings taken to exist in each layer of Swedish national identity have been uncovered through close dialogue with the source material.

I understand the most sedimented layers of Sweden's narrated identity to concern its international **position**, and where it is located in terms of its *hierarchical categories*. This positioning includes processes of categorisation and differentiation. The latter notion of differentiation often, but not necessarily, includes understandings of otherness based on ideas about hierarchy in international order. Sweden's position as a "small state", for instance, implies a differentiation from non-small states.[132] Notably, categorisations can sometimes be constructed as simultaneously inferior and superior. Sweden as a "small state" was often understood as inferior in material terms, but as morally superior because this was linked to it having traits such as being peaceful. This contradiction shows how the aspects of identity connected with heirarchical position can enable different paths for contestation of less sedimented layers.

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[130] Wæver 2002:33

[131] Wæver 2005; Hagström – Gustafsson 2015.

[132] Sweden's constructed position speaks to the recent developments in small state research which acknowledges the social construction of smallness, and that political elites makes sense of what is possible based on how they understand the nation's hierarchal and categorial position in an international setting, see Neumann, I.B. – Gstöhl, S. 2014. *Small States in International Relations.* London: Routledge.

Then where these less sedimented layers are contested, they can also alter the meaning of more sedimented identity elements.

The middle layers of Sweden's identity revolve around more specific **self-** and **other-portrayals**. These layers are less fundamental and more open to contestation. They include descriptions of the self, including *traits* (e.g. peaceful, honourable, vulnerable). They also involve related portrayals of the other (e.g. aggressive, dishonourable, powerful). They further encompass ascribing identity *roles* and *responsibilities*. More than just characteristics, these layers describe who the self is in terms of its role conception vis-à-vis the role of others.[133] They describe the self's (non)-responsibilities vis-à-vis (or toward) the other.[134] While these identity elements allow competition between different understandings of the self, traits, roles, and responsibilities do not emerge out of nowhere. They are interpretations of the self that have been reproduced intersubjectively over time. However, they can be changed in that they can be more selectively drawn upon and contested.

The above distinction between the identity elements in these two layers poses an analytical challenge that requires discussion before moving on to the least sedimented layers of identity. This challenge involves which layer some elements belong to. For example, "small" and "neutral" can notably be understood as both categories and portrayals. This is further addressed in the following section when narratives are presented as producing, and being produced out of, identity. An important distinction lies in the narrative function of a particular element. There is a difference between positioning Sweden as belonging to a group of small or neutral states, and portraying Sweden as being small or fulfilling a neutral role. The latter notably fills such terms with more detailed meaning. For instance, portrayals of Sweden *being* neutral, especially in Interwar peacetime, often included contrasting conceptions. Meanwhile the portrayal of Sweden *belonging* to a group of (ex-)neutral states in international contexts was broadly recognised. The layers must thus be understood as interactive as specific traits, roles, and responsibilities are also given priority within the more sedimented layer.

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[133] Consider, for example, McCourt, D.M. 2011 "Role-playing and identity affirmation in international politics: Britain's reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982" *Review of International Studies* 37:1599-1621; Harnisch, S. – Frank, C. – Maull, H.W. 2011. *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses.* New York: Routledge. See also Hansen 2006:60.

[134] cf. Hansen 2006:50; Ashizawa, K. 2008 "When Identity Matters: State Identity, Regional Institution-Building, and Japanese Foreign Policy" *International Studies Review* 10:571-598.

Finally, the least sedimented layer is where the nation's **programme** is formed and debated. When speaking of Sweden's identity, this is where foreign policies and the (ir)relevance of international issues for Sweden are constructed and contested. It is where the so-called national interest emerges out of interpretations of certain problems that are enabled by, and produced out of, the imaginaries of the nation formed in more sedimented layers. This layer thus provides the *reasons* why a specific programme is needed, the *objectives* of a programme, and what it aims to achieve. It also provides the *actions* needed for how to realise it. How problems and policies are discussed in this layer is, however, shaped by and has consequences for the other layers.

If Sweden's others are narrated as behaving aggressively, the other layers are likely to provide guidance on possible reasons (e.g. vulnerability or morality), objectives (e.g. stability or justice), and actions (e.g. passivity or activism). But this narration of others is also likely to strengthen self-portrayals such as those that depict Sweden's vulnerabilities or its honourable traits. Notably, similar reasons (because we are vulnerable) and objectives (we need international stability) can still lead to different interpretations of possible courses of action (and must be passive *or* active). Interpretations of the nation's role or responsibility in a given situation can similarly involve different conclusions about how to approach this (i.e. contestation in the least sedimented layer). In contrast, we might sometimes also observe a consensus on how to deal with a problem, but one which emerges from different conceptions of responsibilities and roles (i.e. contestation in the middle layer).[135]

The advantages of a layered model are two-fold. First, this model allows for change within continuity as the presence of contestation varies in the different layers of the identity. Some layeres are more sedimented and more resilient to change, whereas other layers are less so and thus more changable.[136] Second, this model clarifies how agency is possible and constrained. Some layers leave less room for contestation, while others are more open to it and therefore expand the boundaries for agency.[137] The following section presents

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[135] Abdelal and colleagues clarifies what is meant by contestation in this context, see Abdelal, R. – Herrera, Y.M. – Johnston, A.I. – McDermott, R. 2012. "Identity as a Variable" in Abdelal, R. – Herrera, Y.M. – Johnston, A.I. (eds.) *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. They conceptualise identity as varying along the dimensions of content and contestation. Content describes the *meaning* of a identity. In this thesis, the content encompasses the positions, self-portrayals, and programmes of the collective as detailed above. Contestation, however, refers to the *presence of (dis)agreement* within the collective over that content.

[136] Wæver 2005:36.

[137] Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:397.

an understanding of identity as being constituted in narratives. It describes how these narratives are central for understanding how contestation occurs because the content of identity (positions, self- and other-representations, and programmes) can be disputed through the stories that constitute them.

The narrative construction of identity and policy

A core idea in constructivist theorisation is that identity is constituted over time. This includes an understanding that narratives are there to construct a continuity that can be call a self. Barnett argued that narrative is one of the most important mechanisms by which a nation constructs its identity; Hansen identified temporality and temporal constructs as a key feature of national identity; and Weldes saw competing narratives of foreign policy crises as made possible by the security imaginaries and identities of their narrators.[138] Because narratives both construct political reality and function as a communicative practice, they can be regarded as particularly valuable sources for analyses attentive to "the relational and contested nature of socio-political process in world politics."[139]

A vital part of any identity is thus its *narrative dimension*. Central to the processes of socialisation that form a collective are narratives about experience: it is the socialisation of a community into narratives about where we came from, where we are now, and where we are going that shapes and defines the "we".[140] Non-linguistic practices also constitute identity, but this thesis focuses on narratives because stories about the national self encompass the intersubjective and historically created meanings about its place in the world, its key properties and differentiations, and its purposes and interests. Since the content of identity is constantly reproduced through multiple, overlapping, and, at times, competing stories, narratives become part of both constructing and contesting the nation's positions, self-portrayals, and programmes.

A common approach within the national identity scholarship is therefore to emphasise the narratives that form national biographies.[141] This has been a common characteristic in the ontological security literature, which argues that states seek to maintain stability and continuity in foreign policy through biographical narratives, and similar reasoning appears in research on historical

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[138] Barnett 1999:12; Weldes 1999:40; Hansen 2006:48f.
[139] Freistein *et al* 2025.
[140] Browning 2008:54; see also Krebs, R.R. 2015. *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[141] Berenskoetter 2014.

myths and collective memories.[142] In short, such identity narratives are the stories a community tells about who it is in order to create a sense of continuity between past, present, and future. Narratives, however, are not only stories about the self. Storytelling is central to how people create meaning and construct reality broadly, including how experience is made sense of and ordered.

Notions of "we-ness" still remain essential to how that reality is experienced and engaged with.[143] While identity narratives help explain how nations make sense of their place in the world, this thesis focuses on *foreign policy narratives*. They are defined as stories that construct problems, objects, and subjects, and that articulate policies to address them. They are ontologically interwoven with identity narratives, since foreign policy and national identity are mutually constitutive. However, the two types of narratives remain analytically distinct.[144] Foreign policy narratives explain and justify policies by narrating the national self (the inside) in relation to the international (the outside). Locating the national self in stories about the international both constructs a sense of identity and gives meaning to the outside world, forming a basis for constructing interests and actions.[145]

A narrative approach to identity

Analytically, foreign policy narratives are understood as consisting of three interrelated *narrative elements*: a setting, characters, and emplotment. In short, narratives involve a cast of characters who enact a plot that develops in a specific setting.[146] Like the identity elements, these are analytical tools for identifying and reconstructing foreign policy narratives. They are not claimed to be exhaustive of the stories told or comprehensive enough to capture all aspects of discourse. They also cannot be easily isolated, since it is only together that they form an intelligible story. Their advantage is that narrowing the analysis to these three elements provides an analytically useful template for engaging with the source material.

The first narrative element, the **setting,** captures the spatial and temporal context in which a story unfolds. The spatial context involves the construction

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[142] See, for example, Bell, D. "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity" *British Journal of Sociology* 54(1):63-81; Steele, B.J. 2008. *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State.* New York: Routledge; Berger, S. 2009. "On the Role of Myths and History in the Construction of National Identity in Modern Europe" *European History Quarterly* 39(3):490-502.
[143] Ringmar 1996:76; Browning 2008:47-52.
[144] Hansen 2006:21.
[145] Somers 1994:621; Browning 2008:47.
[146] Oppermann, K. – Spencer, A. 2024. "Narrative Analysis." In Mello, P.A. – Ostermann, F. (eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods.* London: Routledge.

of boundaries and the delineation of space, including how they relate to each other.[147] As Erik Ringmar stated, we create a presence for our selves by locating our selves, not only in time, but in a "geography of affection". This means that its is not only about geographical location and distance, but about how different spaces become associated or disconnected.[148] The temporal context revolves around the understanding of time. Whether temporality is understood as progressive, cyclical, or inert greatly shapes how a narrative is told.[149] A setting must also situate the self within it, indicating where the "we" is located in time and space.[150] The narrative element of *setting* thus captures the narrative act of *positioning* the self in a story, and can help reveal and reconstruct the identity element *hierarchical category*.

The second narrative element, the **characters,** are the actors identified as the relevant protagonists and antagonists in the narrative.The narrative describes and portrays these actors in particular ways.[151] They therefore play an important role in constituting and distinguishing the others and so also the self in relation to this. David Campbell focused on the construction of a threatening or evil other. However, otherness does not need to involve radical difference.[152] Relationality is complex: it can include sameness with friends and allies, or differentiation from the self as a historical character. Through these processes of linking and differentiation, the narrative provides more detailed self- and other-portrayals.[153] This second narrative element, the *characters*, thus captures the narrative act of *portraying* the self and the other(s) in a story. Looking at it can help reveal and reconstruct the identity elements *traits*, *roles*, and *responsibilities*.

The third narrative element, **emplotment,** provides the script for what happens, making the story comprehensible by selecting events and ordering them meaningfully. A narrative cannot be sustained without leaving some events out. It must also create a causal story linking those events which are selected.[154] A distinction can be drawn between temporal emplotment (i.e. the order and structure of events, including the emphasis placed on some and the silences surrounding others), and causal emplotment (i.e. the explanation of selected

[147] Shapiro 1997:30f; see also Hansen 2006:47.
[148] Ringmar 1996:77f
[149] Hansen 2006:48.
[150] Browning 2008:47.
[151] Krebs 2015:12.
[152] Campbell 1992:9.
[153] Hansen 2006:41. See also Rumelili 2007:21.
[154] Krebs 2015:10-11.

events and their connection).[155] The emplotment therefore supplies meaning and motivations for why certain policy aims are necessary and suggestions for how to achieve them. The narrative element of *emplotment* therefore captures the narrative act of *connecting* the past, present, and future events of a story. It can particularly help the analysis to find and reconstruct the identity elements of *reasons*, *objectives*, and *actions*.

Narrative elements	**Narrative acts**	**Identity concepts**	**Identity elements**
Settings	Positioning	Positions	Hierarchical categories
Characters	Portraying	Self- and other-portrayals	Traits, roles, and responsibilities
Emplotments	Connecting	Programmes	Reasons, objectives, and actions

Table 1 Overview of the conceptual framework

The narrative elements should not, however, be understood as layered (e.g. with settings being more sedimented than emplotments). They rather present a way to *analytically* explore identity elements because the respective narrative acts involve constructing and drawing upon the related identity concepts. In other words, a setting can be narrated in a myriad of ways and it is not *only* about situating the self. Yet, the self's position and categorisation in whatever setting is presented is often more sedimented. Similarly, while the characters of a narrative can be chosen and presented in different ways, the portrayal of the self (and the self in relation to the portrayal of other characters) is narratively bounded. Emplotment is perhaps the clearest example, because the plot of a story is evidently not limited to the nation's programme. A narrative neither gains sequence nor meaning from the self's reasons, objectives, and actions. Rather, within the act of connecting and explaining events, a programme is given meaning in a specific context.

The narrative approach presented here is thus an analytical strategy to find and reconstruct Swedish identity. It is a way for the analysis to explore and illustrate how Sweden's identity is (re)produced and contested in, and across,

[155] Spencer 2016:33f; Oppermann – Spencer 2024:123.

narratives. At the same time, narratives (not their elements!) can be understood as layered.[156] Master narratives and identity narratives are theorised as more sedimented, or as relatively retold in a stable form. These types of narratives are recognised as more fundamental to understanding the world and the self, in comparison with narratives about particular issues. To reassemble foreign policy narratives, the methodological approach detailed below uses narratives about particular issues as a starting point. These narratives, that seek to make sense of specific political issues or crises, are less sedimented and there is more room for contestation and resistance. While these narratives are less sedimented, they are often enabled by, and participate in, the reproduction of foreign policy narratives over time. Struggles over the meaning of particular issues can thus also enable the contestation of, and changes to, more sedimented narratives.

2.3 Research design, method, and source material

The previous section discussed an understanding of the relationship between foreign policy and national identity as mutually constitutive. It developed a conceptual framework for exploring Swedish identity in foreign policy narratives. This section translates this theoretical approach into a research design that specifies what is to be explored and how. It begins by presenting the selection of four cases of crisis moments. It discusses why these moments narrated as crises are particularly useful for exploring how imaginaries of Sweden were narrated, reproduced, and contested. After this, the section details the method used, with its three interconnected analytical moves: 1) the dissection of specific texts into the narrative elements making up issue narratives; 2) the subsequent reassembling of these into foreign policy narratives that were retold across cases; 3) and the final identity reconstruction exploring the identity elements reproduced and contested within the narratives. The section ends by turning to the source material and the five spaces of narration from which specific texts are gathered. It argues that particular spaces and genres of narration enable and constrain when, how, and by whom stories can be told.

[156] Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:379

Narrations of four crisis moments

The interpretations state leaders and representatives make, and the policies and actions they take, are closely linked to foreign policy narratives and the construction of national identity. As Margaret Somers wrote, narrative is not only a condition for social *being*, but for social *action*, because in these narratives the self and its purposes are constructed in the context of time and space.[157] Narrative and identity thus provide possibilities for what actions are deemed reasonable and imaginable. This thesis does not focus on decision-making processes, but instead asks how narrative and identity constructions made certain policy paths conceivable while excluding others.

This subsection specifies what is explored in this thesis: what cases are analysed with the help of the conceptual framework developed above. In this thesis, an emphasis is placed on *crises*. More specifically, moments that were narrated into crisis in Sweden in relation to the League. One reason for this choice of analytical focus is the argument that the depiction of something as a crisis tends to prompt a surge in attempts to make sense of what is happening. Crises are thus moments that stories render as critical, often instigating interpretive struggles around them.[158] What is at stake during crises is thus not just the question of what a state or an international organisation should do in response to what is going on, but what kind of state or organisation it is imagined to be.[159] The exploration of crises is therefore a purposeful choice because we are more likely to be able to observe struggles of meaning at such moments, and thus how Swedish identity and policy in the context of the League was narrated, reproduced, and contested.

This analysis in this thesis is limited to the case of Sweden in relation to the League. This delimitation allows for an extensive and in-depth exploration of how crisis moments were narrated into being during the course of Sweden's membership in the League. It allows for detailed analysis of how these narratives, and the identity constructions in them, made Swedish policies within the context of the organisation possible.[160] These moments when the League was

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[157] Somers 1994:621. See also Weldes 1999; Guzzini 2022:42f.

[158] Hay, C. 1996. "Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent'" *Sociology* 30(2):253-277.

[159] Åse, C. 2016. "Ship of Shame: Gender and Nation in Narratives of the 1981 Soviet Submarine Crisis in Sweden" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18(1):112-132.

[160] This research design draws inspiration from Lene Hansen's suggestion to clarify a research design based on 1) number of selves (Sweden), 2) number of events (multiple crisis moments), 3) temporal perspective (comparable moments), see Hansen 2006:81. Although the thesis does not deploy an intertextual approach as suggested by Hansen, it follows her in clarifying the analytical focus on official texts and political texts, see section on source material below.

depicted as in crisis were selected based on an initial, inductive reading of governmental and parliamentary records. Each was identified as a moment, across this time period, that wasnarrated as a critical moment and led to freqent and substantial narration, both in government discourse and the wider political debate.

The first case selected is the **Corfu crisis**. This was depicted as a diplomatic and military crisis between Greece and Italy in 1923. Following the murder of General Enrico Tellini and his staff on Greek soil and the subsequent Italian ultimatum, bombardment, and occupation of Corfu, Greece made an appeal to the League. Within the context of the League Council, the Corfu crisis revolved primarily around the question of its own competence in addressing the issue. The matter ended up being referred to the Conference of Ambassadors, which was regarded as an organisation for the Allied powers, and it was settled in Paris rather than Geneva. Sweden held a non-permanent Council seat at the time. Even though Sweden was then governed by a conservative government, the former social democratic Prime and Foreign Minister Hjalmar Branting remained the elected Swedish representative throughout the Council's deliberations.

The second case explored in this thesis is the **Mosul crisis** between Türkiye and Iraq. At this time, Iraq was formally placed under a British mandate. The issue was put up for arbitration when Britain requested that it be turned over to the League in 1924. It has often been framed as an early case of successful arbitration despite initial struggles in reaching a solution and fears that the dispute would turn the tension on site into a military confrontation. Sweden, still holding a non-permanent Council seat, was appointed as the Council's *rapporteur*. This made the issue the responsibility of its social democratic government. While this case is less often framed as a crisis in contemporary scholarship, it was, at the time, told as a critical test for both the organisation in averting military escalation and for Sweden for having taken a central role in its handling.

The third case is the **Manchuria crisis**. This is often depicted as an international diplomatic and military crisis following Japan's military activity in northeastern China 1931-33. It has been understood as triggered by the so-called Mukden Incident, followed by a Japanese invasion of Manchuria, and the eventual creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo. Within the League, attempts to respond have been described as slow. However, the report of the League's enquiry commission eventually determined that the invasion was wrong and recommended Manchurian autonomy under Chinese sovereignty,

albeit also recognising some Japanese rights. Following the Assembly's adoption of the report, Japan withdrew from the League. Sweden, which was governed at the time by a liberal and then a social democratic government, no longer held a Council seat. It was, however, elected to an Assembly committee supervising the steps taken to settle the conflict.

The fourth and final case is the **Abyssinia crisis**. This was the culmination of escalating tensions between Italy and Ethiopia, which resulted in Italy's invasion in 1935. Ethiopia made several appeals to the League during the spring, but existing scholarship has argued that great power manoeuvring in the Council was an early approach. Once the invasion began, however, it took the Council four days to determine that Italy had resorted to war in breach of the Covenant. A committee was then formed to prepare sanctions. Sweden's social democratic government participated in the sanctions regime, but Britain and France's pursuit of a parallel policy of appeasement has been understood as severly undermining its forcefulness. Sweden, alongside other ex-neutrals, ended up declaring that it would no longer be bound by the provision of sanction penalties.

These four moments are intended as illustrative cases.[161] Chapter 4 of this thesis provides further background about each. It does so by drawing on how scholars have commonly interpreted these moments, placing this alongside depictions of the Swedish official position, in Stockholm and Geneva. However, neither the brief summary presented here, nor the overview in chapter 4, should be read as neutral accounts of what happened. As each of these four crisis moments appeared on the agenda, stories emerged in Sweden that gave particular meanings to them. These narratives constructed a background and a setting for each issue. They identified who the important characters were and portrayed them in relation to each crisis. They also explained what events mattered and connected them to make sense of what was happening. At the same time, the stories that were told by Swedish officials and in the wider political debate in Sweden not only gave meaning to the crises themselves. As theorised by the conceptual framework, they also positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in relation to them. This is something that ultimately made Sweden's League policy in response to each of the cases imaginable, but also allowed for the possibility of the contestation of this policy.

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[161] The Åland Island dispute has not been selected because of its uniqueness given that Sweden was an involved party. For interest in the Åland Island Dispute, see Tingsten 1944:114; Norman 2014:105; Jansson, I. 2020. "The Implementation of an International Decision at the Local Level: The League of Nations and the Åland Islands 1920-1951" *Journal of Autonomy and Security Studies* 4(1):31-62.

From narrative analysis to identity reconstruction

The empirical exploration begins with a narrative analysis. The literature on narratives is notably vast, with a range of ways to conceptualise them. Arthur Berger has described how "we spend our lives immersed in narratives. Every day, we swim in a sea of stories and tales that we hear or read or listen to or see (or some combination of all these), from our earliest days to our death."[162] Narratives might be everywhere, but not everything is a narrative. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, narratives can broadly be understood as involving a cast of characters who enact a plot that develops in a specific setting. However, it is possible to distinguish between different levels of narratives, with some existing at a more general but fundamental level, such as the Westphalian master narrative, and others at a more specific but less fundamental level.[163] The approach to narrative analysis developed in this thesis moves through three interconnected steps, which I refer to as three moves, and involves two levels of narrative.

Any narrative analysis begins, however, with specific texts, and thus individual stories. Stories are notably not narratives. Instead they have to be dissected and fit into the elements that make up a narrative. It is only after several rounds of disection and engagement with specific texts that insights can acutally be gained about dominant representations (told again and again across stories) within each narrative element. After the narrative elements (settings, characters, and emplotments) have been filled with what can be found in the specific texts, the analyst can engage in a sort of retelling by drawing upon the main meanings and representations emerging in their source material.[164] From this, what is called a narrative can be reassembled.

The empirical exploration in this thesis thus starts with a first move. This involves picking apart individual stories in specific texts, and reassembling them at the level of particular issue narratives. This first move therefore explores how the four selected crises were narrated, and what issue narratives can be found in relation to each of the crises. This entails that more than one narrative can be found in the selected texts. The researcher therefore has to be attentive to how meanings are attached to each other and reoccur, not just in isolation but also between the narrative elements. The second move brings

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[162] Berger, A.A. 1997. *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media and Everyday Life.* London: Sage, p. 1, cited in Spencer 2016:14.
[163] Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:394.
[164] See practical application of narrative analysis in Spencer 2016:35. See also Oppermann – Spencer 2024.

these findings together into the broader foreign policy narratives that are retold across particular issues. Starting from issue narratives allows the analysis to attend to how meanings connected to national identity and foreign policy are reproduced over time. The third move then reconstructs Swedish national identity by exploring how narratives that have been found draw upon as well as (re)produce identity elements. It analyses how, in doing so, these narratives sustain and contest how Sweden is imagined.

An **issue narrative** is thus about a limited issue, event, or episode. The argument here is that whenever we tell stories, including when these stories are about more specific foreign policy issues, we still have to locate the national self within them. These more specific narratives are thus produced out of, and participate in producing, a broader narrative about the nation in relation to the international. In issue narratives, however, the narrative element of *setting* becomes more specific. It can be about narrating, for example, an international crisis by sketching out an institutional context, a decision-making situation, or the background to the situation. The narrative is what actually defines (or does not define) a series of events as a crisis. It further locates the self in relation to it. For example, it gives answers to questions such as: Do we belong to a group of small or powerful states in this intergovernmental body? Do we have an inconsequential or important voice in the decision-making process taking place? Are we detached from or directly affected by the situation? At the same time, issue narratives draw upon, and produce, foreign policy narratives; providing spatial context through the construction of space and boundaries, and temporal context through the construction of temporarility in the international order, albeit doing this to make sense of a specific matter.

Issue narratives also identify who the relevant *characters* are in relation to a particular situation.[165] They imbue actors with particular characteristics, functions, and responsibilities that aid in interpreting their motives, interests, and behaviours in relation to the specific issue.[166] This can take the form of labelling or nicknaming them, invoking certain images of who they are and what they want. It can also involve describing and judging what the characters do and say. Or they can be characterised by being placed in relation to other actors or specific spatial spaces.[167] Again, issue narratives draw upon, and produce, broader foreign policy narratives; providing portrayals of the self and its others to make sense of the actors involved in a specific situation.

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[165] Characters can be both individuals (e.g. political leaders) and collectives (e.g. states or institutions).
[166] Krebs 2015:12.
[167] Oppermann – Spencer 2024:122.

Finally, just as the *emplotment* provides the script for foreign policy narratives, this narrative element also clarifies particular issues by selecting and ordering events. The issue at hand is given meaning as the emplotment connects and explains how everything fits together. By drawing on interpretations of the past and the present, it provides directions for how a specific situation can and should be dealt with. In issue narratives, a specific policy can, for instance, be narrated as a response to a crisis or as part of a long-term agenda. The emplotment thus points to the whys behind objectives in a given situation, such as specific goals to be reached, relationships to strengthen, or risks to avert. It answers questions about how the situation should be addressed by advocating for certain decisions or means that lead to a desired ending, as well as by warning against what paths may hinder resolution.[168] In sum, issue narratives draw upon, and produce, broader foreign policy narratives. They place particular events within a longer trajectory of the nation's place in relation to the international to make sense of the issue at hand.

The reading of individual stories thus provides building blocks to carve out particular issue narratives.[169] These narratives are then reassembled by bringing together interrelated representations of the setting, the characters, and the emplotment *over time*, forming what is here referred to as **foreign policy narratives** (which have been conceptualised in the earlier parts of this chapter). This is done, in other words, by identifying how similar spatialities and temporalities, character portrayals, and trajectories emerge across specific issues. Notably, narratives can still include several (sub-)plots. They may not always emphasise the exact same events, or the exact same characters, especially as new issue are narrated into being. These specific plots still become a part of a narrative as they contribute to an overarching trajectory about how a specific past has led up to a certain present which informs a similar imagination of a future, just as different characters narrated across different issues can still serve similar functions within a foreign policy narrative (e.g. 'great powers' as villains through the repeated construction of *a* 'great power' as *the* villain of a specific issue).[170]

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[168] Oppermann – Spencer 2024:123f.

[169] Appendix 3 illustrates how the analysis is carried out by using a specific text as an illustrative example. The actual narrative analysis is done by looking not at individual stories, but at what appears in a collection of specific texts.

[170] Foreign policy narratives notably exist in a more sedimented layer, whereas there is more room for contestation in the issue narratives, see Hagström & Gustafsson 2019:379. The former is thus marked by the reproduction of certain meanings attached to, in this case, the Swedish national self's relation to an external world. Through the continuous retelling of them in the

When issue narratives have been identified through the process of picking apart the narrative elements in specific texts, and have been reassembled into the foreign policy narratives that are being reproduced across particular issues (here crisis moments), the next endeavour is to explore the identity elements in them. Corresponding to the framework developed above, constructing the setting of a narrative allows for the narrative act of *positioning* the identity in a story. This is therefore analytically useful in reconstructing the element of identity that ascribes the self a *hierarchical category*. When the characters of a narrative are constructed, it involves the narrative act of *portraying* the self and its other(s) in a story. This can therefore be valuable in the analysis of the elements of identity related to *traits*, *roles*, and *responsibilities*. Finally, the narrative's emplotment involves the narrative act of *connecting* the past, present, and future events of a story. This can therefore be analytically helpful in exploring the identity elements *reasons*, *objectives*, and *actions*.

The narrative elements cannot, in isolation, be seen as producing the identity element respectively. It is rather together that they form an understanding of positions, portrayals of the self and other, and programmes. For this reason, the empirical exploration necessarily moves back and forth between the analytical steps; between the analysis of narrative elements in specific text, the analysis of the reproduction of narratives across the cases, and the analysis of identity elements emerging in particular narratives and being reproduced in the broader ones. In other words, the third analytical move of **identity reconstruction** becomes a task that draws upon the narrative analysis performed in steps one and two. In this third move, the previous dissection of narrative elements becomes useful in the reconstruction of the identity elements developed in the layered model (see the earlier subsection of this chapter). [171]

struggle over how to make sense of particular issues related to the League, there is, however, also room for various forms of contestation.

[171] Appendix 4 illustrate how the reconstruction of identity is done by using a specific text as an illustrative example. The actual reconstruction of identity is done by looking at, not individual stories, but how the narratives reassembled from a collection of specific texts produce, and are being produced out of, identity.

Specific texts					
Narrator	Space	Genre	Setting(s)	Charac-ter(s)	Plot(s)
Narrative analysis					
Setting(s)		Character(s)		Emplotment(s)	
Identity reconstruction					
Hierar-chical categories	Traits	Roles	Respons-ibilities	Reasons	Objec-tives	Actions

Table 2 Overview of narrative analysis and identity reconstruction

The argument made in the theory section is that these narrative and identity elements also participate in making possible foreign policy. They provide certain possibilities for the policies taken in response to the specific crisis moments that the thesis explores. However, it should be recognised that there is not only one foreign policy narrative or national identity. Instead, several narratives and identities may exist at any particular moment, and these are often overlapping, paradoxical, or even contradict each other. The final part of the thesis therefore engages in a concluding discussion of how a heterogeneous

landscape of foreign policy narratives together made sense of, and gave meanings to, the crisis moments. It describes how a complex identity template, simultaneously sedimented and contested, produced, and was produced by, these narratives. The narrative and identity elements cannot predict or explain policy in a generic or causal manner. Nonetheless, they allow us to contemplate what paths were imaginable, and thus made possible, in relation to each crisis.

Spaces and genres of narration

The empirical exploration gathers specific texts for the narrative analysis and identity reconstruction. It does so based on what Hansen calls the first and second model. This means that it focuses on governmental texts (found in international and governmental spaces) and texts in the wider political debate (found in parliamentary, party, and press spaces). As such, although the analysis operates at the level of narrative rather than having a focus on narrative agents, an emphasis is implicitly made on political elites as narrators. These elites include, for instance, government ministers, delegates, members of parliament, party leadership, and editors-in-chief. Of course, political elites are not the only narrative agents producing and contesting identity. In fact, contestation is often most prominent in marginalised narratives and popular discourse. However, the narratives of these elites reflect their power, authority, and legitimacy in the production of foreign policy narratives.

While a narrative is defined as having a plot containing characters and a specific setting, narrators can tell stories in great detail or very clumsily. They might tell them in a clearly narratively structured form, or in a messy unstructured way. Not all specific texts take a clear narrative form. Arguments sometimes lack chronological structure, but they are often presented with a temporal logic, contain at least one character, and allude to a certain context. However, a specific text cannot be included in the narrative analysis if it does not encompass the narrative elements in some shape or form. This also means that any exploration must be attentive to the *spaces of narration* and *genres of narration* that it engages with. I argue that spaces of narration are discursively laden. These spaces enable and constrain when, how, and by whom it is possible to narrate. Genres of narration, in turn, differ in the shaping of the contents and styles of texts. For example, consider the differences between diplomatic speeches, government reports, and debate articles.[172]

[172] Hansen 2006:65; Krebs 2015:21. See also Neumann, I.B. 2012. *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 3.

The gathering of specific texts must have a beginning and an end. Here I have begun the gathering of source material from when the crisis was first submitted to the League as an issue for the organisation to handle. Although narrations of the crisis moments do not begin nor end with the League, this choice is made based on the thesis' main research question. The problem that the thesis engages with emphasises Swedish identity and policy in the context of the League. I stop gathering texts when the League ceased its activities in relation to the issue. This means that the specific texts explored with regards to the narration of Corfu start from the Greek appeal in September 1923 and continue to the Swedish attempt to revisit the matter in March 1924. The texts about Mosul start from Britain's request in August 1924 and continue to the Council resolution in March 1926. The texts about Manchuria start from China's appeal in September 1931, continuing to Japan's withdrawal in March 1933. Finally, the texts about Abyssinia start from Ethiopia's appeal in January 1935, continuing to the lifting of sanctions in July 1936. These frames have been allowed some flexibility since Swedish stories continued to be told following the League's final verdicts. However, these specific texts from after the end point are only included when they contain depictions of the issue made in immediate response to the League concluding its engagements.

Five spaces structure the collection of material. The **international** and **governmental spaces** are accessed through the League of Nations Archive and the Archive of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The former archive has been digitalised and I spent four months in Geneva working with the material with the support of archivists on site. These spaces supply minutes and resolutions from Assembly sessions, public and private Council sessions, and committee sessions in which Sweden took part, plus correspondence between Swedish officials and League representatives. The Foreign Ministry archive is not digitalised and is found at the National Archives. It contains material from the yearly "blue books" (*aktstycken*), the League bureau (*NF-byrån*), and specific dossiers related to each crisis. This includes external communications, international communication with the delegation in Geneva, and private correspondence with external actors (e.g. the other Scandinavian ministries).

Both archival sites carry distinct practices in how material is documented, as well as in expectations concerning official and diplomatic language. Documentation procedures are comparatively strict, and the material includes full transcripts of speeches and shorter statements. Internal communication is less full of metaphors and colourful language than public speeches. As such, the material displays prominent differences in genre. Assembly speeches can be seen as attempts to form sentiment around Sweden's policy position, whereas

internal correspondence is less about inciting emotion. Both nonetheless give meaning to experience, and even the most exaggerated "rhetoric" and the most professional letters are equally part of meaning-making.[173] Within this material it is mainly the Prime and Foreign Ministers, and the delegates in Geneva, who are identified as narrators.

The **parliamentary spaces** include the open debates in the two chambers of the *Riksdag*, including motions and interpellations, as well as the private deliberations of the Foreign Policy Council (FPC). The FPC included all parties except for the communists and socialists. It was a venue in which the Prime and Foreign Ministers provided debriefs on ongoing issues (including a yearly ministry statement) and members voiced their opinions behind closed doors. Both the *Riksdag* and the FPC had practices concerning when such matters should be discussed, and the political parties appeared to differ over whether it was understood as appropriate to speak about foreign affairs publicly. Conservative, agrarian, and liberal members were generally more hesitant and often refrained from doing so (despite speaking about issues elsewhere), whereas social democrats and communists/socialists typically sought public parliamentary debate.

The **party spaces** are where party-political elites debated policy internally. They are also where each party, as a collective of partisan individuals, communicated via their channels externally. The material from the party archives thus include national congresses and party leadership dialogues, as well as press releases, party programmes, and other propaganda. There is, however, a clear discrepancy in what has been preserved in the archives of the different political parties. Unlike governmental or parliamentary bodies, parties were not bound to set procedures for documentation. It was, for example, not until the 1930s that most began to include meeting minutes. Party leadership meetings also rarely addressed particular foreign policy issues, and what was said when they did is seldom noted. The most usable material for the narrative analysis has therefore been the press releases, public speeches, and debate articles preserved in these archives.

The **press spaces** were accessed through the press archive at the Royal Library. Collection of texts from these spaces was limited to the editorial pages of six major newspapers across the political spectrum. These papers are the conservative *Svenska Dagbladet*, the liberal/conservative *Göteborgs handels- och sjöfartstidning*, the liberal *Dagens Nyheter*, the social democratic *Arbetet*, the syndicalist *Arbetaren*, and the socialist *Norrskensflamman*. However, here

[173] Weldes 1999:114.

the gathering of source material allowed for a degree of intertextuality, where specific texts from additional outlets were included if an editorial in the chosen papers makes explicit references or responses to them. Notably, the political editors of these papers were often members of parliament themselves. However, they were typically more outspoken with regards to foreign policy issues in the press space, and the material therefore adds specific texts broadly across partisan affiliations. Moreover, editorials and debate articles often use storytelling in a straightforward way. In the analysis, the press space was therefore an important additional site for gathering source material to work with.

2.4 Reflexivity

Following the epistemological starting point, I have argued that (scientific) knowledge is itself narratively produced. That means that this thesis, much like any narrative, also participates in the construction of both knowledge and social reality. The concluding section of this chapter therefore engages in a reflexive discussion. It turns my attention, as the researcher writing this theis, back onto my own guiding assumptions, positionality, and power when producing knowledge. Different kinds of reflexivity can be distinguished here. *Sociological reflexivity* is, for instance, about the social conditions of knowledge production, and about acknowledging the standpoint from which we observe a world that we are also a part of shaping. *Epistemic reflexivity* is about the categories we employ, the assumptions we inherit, and the ways 'common sense' can be hidden in analysis as if it is neutral.

In a recent special issue in the *European Journal of International Relations,* the editors made an additional call for *historical reflexivity*. This is defined as "reflexivity about the spatio-temporal preconditions of theorizing itself and the consequent necessity to duly acknowledge the contingency of all theoretical frameworks and argumentative moves."[174] Their point was that every theory is marked by the circumstances of its emergence; to theorise is not to generate timeless propositions, because articulated claims are situated in time and space. The remainder of this chapter therefore considers two aspects. First, it discusses the challenges with the study's ontological premise by briefly historicising the claims upon which the framework rests, and by considering how its assumptions and categories have their own limitations and pitfalls. Second,

[174] Kessler *et al* 2025:6

it addresses what the approach fails to shed light on, what it risks silencing, and from what standpoint it observes what it does uncover.

The limitations and challenges of narrative ontology

Constructivism in the social sciences encompass centuries of intellectual developments in philosophy, sociology, and social theory, and its development path has been far from a single trajectory. According to Adler's genealogy of constructivism, the "weak programme" of modernist constructivism can be traced back to Immanuel Kant and neokantianism as an objective approach to hermeneutics. In contrast, the "strong programme" has its roots in Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein who "directly challenged positivism by arguing that social facts are constituted by the structures of language."[175] Adler linked this programme to two approaches; a modernist approach and a radical linguistic approach.[176]

This thesis follows in the footsteps of the broader linguistic turn in the social sciences and humanities in the mid-twentieth century, when the devastation of two world wars and a subsequent Cold War undermined confidence in universalist narratives of progress and modernity. It was a time when decolonisation and social movements further confronted established hierarchies of power and knowledge production. Linguistic constructivism thus intersected with feminist, postcolonial, and critical traditions that questioned essentialism and foundationalism.[177] These scholars moved attention from material and structural explanations towards the ways social realities are constituted in systems of meaning. At the same time, this refocus has not been without reproach and challenges.

The first challenge has been about not taking the material seriously. A narrative ontology notably emphasises the constitutive role of stories and redi-

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[175] Adler 2013:115f; see also Parsons, C. 2018. "Constructivism and Interpretive Theory" in Lowndes, V. – Marsh, D. – Stoker, G. (eds.) *Theory and Method in Political Science.* 4th edition. London: Palgrave.

[176] The latter, according to Adler, "radicalized" the anti-positivist movement because science was at "best" constrained by its social contexts, and at "worst" a discourse that could not attain objective knowledge. These ideas go back to Friedrich Nietzsche's claim that truth is made, not found, and poststructuralists like Jacques Derrida and postmodernists such as Michel Foucault, who later challenged science and modernity and brought "radical linguistics to its ultimate relativist destination.", 2013:116.

[177] Zehfuss, M. 2013. "Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, and Postcolonialism" in in Carlsnaes, W. – Risse, T. – Simmons, B. A. (eds.) *Handbook of International Relations.* 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications.

rects analyses toward language, since the 'material' cannot be interpreted outside of it anyway. Yet much of what IR scholars and international historians engage with notably has devastating consequences beyond language. Richard Evans' argument that seeing Auschwitz as a discourse trivialises mass murder is a sharp example of this critique. However, Vaughan-Williams has clarified that stressing language does not deny such traumas, but rather allows for sensitivity towards the implications of representing them.[178] How horrific events are interpreted has very real consequences as well. Still, Evans forces us to remember that while it is all about language, it is never *only* about language. It is also about what narratives constructing social reality *do* and what they make possible.

A second challenge has been related to the consequences of narrative power. This thesis explores narrative and identity constructs, but does not go 'beyond' narrative as critical constructivists might do.[179] A limitation with the framework is thus that it makes less visible how narratives structure political outcomes. Consider, for example, constructions of Sweden as a humanitarian nation alongside its arms exports. Narratives can construct Sweden as a defender of human rights, while its own arms industry complicates that story. From a narrative ontology the key question is not whether this is a contradiction, but how such potential tensions are managed narratively. Still, focusing soley on narratives can limit the potential for critique, or make it less obvious. While Patrick T. Jackson understands reflexivity as a *methodology* for provoking social change, such an explicit approach is absent in this thesis.[180]

Reflexivity does not, however, necessitate an outright emancipatory concern, it rather relates to the researcher's (self-)awareness around their own knowledge production. This still raises additional questions: if all knowledge should be understood as narratively produced, what status can scholarly knowledge claim? A third challenge has thus revolved around the critique that relativism just collapses all meaningful knowledge. However, a more pragmatic approach can illustrate how scientific knowledge remains valuable, even when it is understood as narratively produced. What makes empirical claims

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[178] Evans, R.J. 2000. *In Defence of History.* 2nd edition. London: Granta Books, p. 124; Vaughan-Williams, N. 2005. "International Relations and the 'Problem of History'" *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 34(1):115-136, p. 124.

[179] Critical constructivism, linked to the Frankfurt school's attempt to turn a Marxist critique of political economy into one of ideology, was placed by Adler between the "weak" and "strong" programmes of constructivism. Critical constructivism in IR thus build on, for instance, Jürgen Habermas's blend of a philosophy of language with beliefs in the objectivity of natural knowledge. See also Zehfuss 2013.

[180] Jackson 2016, see chapter 6.

"scientific" concerns how far a narrative analysis or an identity reconstruction can take us in exploring and answering certain questions. This also means that history still remains open for reinterpretation, and that the knowledge produced can still be scrutinised for how it represents that history.

Narrative analysis and identity reconstruction as methods should not, however, be understood as "techniques of extracting information from reality and aligning it with – or against – bodies of knowledge. [They] are instead performative practices experimentally connecting and assembling fragments of ontology, epistemology, theories, techniques and data [...]"[181] Methods and theories are thus not neutral, but are rather both *political* and *historical*. They cannot be seen as apolitical because they "are part and parcel of specific political visions of how the world around us is supposed to be understood, look and be researched."[182] They cannot be seen as ahistorical either since the "conceptual vocabulary we use to interrogate the world is continually in the process of emerging from that world and then collapsing back into it as historical change is provoked by the very articulation of that vocabulary."[183]

This means that knowledge does not start with the world, but with the knowledge producer and the vocabulary they deploy to give the world meaning. Scholars, and scholarly identity, is also connected to narrative power. Narratives participate in making scholars inclined to turn to certain concepts and theories that shape how they make sense of what they observe. At the same time, scholars are also narrators, and the concepts and theories they use "become building blocks in narratives and contribute to the construction of both the narrator of and the protagonists in the narratives."[184] One challenge of a reflexive position in this thesis is thus moving between narratives as empirical phenomena, the narrative concepts and tools relied on to engage in an analysis of these narratives, and an attentiveness to the narrative constructed of the knowledge produced.[185]

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[181] Aradau, C. – Huysmans, J. 2014. "Critical Methods in International Relations: The Politics of Techniques, Devices and Acts" *European Journal of International Relations* 20(3):596-619, p. 3 in Winkler, S. 2020. *Conceptual Politics in Practice: How Soft Power Changed the World.* Stockholm: Stockholm University, p. 68.

[182] Winkler 2020:68.

[183] Jackson 2016:176f.

[184] Hagström – Gustafsson 2019:398

[185] Guzzini similarly recognises that theory itself participates in the reproduction of power, and that IR scholarship cannot be seen as neutral: it contributes to the stabilisation, or transformation, of international order and possibility. Challenges therefore arise in terms or the positionality and ethical responsibility of the researcher since the choices made regarding conceptual frameworks, analytical tools, source material, and so on, order and create specific representations of (historical) reality, see Guzzini 2000.

One implication can be illustrated by discussing the concept of *hierarchal categories*. This concept may carry risks of ontologising hierarchy and violence (i.e. making hierarchies seem as if they are natural or inevitable features of the world). When hierarchy becomes embedded in categories through which reality is interpreted, it could cease to appear as constructed in language and come to seem more like an inherent structure of life. The categories researchers employ can thus participate in stabilising them. Violence, likewise, can be normalised when built into how difference is organised. This is the very opposite of what this thesis seeks to do. However, since hierarchy is (somewhat) presupposed in the conceptual framework developed in this thesis, it can still become a challenge to imagine social relations outside of it. In this way, the ontologisation of hierarchy risks foreclosing alternative imaginaries. For that reason, reflexively interrogating how relations are ordered in narratives becomes a critical aspect of destabilising rather than reproducing ontological assumptions sustaining power relations. It is also necessary to adopt an understanding of categorisation as usually following hierarchal logics but not as being ontologically dependent on it.

Exclusions, silences, and positionality

Since this thesis explores the Interwar period, the texts that it engages with have been gathered from archives, and archives are sites of power. They only contain parts of history since assembling them involves determining what ought to be remembered and what can be forgotten.[186] Certain spaces of narration, and the specific texts in them, have been saved because they contain stories deemed worthy to save. Additional stories are always out there, and archival sites that have been excluded, or sites beyond the archive, could add alternative narratives that are silent in this thesis. This study engages with primary sources, performing the narrative analysis on specific texts produced in Interwar Sweden, but some spaces of narration, genres of texts, and narrative agents are excluded by choices made, both by the researcher and within the archives themselves.

Focusing on governmental texts and the wider political debate, for instance, excludes popular discourse and the narratives that might be found in fiction, poetry, music, or the visual arts. It also excludes marginalised discourse which

[186] King, M.T. 2011. ”Working with/in the archives” in Gunn, S. – Faire, L. (eds.) *Research Methods for History.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. See also Zaagsma, G. 2022. “Digital History and the Politics of Digitization” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 38(2):830-851.

might contain narratives told in spaces detached from political arenas or even from everyday Swedish society. This discourse could include stories of Sweden that have since been forgotten. Even the wide exploration of this thesis, across five spaces of narration, cannot avoid such silencing. This is because formulating research aims, making conceptual and methodological choices, and gathering source material, always become a process of leaving some things out. The emphases made in this study notably accentuate the dominant narratives of the period. These dominant narratives were reassembled from the texts of narrative agents who were also in positions of power in the Swedish context. The study might therefore participate in a disremembering of alternative and marginalised ways of imagining Sweden in the League.

The dominant narratives of the League in Sweden might similarily echo broader European discourse. Although non-European perspectives on the League have increasingly been explored in recent scholarship on the organisation, a Eurocentric viewpoint still dominates. Focusing on Sweden reproduces this. A related challenge has to do with the researcher's own storytelling. Narrative analyses explore how heroes, villains, and victims are constructed, and the narratives grant agency to some subjects while leaving others seemingly without any agency. Looking at events through Swedish narratives therefore makes some actors appear as mere recipients of this narration, making them appear aslacking agency to resist the meanings forced upon them. Even the labelling of Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia participates in constructing places and peoples as "issues" or "crises" to be resolved rather than actors in their own right. The concepts used in the framework likewise risks forcing hierarchies upon them, even when the aim is to uncover how narratives participate in such constructions rather than to reproduce them.

The positionality of the researcher also matters, including when it involves the study of an identity – that of Sweden – which the researcher identifies with. This can, of course, be an advantage, but also a challenge since familiarity and identification with a context can make some meanings appear as common sense rather than as the result of narrative power. There is also a fairly common temptation towards Nordic exceptionalism, or Swedish uniqueness, in scholarly and political discourse. The purpose here is not to reproduce these constructs, but to expose them and start conversations about how Swedish identity has been (re)produced historically. This makes it possible to think about how Swedish internationalism, peaceful history, traditions of neutrality, and so on, are part of national stories and self-understandings that have been (re)told for a long time, rather than any sort of essentialist aspects of Swedish identity.

Within this emerges also a final concern with presentism. Looking at the past from the present will unavoidably carry with it some presumptions drawn from how Sweden and the international is narrated and imagined today. Part of this relates to the use of theoretical and analytical concepts that have emerged in other spatial and temporal contexts than the context where they are deployed, but it is also about how researchers bring assumptions from the present into their interpretation of the past.[187] One way to be mindful of this is to emphasis frameworks allowing specific texts to 'speak for themselves' and to gain centre stage in the analysis, and to work back and forth between the words of past narrators and the concepts allowing a present narration of that past re-emerge. Even if the framework developed in this thesis seeks to bring to the forefront understandings from a century ago, history will always appear in a dialogue between past and present stories.

[187] See discussions in Smith 1999, p. 40f and p. 245f.

PART II

3 Swedish foreign policy and identity in the twentieth century

Before diving into the Interwar years, this chapter situates Swedish foreign policy and national identity within the longer history of Sweden in the twentieth century, and correspondingly locates the thesis within the scholarships that have sought to make sense of the same. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce readers unfamiliar with the Swedish case to the main takes on its policy and identity across the past century, as well as to review them. First, the chapter introduces Swedish foreign policy through the vocabulary of neutrality and solidarity, and considers how a realist-idealist lens has often been used to explain it. Second, it turns to scholarly contributions on Swedish identity (or identity-related concepts such as culture or national roles), including more critical and historical work on Swedish (and Nordic) nation-building and myth-making. Third, the chapter addresses the question of a Swedish consensus on foreign policy, and, although the thesis does not look at political parties, it contemplates how partisan contestation over foreign policy in Sweden has been understood and explored. The final section briefly discusses the three aspects together, and argues that revisiting the Interwar years promises several contributions to these literatures.

3.1 Foreign policy between neutrality and solidarity

"Neutrality or solidarity?" was a question posed by Östen Undén in an article published ahead of the founding of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. In the article he referred to the Swedish debates before its League accession over two decades earlier.[188] Historians and political scientists alike have highlighted how a dilemma, or rather a balance, between *neutrality* and *solidarity* has

[188] Bjereld, U. – Johansson, A. W. – Molin, K. 2008. *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred. Svensk utrikespolitik under kalla kriget.* Stockholm: Santérus förlag, p. 68; Wahlbäck 2014:73.

characterised Swedish foreign policy since the 1920s. Kjell Goldmann wrote that "what is thought to make Swedish security policy special – to make it a model – is not so much neutrality and internationalism *per se* but the combination. In the Swedish model of security policy, the two dimensions are not just compatible or complementary but mutually supportive."[189] Neutrality and solidarity have thus been described as a Swedish way of approaching foreign policy, and the terminology resurfaces across the literature.[190] This section of the chapter introduces Swedish foreign policy across the twentieth century from the perspective of neutrality and solidarity, and ends with discussing how *small state realism* and *small state idealism* has been used as a lens to make sense of this balancing or move between two complementary, or contradictory, policies.

Neutrality as foreign policy

Swedish neutrality is often given its origin in the neutrality system of king Karl XIV Johan. Although Ove Bring and Leos Müller trace its history further back, from its early uses as a strategy to protect shipping trade to the Leagues of Armed Neutrality, a modern neutrality policy declared in peace time was sought by Sweden for the first time in 1834.[191] The 1812-politics of king Karl XIV Johan, which aimed at peaceful relations with Russia, resulted in a neutrality declaration following fears of a great power war. Neutrality as a legal concept was later advanced during the nineteenth century, and the rights and obligations of neutral states were consolidated in the 1907 Hauge Conference.[192] In parallel with these developments, the parliaments of the Sweden-Norway Union received motions on the establishment of a permanent neutrality, but these did not pass because it was argued to limit Sweden's room to manoeuvre its foreign policy.[193] Bring thus understands both neutrality in legal

[189] Goldmann 1991:129.
[190] Associated ways of conceptualising Swedish foreign policy has been the use of autonomy/integration, independence/cooperation, passivity/activism, and so on.
[191] Bring, O. *Neutralitetens uppgång och fall – eller den gemensamma säkerhetens historia*. Stockholm: Atlantis, p.106.
[192] Westberg 2012:73. Two conventions (Hauge V and XIII) stated that neutrals had the obligation to protect their own territories against violations of their neutrality by belligerent parties, and that a failure on the part of the neutral state to take countermeasures or protest a committed violated constituted a breach of neutrality.
[193] The motions had also mentioned a Scandinavian peace union which was argued to lead to obligations to protect the neighbouring countries, see Westberg 2012:70f.

terms and neutrality as a Swedish policy as adapting to the course of history, where the latter has remained particularly flexible for reinterpretation.[194]

After the Austrian war declaration against Serbia in 1914, Sweden soon declared that it would take a complete neutral position, and the literature on Swedish foreign policy during the First World War focuses on how Sweden navigated its neutrality alongside secret diplomacy. This includes discussions on potential breaches of Swedish neutrality, and the suggestion that Sweden pursued a pro-German and an anti-British policy behind the scene. According to historian Torsten Gihl, Sweden, for instance, committed a violation of international law when it, because of an agreement with Germany as a warring party, mined the *Kogrundsrännan* sea lane in 1916.[195] Oscar Nygren argues, however, that the "almost hegemonic" story of a "German turn" in Sweden during the First World War has since been nuanced by historians like Wilhelm Carlgren who maintained that the Swedish government pursued a more balanced approach between the European great powers.[196]

After the end of the war, the literature on Swedish foreign policy suggests that the neutral states found themselves in a peculiar position as the "principle of neutrality was greatly undermined by the creation of the League."[197] While neutrals had previously been subjected to strict impartiality, the Covenant's introduction of the compulsory settlement of disputes alongside the obligation to participate in collective punitive action against belligerents implied novel rules.[198] Per Cramér points to how the incompatibility between collective security and neutrality was explicitly stated by the League Council, but that the Covenant in practice still allowed for neutrality as an accepted position for non-belligerents.[199] The literature thus argues that, despite the official League

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[194] Bring 2008:15; Müller, L. 2022. "'Long Peace', Neutrality and Sweden-Norway's Foreign Policy, 1794-1856" in Biltekin, N. – Müller, L. – Petersson, M. (eds.) *200 years of peace: New Perspectives on Modern Swedish Foreign Policy.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

[195] Gihl, T. 1951. *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia, Del IV 1914-1919*. Stockholm: Nordstedts, p. 215.

[196] Nygren, O. 2025. *Östersjöfrågan: En studie av svenskt internationellt tänkande 1914-1945*. Södertörn: Södertörn University, p. 21. See also: Carlgren, W. 1979. "Svensk neutralitet 1914-1919 och 1939-1945" *Historisk tidsskrift.*

[197] Bring 2008:183.

[198] Riste. O. 2003. *War an Peace in the Political Culture of Scandinavia in the 20th Century*. Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies. See also: Hathaway, O. A. – Shapiro, S. J. 2019. "International law and its transformation through the outlawry of war." *International Affairs* 95(1):45-62.

[199] Cramér, P. 1998. *Neutralitet och europeisk integration*. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, p. 113f. In the context of the League, the states who had remained neutral during the war, including Sweden, became referred to as the ex-neutral states and the term non-belligerent was introduced for ex-neutrals participating in sanctions against aggressors.

rhetoric on the organisation's discordancy with neutrality, Sweden preserved neutrality as a complementary foreign policy.

For that reason, the literature also emphasises how Sweden and the other ex-neutral states often remained sceptical of wider interpretations of collective security. Bring, for example, understands Swedish neutrality as remaining a second-hand policy solution in case collective security would fail, and that Sweden therefore sought to soften obligations to participate in coercive measures to keep that option viable.[200] When the neutral states had been consulted by the League Commission in March 1919 they had managed to secure their independence of action regarding precicely military sanctions.[201] Both Ingemar Ottosson and Jacob Westberg point to how Sweden also later remained resistant towards attempts to strengthen obligatory measures. The Geneva Protocol in 1924, which sought to combine disarmament with stricter requirements for arbitration and more robust assurances of collective action, was, for example, actively disputed by Sweden and the other ex-neutrals who regarded the proposed security guarantees as undermining the possibility of assuming a neutral position in case of war.[202]

Sweden would nonetheless come to participate in the League's first and only use of the sanctions article following Italy's invasion of Etiophia in 1935. However, when the sanctions regime had little effect on Italy's occupation, and France and Britain announced that they would end their own sanctions, Sweden began negotiations alongside Norway, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Spain on a joint neutral position. They later declared that Article 16, the so-called sanctions article, of the Covenant had lost its binding force; a declaration that, according to Bring, announced the full return of a Swedish neutrality policy. In the spring of 1938, the Nordic foreign ministries met to prepare new national rules of neutrality based on the 1907 Hauge Convention, and signed a joint declaration announcing each state's neutral position in May.[203] In June 1940 the Swedish government withdrew its permenant representation to the League in Geneva.

Compared to research on Sweden *before* the Second World War, the literature on Swedish war time neutrality is far more extensive. On the one hand, the literature has approach Swedish neutrality from the perspective of how

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[200] Bring 2008:185f.
[201] Jones 1939:61. Economic sanctions in response to violations of the Covenant were thus obligatory, although the duty to implement them rested with the individual member states, while military sanctions were discretionary, see White, N. D. 2020. "The League of Nations, autonomy, and collective security" *London Review of International Law* 8(1):89-120.
[202] Ottosson 1986:4f; Westberg 2012:85ff.
[203] Bring 2008:189ff.

Sweden, as a small state, managed to stay out of the war by adapting and navigating its foreign policy and neutral position in relation to its external security environment given its own limited resources.[204] In this vein, a research project at Stockholm University in the 1970s (the so-called *SUAV* project) resulted in about 20 doctoral theses. On the other hand, Swedish neutrality during this period has also been the subject of debates around morality. In the 1990s, the Swedish Research Council funded a project on Sweden's conduct during the war focusing on Sweden's relationship to Nazi Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust. The project was part of a broader moral debate in Swedish historiography on Sweden's neutrality, its appeasement policy towards Nazi Germany, the presence of pro-Nazi sentiments in Swedish society, and Sweden's passivity or solidarity with its occupied Scandinavian neighbours.[205]

Just as the Second World War has been more extensively covered and debated in the literature on Swedish foreign policy, the Cold War period has also received substantive attention, including in another research project (the *SUKK* project) resulting in several doctoral disserations and reports on the topic. This literature in particular emphasises Sweden's balancing between the two great powers, where a Swedish neutrality policy in the Cold War context meant that Sweden would stay out of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, while supporting the credibility of its neutrality with a strong national defence. In 1956, Sweden thus formalised its policy of "non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in war", establishing the so-called "Undén-line" which is typically told as a more low-profile or passive policy seeking to maintain the *status quo*.[206] In short, this approach built on the need for stability by providing a buffer between the West and the East.[207]

At the same time, the literature often understands this period as marked by a contradiction between, on the one hand, Sweden's *de facto* integration into

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[204] See, for example: Carlgren, W. 1973. *Svensk utrikespolitik 1939–1945*. Stockholm: Allmänna Förlaget; Johansson, A. W. 1985. *Per Albin och kriget: samlingsregeringen och utrikespolitiken under andra världskriget.* Stockholm: Tiden. See also: Gilmour, J. 2013. *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish Experience in the Second World War.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[205] See, for example: Wahlbäck, K. 1998. "Neutrality and Morality: the Swedish Experience" *American University of International Law Review* 14(1):103-122; Andersson, L. M. – Tydén, M. 2007. *Sverige och Nazityskland: Skuldfrågor och moraldebatt.* Stockholm: Dialogos; Åmark, K. 2011. *Att bo granne med ondskan: Sveriges förhållande till nazismen, Nazityskland och förintelsen.* Stockholm: Bonnier.

[206] Makko 2012:68-97.

[207] Brommesson *et al* 2025:72. This has been called the 'Finland argument' and based on the interpretation that if the Soviet Union saw Sweden as a part of NATO it could seek to balance by expanding into Finland.

Western cultural, political, and economic structures, including its covert defence cooperation and close ties with NATO countries, and, on the other hand, its corresponding need to uphold a degree of isolation and autonomy to safeguard the neutrality policy.[208] In the 1960s, Prime Minister Olof Palme also introduced an alternative "active policy of neutrality" (see further below), and Mikael af Malmborg writes that the Swedish government more and more began emphasising the "mutually supportive character of Sweden's internationalist ambitions and the policy of neutrality."[209]

The period following the Cold War up until today is broadly understood and presented as Sweden's gradual abandonment of the neutrality policy.[210] For some, Sweden's decision to join NATO's Partnership for Peace programme in 1994 and the European Union in 1995 signalled a move away from of neutrality immediately after the Cold War.[211] For others, the Swedish self-image of neutrality alongside its new official policy of military non-alignment was rather a continuation.[212] Although Ulf Bjereld and Ann-Marie Ekengren understand Swedish foreign policy after the Cold War as the gradual move from autonomy to integration through both European cooperation and collaboration with NATO, they argue that, until 2022, military non-alignment still represented a lingering continuity of Sweden's tradition of a neutrality policy.[213]

Solidarity as foreign policy

Jacob Westberg traces the roots of Sweden's so-called idealist foreign policy to the end of the nineteenth century when new possibilities for smaller states to contribute to the development of a more peaceful world emerged.[214] The

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[208] See Bjereld *et al* 2008. See also: Agrell, W. 1991. *Den stora lögnen: ett säkerhetspolitiskt dubbelspel i alltför många akter.* Stockholm: Ordfront; Petersson, M. 2017. "'The Allied Partner': Sweden and NATO through the Realist-Idealist Lens' in Andrew, Cottey (ed.) *The Europe Neutrals and NATO: Future Prospects.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
[209] af Malmborg 2001:161. See also Lödén, H. 1999. *"För säkerhets skull" Ideologi och säkerhet i svensk aktiv utrikespolitik 1950-1975.* Stockholm: Santérus.
[210] Biltekin *et al* 2022.
[211] See, for example: Petersson 2017. See also Dalsjö, R. 2015. "Från neutralitet till solidaritet: Omgestaltningen av Sveriges säkerhetspolitik efter det kalla kriget" in Engelbrekt, K. – Holmgren, A. – Ångström, J. (eds.) *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i Europa och världen.* Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik.
[212] See, for example, Jonter, T. 1999. "Sverige in i NATO?" *Ordfront Magasin* 5:23-27.
[213] Bjereld, U. – Ekengren, A. 2024. *Från neutralitet till Nato. Svensk utrikespolitik under 200 år.* Lund: Studentlitteratur. See also Möller, U. – Bjereld, U. 2010. "From Nordic neutrals to post-neutral Europeans: Differences in Finnish and Swedish policy transformation" *Cooperation and Conflict* 45(4):363-386.
[214] Westberg 2012:67ff.

first world peace conference had been held already in 1843, and was connected to the emergence of peace movements in the United States (US) and Europe. In the 1870s such ideas started gaining more ground in Scandinavia as well, and during the early twentieth century Sweden would come to participate actively in the "negotiations on general disarmament and in those on the establishment of principles for the settlement of international disputes."[215]

There are also early takes on a specific Nordic/Scandinavian, rather than international, solidarity encompassing Swedish foreign policy. Krister Wahlbäck writes that this initially rested on a "great-Swede" conservative-nationalist perspective where support for Sweden's neighbours was understood as being paid for by the acknowledgement of Sweden's "leading position" in the Nordics.[216] Wahlbäck argues, however, that the variant that would become dominant in Sweden was a liberal democratic-Scandinavian tradition with its origin in the mid-1800s when it was target towards the Prussian and Russian authoritarian regimes and a support for Denmark's sovereignty and Finland's liberation respectively. The more internationalist role developed in the twentieth century had similar roots, but would come to be just as associated with the work of social democratic Swedes in the League specifically.

Although a foreign policy based on international and Nordic/Scandinavian solidarity can thus be traced further back, the Interwar period is commonly understood as consolidating the former. The literature highlights how Sweden would become an active member of the organisation, despite the initial opposition towards a Swedish membership, and that it continuously advocated for the development of arbitration and disarmament in that context. Sunniva Engh and collegues write, however, that the League membership also transformed the pre-war emphasis on "international law, courts and arbitration as the main instruments of international peacekeeping to a begrudged acceptance of a

[215] Brommesson *et al* 2025:66. Examples of Swedish early contributions in the field of disarmament and arbitration can thus be found in the Hauge Peace Conference in 1899 with the signing of the Convention of the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, as well as in the Swedish-Russian arbitration agreement in 1905. In 1915, the *Central Organisation for Durable Peace* was established at the Hague with leading Scandinavian politicians seeking paths to more peaceful interstate relations, and, in 1918, the Scandinavian states set up a commission that was built on the idea that the neutral states had a specific role in developing suggestions for a new peace order, see Westberg 2012:77ff. However, according to Jones, there is nothing to suggest that the work of the Scandinavian commission was actually included in the work of developing the League Covenant after the First World War, Jones 1939:37ff, in Westberg 2012:79. See also Ikonomou – Rasmussen 2021.
[216] Wahlbäck 2014:79.

Great Power-led organization that had political deliberations and negotiations at its core."[217]

This meant that Sweden focused especially on advancing the League's arbitrational role, its disarmament efforts, and the power of its smaller members vis-à-vis that of the Council. Already at the Assembly's first meeting, Sweden and its Scandinavian counterparts revisited the need for an arbitration body, and Swedes would later come to hold key positions in the League's own mediation and arbitration of disputes.[218] Sweden also made disarmament a key feature of its policy, and even took a unilateral decision in its own defence plan in 1925. It sought, together with its Scandinavian neighbours, the creation of a disarmament commission under the Secretariat, and one of its achievements include a one-year freezing of arms levels accepted at the disarmament conference in 1932.[219] Sweden also agreed to give up its non-permanent seat during the 1926 Council crisis in order to secure a smooth German entry without tipping the scale of the Council to the disadvantage of the smaller states.[220]

As discussed in the section above, Sweden still remained sceptical towards wider interpretations of collective security, but John Ross has illustrated that, over time, Sweden became gradually more open towards such provisions.[221] When the League decided to enforce economic sanctions against Italy following its invasion of Ethiopia, Sweden participated in the sanctions regime with an, at least initially, broad parliamentary support.[222] Sweden notably also contributed with troops to the first international peacekeeping force deployed to supervise the Saar plebiscite. Taken together, Sweden's conduct within the League has thus been told as consolidating an "idealistic foreign policy, with

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[217] Engh *et al* 2025:879. The authors note that the Scandinavian governments started cooperating more systematically within the League context, and that the Scandinavians were "coded" within the League as holding certain values based on being ex-neutral, European, non-colonial states (despite colonial pasts and presents) with reliable state administrations. See also Götz 2009.

[218] Makko, A. 2010. "Arbitrator in a World of Wars: The League of Nations and The Mosul Dispute, 1924-1925" *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21:631-649; Ikonomou – Rasmussen 2021.

[219] Westberg 2012:90. See also: Lönnroth 1959:107; Trönnberg, S. 1985. *Nedrustning under mellankrigstiden: Sverige och nedrustningskonferensen i Geneve 1932.* Kungälv: SEELIG & Co.

[220] The Council crisis occured against the backdrop of the Locarno Treaties which had sought to normalise relations between Germany and the West, and, as part of these efforts, Germany was to gain admission to the League. When the country was offered a permanent seat in the Council, Poland, and later Spain and Brazil, demanded the same recognition. Sweden therefore opted to give up its non-permanent seat, allowing Germany a permanent one without additional changes to the Council's composition, see Lönnroth 1959:77; Westberg 2012:86f.

[221] Ross, J. F. L. 1989. *Neutrality and International Sanctions: Sweden, Switzerland and Collective Security.* New York: Praeger, p. 70.

[222] See also Ottosson 1986.

strong principled beliefs in multilateralism and legalism".[223] In other words, a gradual development of ideas stemming from the Interwar years and Swedish support for a world order based on collective action, conflict mediation, and arms reduction, led to the Swedish "self-image of neutrality and a desire to play an active role in the international sphere."[224]

While the literature on Sweden's foreign policy during the Second World War has emphasised its neutrality policy from both realist and moralist perspectives, Norbert Götz points out that domestic organisations in Sweden still continued to advocate the idealist idea of a world governing body.[225] However, such references to a future programme of post-war international reconstruction were sparse, and, even as the war had ended, Sweden did not become an 'activist' in the international arena from the outset, and rather (re)turned to its ambition to stay out of controversial foreign policy issues.[226] Instead, Sweden first turned to seeking a Scandinavian defence union and solidarity within the Nordics, but the communist *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia accelerated negotiations on an alliance under the umbrella of the US, with Denmark and Norway deciding to join NATO instead.[227]

Although Sweden opted to stay out of the military alliance and declare itself non-aligned, it had notably become a member of the UN in 1946, and, albeit a fervent UN support has been questioned by Götz, the literature maintains that Sweden would later come to embrace multilateralism and cooperation within that context.[228] Especially in the 1960s did Sweden become increasingly active in various international issues, including on decolonisation and humanitarian aid. Alongside this Sweden sought to develop its credibility as an impartial mediator and bridge-builder, and Swedish foreign policy became

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[223] Brommesson *et al* 2025:67.
[224] Biltekin *et al* 2022:3.
[225] The board of the *Swedish League of Nations Association*, for instance, maintained that current events only hampered the collaboration that had characterised the international sphere for the past decades, and it soon changed its name to the *Swedish Association for a New League of Nations*. After the war, it merged with two other peace organisations an became the predecessor of the current *United Nations Association of Sweden.* See: Götz, N. 2016. "From Neutrality to Membership: Sweden and the United Nations, 1941-1946" *Contemporary European History* 25(1):75-95, p. 79.
[226] Ekengren, A. 2011. "How Ideas Influence Decision-Making: Olof Palme and Swedish foreign policy, 1965-1975" *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36(1):117-134, p. 124; see also Makko 2012.
[227] Brommesson *et al* 2025:70.
[228] Götz 2016.

centred on diplomatic peace-making.[229] However, Sweden would also come to pursue a more outspoken policy centred on international criticism. Ann-Marie Ekengren describe Sweden's foreign policy as becoming 'radicalised' from the mid-60s where Palme has been told as a leading figure in the pursuit of an 'activist' foreign policy, for instance through the reproach of the US's involvement in Vietnam and of apartheid in South Africa.[230]

The end of the Cold War then opened new doors for Sweden in pursuing an 'internationalist' foreign policy.[231] For at least a decade, however, it still emphasised military non-alignment alongside a gradual political and economic integration within the European Union (EU).[232] The "Europeanisation" of Swedish foreign policy nonetheless culminated in a unilateral declaration that Sweden would be willing to defend other EU members and its Nordic neighbours.[233] This emphasis on European solidarity was accompanied by the participation in international activities for the promotion of peace and security, including in military operations, alongside an advocacy for norms on human rights, environmental policy, and gender equality.[234] Following renewed tensions in Europe in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Sweden

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[229] Svensson, I. – Wallensteen, P. 2025. "Mandates and Nordic Experiences in International Mediation" in Svensson, I. – Wallensteen, P. *The Peacemaking Mandate: Nordic Experiences in International Mediation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[230] Ekengren 2011:124; see also Bjereld, U. 1995. "Critic or Mediator? Sweden in World Politics, 1945-90" *Journal of Peace Research* 32(1):23-35; Jerneck, M. 2013. "Sitting on the Balcony: American Responses, Strategic Dilemmas, and Swedish Criticism of the Vietnam War" *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24:404-426.

[231] Sweden had, for example, contributed to UN peacekeeping missions during the Cold War, but a next step would come to involve peace-enforcing missions.

[232] Brommesson *et al* 2025:112f. For more on the preceding Swedish debates on the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1960s and 1970s, see Bergquist, M. 1969. "Sweden and the European Economic Community" *Cooperation and Conflict* 4(1):1-12; Karlsson 1995; Brommesson *et al* 2025:101.

[233] Brommesson, D. 2010. "Normative Europeanization: The case of Swedish foreign policy reorientation" *Cooperation and Conflict* 45(2):224-244; Petersson 2017:81; Czarny 2018:187.

[234] See, for example, Björkdahl, A. 2008. "Norm advocacy: a small state strategy to influence the EU" *Journal of European Public Policy* 15(1):135-154; Aggestam, L. – Hyde-Price, A. 2016. "'A Force for Good'? Paradoxes of Swedish Military Activism" in Pierre, J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Noreen, E. – Sjöstedt, R. – Ångström, J. 2017. "Why small states join big wars: the case of Sweden in Afghanistan, 2002-2014" *International Relations* 31(2):145-168; Engström, O. – Rosén Sundström, M. 2026. "Normative Leadership Lost? Gender Equality in the EU and the Rise and Demise of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy" *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 47(1):81-91.

turned to established bi- and multilateral relations to build defence cooperation, including a 'return to Norden' and a regional focus, eventually leading up to Sweden embracing a Euro-Atlantic solidarity within NATO.[235]

Realism, idealism, and Sweden's grand strategy

The summary above briefly touches upon what the scholarship on Swedish foreign policy in the twentieth century (and beyond) has tended to highlight. What these broader scholarly narratives nonetheless illustrate is that neither neutrality nor solidarity has had fixed meanings across neither time nor space.[236] Neutrality became a peacetime declaration that Sweden resisted making permanent, and in the Interwar years it persisted as a policy held in reserve. Solidarity encompassed both an early conservative-nationalist variant based on regional primacy, but also a liberal-democratic tradition. Swedish Interwar solidarity was invested towards developing arbitration and disarmament, institutionalising its more internationalist orientation. After the war, neutrality was reverted into non-alignment aiming at neutrality in wartime, and was eventually reframed as an "active neutrality" opening the door for Sweden to pursue a place as both a bridge-builder and an international critic. From the 1990s and onwards, neutrality thus persisted more as a self-image than a policy, with Sweden moving towards a European and transatlantic solidarity.

Undén's question in 1945 had notably been between neutrality *or* solidarity, and Undén himself had advocated for the depreciation of the former since it, in his view, did not go hand in hand with international solidarity. Since then the scholarship has, in practice, embraced a range of associated concepts, ranging from autonomy or integration, independence or cooperation, and passivity or activism, to characterise Sweden's foreign policy.[237] To make sense of this – whether seen as a dilemma causing tension, a mutually reinforcing policy model, or a transformation over time – the literature drawing on traditional IR theory often turns to an understanding of Swedish foreign policy as

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[235] For some, the NATO membership meant a full embracement of European and/or Western solidarity. For others, it meant an end to an "activist" policy based on bridge-building and criticism, and thus an end to a competing understanding of Swedish solidarity.

[236] As section 3.3 will discuss further, both policy paths also appear to occasionally have been the source of partisan conflicts with divergent interpretations appearing, not only over time, but in specific debates as well.

[237] See, for example, Andrén, N. 1997. *Säkerhetspolitik. Analyser och tillämpningar*. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik; Agrell 2000; Brommesson *et al* 2025; Westberg, J. 2023. *Svenska säkerhetsstrategier: från neutralitetspolitik till ansökan om Natomedlemskap.* 3rd edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur. See also Crazny, R. M. 2018. *Sweden: From Neutrality to International Solidarity.* Cham: Springer.

based on *small state realism* and *small state idealism*. In Fredrik Doeser and colleagues' historical and contemporary case studies, realist and liberal/idealist influences were understood as shaping both external and internal reasons for Nordic security policy and cooperation from the end of the Napoleonic Wars up until the twenty-first century.[238]

Similar starting points have thus informed a large bulk of studies on Swedish foreign policy, including in relation to the Interwar years. When seeking to explain Swedish policy during the Mosul Crisis in 1924-25, John Rogers, for instance, argued that Sweden as a small state could base its foreign policy on four options: a realism favouring anti-balance behaviour, an isolationism based on passivity, an idealism relying on international rules and laws, and an expansionism seeking to strengthen Sweden's own role in the international sphere.[239] Magnus Petersson has similarly used a realist-idealist lens to characterise Swedish foreign policy doctrine over time, but more so by drawing on the argument that its neutrality policy has served *both* realist functions related to security and stability at home, and idealist functions in the support of certain norms and values abroad.[240]

A related way of making sense of the question of neutrality or solidarity can also be found in Douglas Brommesson and colleagues' recent book *Sweden's Grand Strategy* in which the authors identify a Swedish approach centred around preserving regional peace and defending "the values and norms grounded in a Swedish culture and worldview that was of importance to the conception of Self."[241] Although they do not draw on a realist-idealist lens and rather deploy a constructivist ideal type approach, they explore role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy as expressions of its grand strategy along the dimensions of the degree Sweden as a small state has sought *autonomy*, and the extent to which it has been willing to cooperate and *integrate* into alliances and partnerships. In turn, they identify and categorise Sweden's dominant roles since 1945 as: autonomous security seeker, integrated security seeker, and integrationist European.[242]

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[238] Doeser, F. – Petersson, M. – Westberg, J. 2012. *Norden mellan stormakter och fredsförbund: Nordiskt säkerhetspolitiskt samarbete i det gamla och nya Europa.* Stockholm: Santérus förlag.
[239] Rogers, J. 2007. "The Foreign Policy of Small States: Sweden and the Mosul Crisis 1924-25" *Contemporary European History* 16(3):349-369, p. 355. See also: Rothstein 1968, chapter 7.
[240] Petersson 2018:74. See also: Erlandsson, S. 2015. *Windows of opportunity. Dutch and Swedish security ideas and strategies 1942-1948.* Uppsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia, p. 20.
[241] Brommesson *et al* 2025:188.
[242] Brommesson *et al* 2025:193.

Scholars writing on Swedish foreign policy have thus attached importance to these terminologies and analytical lenses. Given that neutrality and solidarity are ambiguous enough to be filled with a myriad of different meanings, there are clearly nuances both over time and at particular times as to what they actually imply, including whether they are mutually exclusive or mutally reinforcing aspects of Swedish foreign policy. Scholars deploying a realist-idealist perspective, or ideal types between autonomy and integration, to make sense of Sweden's policy model are well aware of this, and therefore understand them as dimensions, or even two sides of the same coin, rather than fixed opposites that remain rigid across time and space. While this allows for analytical flexibility, it also leaves one to wonder what is potentially obscured and what could be lost by deploying these particular concepts. To what extent was Undén's initial question representative of Swedish twentieth century foreign policy, and to what extent was it a rhetoric move allowed to become an accepted presumption in scholarly accounts of the same?

3.2 Identity between neutrality and solidarity

What a vocabulary of neutrality and solidarity might obscure, and how Undén's framing constituted rather than described Swedish foreign policy, point beyond the explanatory ambitions of the literature reviewed thus far. Addressing this requires asking, not only what Sweden's foreign policy was or why it might have changed, but what neutrality and solidarity have meant for how Sweden has come to understand, narrate, and present itself. Some scholars have taken on this task by approaching Swedish foreign policy through identity or identity-related concepts. This section of the chapter reviews these contributions, firstly, by briefly exploring the scholarship(s) on strategic culture, role conceptions, and national identity, often situating itself in more contemporary debates on Swedish foreign policy. It then turns to a more history-oriented literature, locating itself primarily in the post-war context, in which neutrality and welfare emerge as hegemonic concepts, and Swedish internationalism as a specific social democratic project. Finally, this section also considers the scholarship on Nordic exceptionalism and regional identity, alongside postcolonial and feminist interventions of the same.

Strategic culture, role conceptions, and national identity

A body of research has approach Swedish foreign policy through the concepts of cultures, roles, and identity. These contributions share a broad interest in the sociopolitical, ideational, and/or discursive conditions under which foreign policies emerge, and they thereby shift the question from *what* Sweden's foreign policy was towards *why* or *how* it appeared available and reasonable to policy-makers. Harrison Manke captures the motivation behind this move by arguing that that, "when looking through a prism of realism or idealism, Swedish decisions can be contradictory and confusing. To better understand Sweden […] a deeper examination of distinct sociopolitical factors is required."[243] For him, historical influences on a Swedish strategic culture and the existence of two subcultures (constructive and traditional neutralists) could better make sense of, in his case, Sweden's nuclear decision-making.

In the strategic culture literature, Jan Ångström has addressed how a dichotomy between the national and the international has allowed for Sweden's modern engagement in international military operations despite its policy of non-alignment. He underscores the discursive distinction in Sweden's historical strategic narrative between, on the one hand, the *national* and an interest-driven, non-aligned people's defence (*folkförsvar*), and on the other, the *international* which is equated to humanitarian ideals, modernism, and a scepticism towards the use of military force.[244]. In a similar vein, Magnus Christiansson has developed an interesting take based on a dual understanding of discourse related to the domestic and the international arena respectively. He argues that conceptual stretching has created a "heterotopia" in which actors in Sweden invoke "solidarity" and "sovereignty" for quite different purposes and with different meanings attached to them across these arenas. In other words, solidarity could be invoked in Sweden "both as a sign of Sweden's active involvement in the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration and as a notion that is fully compatible with the *status quo* preference for military non-alliance."[245]

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[243] Menke. H. 2023. "Swedish Exceptionalism and Strategic Culture: Swedish Nuclear Decisionmaking" in Kartchner, K. M. – Bowen, B. D. – Johnson, J. L. *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture.* London: Routledge, p. 219.

[244] Ångström, J. 2015. "Försvarsmaktens internationella insatser: i den svenska säkerhetens eller identitetens tjänst?" in Engelbrekt, K. – Holmberg, A. – Ångström, J. (eds.) *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i Europa och världen.* Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik. See also: Ångström, J. – Honig, J. W. "Regaining Strategy: Small Powers, Strategic Culture, and Escalation in Afghanistan" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35(5):663-687.

[245] Christiansson, M. 2010. "Solidarity and Sovereignty: The Two-Dimensional Game of Swedish Security Policy" *Connections* 10(1):1-23, p. 21. For another take on this focusing on how neutrality has been re-conceptualised, see: Devine, K. 2011. "Neutrality and the development

Strategic culture is, however, mostly narrowed down to explaining Sweden's defence policy or military strategy.[246] In the realm of foreign policy, scholars have more readily turned to the concept of *roles*. Here Anna Michalski, Brommesson, and Ekengren argue that national roles compromise a constitutive dimension by connecting to the collective identity of the state, as well as an action-oriented dimension by setting cognitive boundaries for its foreign policy. They argue that the present-day weakening of a rules-based international order has forced Sweden's political elites to address a role strain through domestic processes of role adjustment, resulting in Sweden's abandonment of its role as military non-aligned.[247] Ulrika Möller and Ekengren similarly argue that foreign policy priorities, with implications for conceptions about a state's appropriate international role, can involve role conflicts due to mismatches between multiple roles or because of the changing functions of a role. They explored the domestic controversy around the Swedish 2017-18 membership on the UN Security Council, and found that diverging national role conceptions, especially between an internationalist or a European orientation, led to role contestation among the foreign policy elites in Sweden.

Sweden's strategic culture and role conceptions are, however, often understood as intervening factors that play a (sometimes major, sometimes minor) part in explaining Sweden's foreign policy, and these works can broadly be placed in the "thin" programme of constructivism.[248] In addition to these takes are also scholarly contributions that, more in line with the approach developed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, emphasise the mutually constitution of national identity and foreign policy. Here the ontological security scholarship has made notable additions, especially in seeking to explain Sweden's recent NATO membership as a way to help restore ontological security when non-alignment was put "into conflict with the identity of being an independent and peace-contributing state that promotes democracy and solidarity with like-minded

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of the European Union's common security and defence policy: Compatible or competing?" *Cooperation and Conflict* 46(3):334-369.

[246] Gunnar Åselius has traced the evolution of Sweden's strategic culture, arguing that, the despite Sweden's 200 years of peace, it has military traditions stemming from its "age of empire" and from the Cold War period when it combined non-alignment with becoming partly self-sufficient in modern military technology, see Åselius, G. 2005. "Swedish strategic culture after 1945" *Cooperation and Conflict* 40(1):25-44. See also Doeser, F. 2016. "Finland, Sweden, and Operation Unified Protector: The impact of strategic culture" *Comparative Strategy* 35(4):284-297.

[247] Michalski *et al* 2024:143.

[248] As part of this one might also want to consider the literature on Sweden's strategy and/or role as a norm entrepreneur, see for example: Ingebritsen, C. 2002. "Norm Entrepreneurs: Scandinavia's Role in World Politics" *Cooperation and Conflict* 37(1):11-23; Björkdahl, A. 2007. "Swedish Norm Entrepreneurship in the UN" *International Peacekeeping* 14(4):538-552.

states".[249] From this perspective, Sweden's foreign policies can thus be understood as narratively produced as paths to confirm and stabilise a sense of self.

Scholarship on national identity has also attempted to make sense of Sweden's move away from a tradition of neutrality following the end of the Cold War. Christine Agius has, for instance, drawn attention to how a 'politics of post-neutrality' relied on privileging certain narratives and discourses about neutrality, identity, and security. From this perspective, it was not merely a shift occurring in response to an external security environment, but one "intricately enmeshed in ideas of self and subjectivity – what sort of subject the state ought to be."[250] In another piece written together with Annika Bergman Rosamond, Agius also illustrates how the reconfiguration of collective memories and self-narratives has formed a crucial aspect of Sweden's post-Cold War self-understanding which has permitted it to engage in new activities: from strict notions of neutrality towards active engagement in military interventions.[251]

Strategic culture and role approaches have thus been particularly useful in delineating the processes through which particular foreign policies come to appear as reasonable for Sweden, as well as in drawing attention to the different, and sometimes competing, perceptions appearing within domestic contexts. But in treating Swedish culture(s) and role(s) primarily as intervening factors, they tend to take two things for granted: an external security environment supplying a sort of stimulus to which the state adjusts, as well as an internal self/identity that can be held ontologically apart from that adjustment. The more critical scholarship on national identity and ontological security instead asks how a sense of self is reproduced, stabilised, and contested through the making of foreign policy itself (e.g. how threats come to be narrated as such or how collective memories are reconfigured while others are forgotten). Change in Swedish policy and identity, from this perspective, is not adaptation to an altered environment, but a renegotiation of who the state imagines itself

[249] Hjertström – Hagström 2025:48f. See also: Nymalm, N. 2024. "Sustaining (organizational) identity in times of change? Ontological security and narrative in Swedish military doctrine" *Critical Military Studies* 11(2):130-150; Vuorelma, J. 2025. "An existential threat in the North: Ontological insecurity and the Nordic path to NATO" *Cooperation and Conflict* 60(4):727-751.
[250] Agius, C. 2011. "Transformed beyond recognition? The politics of post-neutrality" *Cooperation and Conflict* 46(3):370-395, p. 384.
[251] Bergman Rosamond, A. – Agius, C. 2018. "Sweden, military intervention and the loss of memory" in Aguis, C. – Keep, D. (eds.) *The Politics of Identity: Place, Space, and Discourse.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

to be within it. However, these important insights, often drawing upon constructivist and poststructuralist IR theory, have rarely been used to make sense of Swedish identity and foreign policy before its most recent past.

Swedish nation-building or a social democratic identity project

Whereas the question of neutrality and solidarity has not been extensively studied from the perspective of national identity *per se*, there are a number of writings that explicitly link, in particular the former, to the construction of a Swedish national self within what can be called a more critical historical scholarship. In addition to the importance of neutrality in the story about the Swedish nation, this literature also points to the welfare state as a second core theme. Revolving around the question of nation-building, this literature offers reflections on the myths of Swedish neutrality in connection to associated myths of modernity and the People's home (*folkhemmet*) – often regarding them as interrelated in the imagining of Sweden in the twentieth century.

Af Malmborg has offered one of the most noteworthy works on Swedish neutrality, and summarises the prevailing narrative on Swedish neutrality as follows:

> The history of Swedish peace and neutrality has traditionally been told as a national story beginning with Jean Baptiste, the French general who was elected king at the end of the Napoleonic Wars and broke with Sweden's belligerent past. […] From him the story continues to the abortive nineteenth-century Scandinavianism and the successful navigation between the Scylla and Charybdis of pro-Germanism and the Russian menace in the two World Wars. It blossoms fully with Per Albin Hansson, social democratic Prime Minister of the People's Home, who steered his country with a firm hand through the dark age. In the Cold War, the story goes on, Swedish neutrality policy laid the ground for détente in Northern Europe, eased Finland's position and culminated when the late Olof Palme carried the Swedish peace message out in the world.[252]

Af Malmborg maintained a far more complicated history than this story suggests however. His post-revisionist approach placed neutrality within the broader history of European state-formation where he discussed Sweden's neutrality tradition in parallel with the emergence of the conceptual distinc-

[252] Af Malmborg 2001:1

tions that characterise modern society, such as public/private, national/international, and war/peace.[253] From this perspective, simple questions about Sweden as a neutral (or non-neutral) quickly obscures the nuances in how it has been practiced and interpreted across time and space, and to what effect. [254]

Bo Huldt has gone as far as to contend that neutrality has often been applied to things that have little to do with security policy, and a lot more to do with national sovereignty and cultural identity.[255] In this vein, Agius also understands the early origins of Swedish neutrality as an attempt to redefine and signal a new path for Sweden following its decline from a belligerent empire to a defeated one. Swedish identity was challenged as a result of its loss of power, and neutrality represented an alternative, albeit not uncontested, path. Still, Agius argues that it was not until the post-war era that neutrality became intrinsically tied to a "historically-defined process of self-identification."[256] The neutrality that emerged during the war became not only a self-proclaimed security policy, but was a part of forming a Swedish mentality.[257] In the context of the Cold War, Swedish neutrality was increasingly embedded in historical narratives that emphasised Sweden's century long period without war, thus linking the tradition of neutrality to one of peace and peacefulness.[258]

Per Lundin and Niklas Stenlås connect this myth of Swedish neutrality to one of modernity, welfare, and the People's home (*folkhem*). They understand Sweden's foundational myths as formed in the 1950s but projected back onto the 1930s – a "period typified by 'a modern breakthrough', a new national spirit and the rise to power of a new political force: the labour movement."[259] Lars Trägårdh further connects the emergence of the People's home to a nationalism centered around the uniting of social democrats and agrarians, or in his words: "the old pitting of a nationally-minded King and patriotic and freedom-loving Peasant against the treacherous and faithless Lord is reinvented: the aristocrats of old become the industrialists and capitalists of today, and the

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[253] Af Malmborg 2001:3. See also Ångström 2015:189.
[254] Another important contribution to historical narrative is Erik Ringmar's work on Sweden's intervention in the Thirty Years War which explained Sweden's decision to go to war in Germany in 1630 as part of a process of national identity formation, see Ringmar 1996.
[255] Huldt, B. 1990. "Svensk neutralitet – historia och framtidsperspektiv" in Nordlöf-Lagerkrantz, U. (ed.) *Svensk neutralitet, Europa och EG.* Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska institutet, p. 8.
[256] Agius 2006:85.
[257] Johansson 1995. "Neutralitet och modernitet: andra världskriget och Sveriges nationella identitet" in Huldt, B. – Böhme, K. (eds.) *Horisonten klarnar: 1945 – krigsslut.* Stockholm: Probus, p. 210.
[258] Lundin – Stenlås 2010:7. See also: Ekman, S. – Edling, N. 1997. *War Experience, Self Image and National Identity: the Second World War as Myth and History.* Hedemora: Gidlund.
[259] Lundin – Stenlås 2010:6

peasants are joined by the workers as the true representatives of the *folk* and the nation."[260] Central to this turn was thus the shift in the Swedish social democratic party from an emphasis on class to an emphasis on the people (*folket*) and the community (*gemenskapen*).[261]

Traced back to the 1930s, two key events came to be particularly incorporated into the collective memory of Swedes, and later led to an arrangement typically referred to as the 'Swedish model': the 'Horse Trade' (*kohandeln*) between the social democrats and the agrarians, as well as the Saltsjöbaden Agreement between the Swedish trade union (LO) and the employers' confederation (SAF).[262] These happenings provided the background for the post-war modernistic ideals and their connection to the welfare state as the two compromises underlined the hopes for peaceful labour relations, a large public sector, and social reforms. At the same time, the build-up of the Swedish welfare state has been described as reliant on the defence industry to ensure economic growth.[263] Welfare was thus linked to warfare, and was further exemplified by how the Swedish people and the nation's defence was united under the concept of a People's defence (*folkförsvar*).[264]

Neutrality as a 'state of mind' rather than a security policy thus underscored its relation to the construction of a Swedish national identity, one centered around rationality, peacefulness, and modernity. This process of making modernity and neutrality the heart of the Swedish story, Maria Cronqvist argues, entailed a departure from tradition and history – a narrative that detached Sweden from the chaos of post-war Europe, and concentrated on a spirit of rational collaboration and consensus among social groups. Neutrality and the People's home had "become not merely hegemonic, but sanctified concepts."[265] Unity

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[260] Trägårdh 2002a:82. See also Stråth, B. 1996. *The Organisation of Labour Markets: Modernity, Culture and Governance in Germany, Sweden, Britain and Japan*. London: Routledge, p. 75f.

[261] See also Johansson, A. W. 2004. "If you seek his monument, look around! Reflections on national identity and collective memory in Sweden after the Second World War" in Almqvist, K. – Glans, K. (eds.) *The Swedish Success Story?* Stockholm: Axel och Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation; Westberg, J. 2003. *Den nationella drömträdgården: den stora berättelsen om den egna nationen i svensk och brittisk Europadebatt.* Stockholm: Stockholm University, p. 47.

[262] Lundin – Stenlås 2010:6. See also Stråth 1996:88.

[263] Rosengren, E. 2020. *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament: Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War.* Stockholm: Stockholm University, p. 64.

[264] Cronqvist, M. 2012. "Survival in the Welfare Cacoon: The Culture of Civil Defense in Cold War Sweden" in Vowinckel, A. – Payk, M. M. – Lindenberger, T. (eds.) *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Socities.* New York: Berhahn. See also Tornbjer, C. 2002. *Den nationella modern: moderskap i konstruktionen av svensk nationell gemenskap under 1900-talets första hälft.* Lund: Lund University, p. 262.

[265] Cronqvist 2012:197.

was at the core of it, and as Alf W. Johansson puts it: "Sweden sought its glory by being the most successful in security: from the cradle to the grave the Swede would rest in a sheltering net of societal safety. The condition for this was societal homogeneity and a dominating Puritan ethos."[266]

Lundin and Stenlås similarly argues that disunity and disharmony became suppressed, and events that did not align with the 'modern' story of Sweden was forgotten. The same could be said about the emergence of the parallel myth of neutrality as it was projected back onto, not only Sweden's over a century long peace ever since entering a union with Norway in 1814, but to the country's preservation of neutrality during the Second World War. The story goes that this was an ideological choice rather than a historical chance; one that justified Sweden's non-participation in the war and became a shared truth. As Lundin and Stenlås writes:

> It was silently 'forbidden' even to discuss this policy in critical terms as it was considered to weaken Sweden's position if the firmness of the decision to remain neutral at all could be questioned. The dominant political power – the Social Democratic Party – again succeeded in allying itself with the nation's chosen path. Criticism of foreign policy matters was equally a criticism of the Swedish policy of 'non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in time of war'. Such criticism was irresponsible and could be dismissed as such, something that the opposition on both the Left and the Right came to experience.[267]

What is highlighted here is the overarching presence of the social democratic party, and how the two foundational myths of neutrality and modernity can be conntected to their dominance in Swedish politics after 1945. When moving the question of identity back to the question of foreign policy, it can be noted that the neutrality-solidarity nexus is similarily, to a large extent, explored within the post-war context. Some scholars have therefore argued that Sweden's international solidarity can be traced to social democracy specifically, and especially so in the consolidation of Sweden's internationalist role through Branting and Undén as leading figures in Interwar Sweden.[268] Mikko

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[266] Johansson, A. W. 1997. "Neutrality and Modernity: The Second World War and Sweden's National Identity" in Ekman, S. – Edling, N. 1997. *War Experience, Self Image and National Identity: the Second World War as Myth and History.* Hedemora: Gidlund, p. 170.
[267] Lundin & Stenlås 2010:8
[268] Neutrality, adopted as part of social democratic ideology and its vision of the *folkhem*, became understood as a platform from which Sweden could export its core domestic values, such as solidarity and equality, abroad. The Nordic states have, in particular, been told through a commitment to a distinctly social-demoratic set of internationalist values, see Agius 2011:375. See also: Huldt, B. – Misgeld, K. 1990. *Socialdemokratin och den svenska utrikespolitiken.* Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska institutet; Bergman, A. 2006. "Adjacent Internationalism: The Concept of Solidarity and Post-Cold War Nordic-Baltic Relations" *Cooperation and Conflict*

Kuisma has, however, underscored how the 'Nordic normative legacy' has anchors in broader historical developments taking place before the emergence of modern nation-states, where the 'Nordic model' (in terms of social and economic policy as well as foreign and security policy) might have become known as social democratic in the post-war era, but is also informed by a certain 'Nordicity' and form of 'welfare state nationalism'.[269]

Nordic exceptionalism and racialised identities

Another body of literature has placed regional identity formation at the centre, but also taken a more critical approach to the labelling, also in the IR literature, of Nordic approaches to peace, security, and internationalism as something exceptional. Nordic exceptionalism is sometimes treated as a fact, and explained by the referencing to the uniqueness of the history of the Nordic region. As Kuisma writes: "The way in which Nordic states have behaved within and with regard to the international community has been noticeably different from the norm. Neutrality (especially Sweden but also Finland, at least rhetorically), multilateralism, active and solidaristic internationalism have been the 'Nordic trademarks'".[270] As a group, the Nordic states are referred to as "moral superpowers" or "good states", and central to this is the image of the Nordic nations as altruistic actors who accept and promote a broader sense of responsibility as 'model citizens' of the international community.[271]

In 1992, Ole Wæver argued that this Nordic identity was in crisis following European integration. Nordic identity had been defined by its low military tension compared to Central Europe, by its challenge to the struggle between communism and capitalism, and it presented as a model of enlightened, anti-militaristic societies that were constructed as superior to the old Europe.[272] With Europe becoming centred around political freedom rights, and with the

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41(1):73-97; Bergman, A. 2007. "Co-Constitution of Domestic and International Welfare Obligations: The Case of Sweden's Social Democratically Inspired Internationalism" *Cooperation and Conflict* 42:73-99. For more on social democracy in Interwar Sweden, see: Berman 1998.

[269] Kuisma, Mikko. 2007. "Social Democratic Internationalism and the Welfare State After the 'Golden Age'" *Cooperation and Conflict* 42(1):9-26.

[270] Kuisma 2007:10.

[271] Browning, C. S. 2021. "Fantasy, Distinction, Shame: The Stickiness of the Nordic 'Good State' Brand" in de Bengy Puyvallée, A. – Bjørkdahl, K. (eds.) *Do-Gooders at the End of Aid: Scandinavian Humanitarianism in the Twenty-First Century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also: Vik, H.H. – Jensen, S. L. B. – Lindkvist, L. – Strang, J. 2018. "Histories of Human Rights in the Nordic Countries" *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 36(3):189-201.

[272] Wæver, O. 1992. "Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War" *International Affairs* 68(1):77-102.

battle between capitalism and communism ending, the symbol of "Norden" no longer offered the "better" path. This is also shown by Trägårdh's analysis of the Swedish anti-EU movement where *Norden* was distinguished by progressivism, egalitarianism, secularism, and modernism. This exceptionalism was, according to Trägårdh, understood as a mission to spread the "Good Message" of social democracy to the world; an impulse linked to an older Nordic Lutheran Protestant tradition that was markedly other than Catholic Europe.[273]

The idea of Nordic exceptionalism is, however, often connected to the Scandinavian or Nordic countries' post-war ambitions to be a moral force for good in world politics, albeit these were, in turn, similarly related to a Nordic identity based on qualities like non-European, non-Catholic, anti-imperialist, and non-colonial. According to historian Uffe Østergaard, the Nordic states shared a broader "sense of being free from Europe's historical burden as conquistador, colonialist, and exploiter of the rest of the world."[274] Here Ada Nissen notes that it was mainly Norway and Sweden that cultivated a distinct peace nation narrative, and the story of Sweden as a bridge-builder, as a peace mediator, and as a critic (the latter told as made possible by its non-aligned position) in the post-war context can, in other words, be understood, not only as a policy, but as an imagining and a branding of the nation itself. [275]

Scholars have thus looked at how the construction of national historiographies and myths have been at the core of nation-building processes within the Nordic region, but also shaped a specific and strategic *branding* of the Nordic nations. A special issue titled *History and Nation-Branding in the Nordic Region* has shed light on this "strategic use of history and historical memories in the imagining of the Nordic countries".[276] While the claims of Nordic "exceptionalism" can be challenged, both with regards to the extent of their "uniqueness" and whether the Nordics are actually, or indeed ever were, as good and peaceful and solidaristic as they claim to be, this branding also appear to have been accepted or recognised also outside the Nordic region. As

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[273] Trägårdh, L. 2002b. "Sweden and the EU: Welfare State Nationalism and the Spectre of 'Europe'" in Hansen, L. – Wæver, O. (eds.) *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States.* London: Routlege.

[274] Citation from: Nissen, A. 2021. "A Historical View on the Nordic 'Peace Brand'. Norway and Sweden: Partners and Competitors in Peace" in de Bengy Puyvallée, A. – Bjørkdahl, K. (eds.) *Do-Gooders at the End of Aid: Scandinavian Humanitarianism in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 82f.

[275] Nissen 2021:83.

[276] Angell, S. I. – Larsen, E. 2022. "Introduction: Reimagining the Nordic pasts" *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47(5):589-599. See also: Coetzee, W. S. – Larsson, S. – Berndtsson, J. 2024. "Branding 'progressive' security: The case of Sweden" *Cooperation and Conflict* 59(1):86-106.

Christopher S. Browning writes, some external actors, not only recognise, but invest emotionally in this Nordic reputation.[277]

This seems to also trace back to the Interwar years and the Scandinavians' presence in the League. Although the literature on Swedish peace branding and Nordic exceptionalism emphasise the post-war context, Engh and colleagues argue that the Scandinavians were deemed, already by the first Secretary-General of the League and his administrative leadership in the 1920s, as holding certain systemic values, and they were consistently coded as: "European, non-colonial states (despite both colonial pasts and, for instance with regard to Denmark's holding of Greenland, presents), which were neutrals during the war and with reliable state administrations."[278] However, while fantasised notions of Nordic goodness also exert affective influence on "outsiders", Browning argues that for the Nordic nations this has become a more fundamental issue of self-identity and self-narrative.

When it comes to how Nordic identity was constructed before 1945, postcolonial perspectives have added important insights on the idea of Nordic exceptionalism and its legacy also in relation to the colonial period.[279] In this vein, Tobias Hübinette and Catrin Lundström have, for instance, mapped out the historical development of "hegemonic whiteness" in Sweden specifically, and locate its foundations in the early twentieth century; a period they understand as marked by a white nation-building project centred on homogeneity and social engineering (cf. literature on neutrality and modernity above).[280] Karin Idevall Hagren has also argued that, to understand Sweden's contemporary national identity, it is necessary to understand the history of discourses defining the nation and those included and excluded from that definition. She found that processes of othering in constructions of Swedish identity between 1870 and 1940 were based on colonial, scientific racism, and eugenics discourses.[281]

A final body of research has focused on, not only the racialised aspects of national and regional identities in the Nordics, but how Swedish identity can also be understood as gendered. Cecile Åse has, for instance, argued that the two core aspects of Swedish identity emphasised in the Cold War literature

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[277] Browning 2021:31f.
[278] Engh et al 2025:879. See also Götz 2009.
[279] See, for example: Loftsdóttir, K. – Jensen, L. 2012. *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region.* 1st edition. London: Routledge.
[280] Hübinette, T. – Lundström, C. 2014. "Three phases of hegemonic whiteness: understanding racial temporalities in Sweden" *Social Identities* 20(6):423-437.
[281] Hagren, K. I. 2020. "Othering in discursive constructions of Swedish national identity, 1870-1940" *Critical Discourse Studies* 19(4):384-400.

(i.e. armed neutrality and the People's home, see above) should also be seen as gendered where "mandatory male conscription gendered conceptions of citizenship and associated the political sphere and the duty to bear arms with men [and w]omen remained associated with the private and productive spheres of the *folkhem*."[282] Feminist and intersectional lenses have therefore been used to explore how both Sweden's engagement in military interventions in the twenty-first century and the recent NATO membership has been reconciled and naturalised through gendered, racialised, as well as classed narratives, tropes, and silences.[283]

In sum, the literature demonstrates that neutrality operated as more than a policy; it was part of constructing a national identity that was just as entangled with the nation's myths of modernity and welfare, as well as of sustaining a political culture in which disunity, especially on foreign policy, was often suppressed. The scholarship on Nordic exceptionalism adds to this a self-narrative based on claims of societal and moral distinctiveness, with postcolonial and feminist critiques making visible how Swedish and Nordic identities have historically and presently been based on racialised, gendered, and classed othering. Still, much of this literature remains anchored in the post-war decades, with the Interwar years entering discussions more as a point of origin. If Swedish identity was consolidated in the years in which neutrality and international solidarity were first articulated as (joint) foreign policies, then the contested production of Swedish identity, *before* a post-war narrative settled based on what has been described as a hegemonic and sanctified concepts, remains largely unexplored – especially from the perspective of the mutual constitution of national identity and foreign policy.

3.3 Neutrality or solidarity: A Swedish consensus?

Undén's question – neutrality or solidarity? – had notably not been met without contestation. In 1945, a tension arose between outgoing Foreign Minister Christian Günther and Undén as the new one. Günther, a party neutral diplomat responsible for Sweden's neutrality policy in the Second World War, expressed his scepticism towards the ability of an international organisation to

[282] Åse 2016:117. See also: Tornbjer 2022.
[283] See, for example, Åse, C. – Wendt, M. 2018. "Gendering the new hero narratives: Military death in Denmark and Sweden" *Cooperation and Conflict* 53(1):23-41; Wright, K. A. M. – Bergman Rosamond, A. 2024. "Sweden, NATO and the gendered silencing of feminist foreign policy" *International Affairs* 100(2):589-607; Rosengren *et al* 2025.

hold off great power interests. His doubts were rooted in the experiences from the Interwar period and the eventual failures of the League to prevent escalation and war. Undén, a former Swedish delegate to the League, had a contrasting outlook on the future of international cooperation, and he advocated for a policy based on international solidarity over neutrality.[284] Still, another story often told, by politicians and the scholarly community alike, is one centred on consensus and the absence of disunity on foreign affairs in Sweden – a specific political culture often told as originating from the Interwar period.

The (Interwar) culture of consensus

During the Interwar years, Sweden had witnessed a transfer of power from the government to the parliament, creating new premises for political parties to influence foreign policy. Firstly, through the creation of a secret Foreign Policy Council where the government had to communicate its intentions with regards to Sweden's foreign affairs to the parties in opposition. Secondly, via the rule that agreements with external actors had to get approval from the *Riksdag*.[285] Even so, the period has been seen as consolidating a culture of consensus on Sweden's foreign policy.[286] Nygren writes that the historiography on Swedish Interwar foreign policy has often been told as a "field of silence" with a politics of consensus dominating. He links such an understanding to the two main works delineating Swedish Interwar foreign policy: Herbert Tingsten's *Svensk utrikesdebatt mellan världskrigen* [Swedish foreign policy debate between the world wars] and Erik Lönnroth's *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia 1919-1939* [The history of Swedish foreign policy 1919-1939].[287]

The latter contribution guide the reader from the League accession, the Council crisis, and the world disarmament conference, to the second decade of rising tensions in Europe and discussions on a Nordic alliance ahead of the war. However, despite illustrating a degree of variance in party positions on several issues, his conclusions conform with Tingsten's original argument from 1944, namely that the parliamentary arena was characterised by unity.

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[284] Bjereld *et al* 2008:68; Wahlbäck 2014:73.
[285] Lönnroth 1959:10-20; see also Brusewitz, A. 1941. *Utrikesfrågors behandling i den svenska Riksdagen.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri.
[286] Bjereld – Demker 1995:14f.
[287] Nygren 2025:22. Ulf Bjereld and Marie Demker, for example, draw on Erik Lönnroth and Herbert Tingsten to argue that "the Swedish spirit of consensus rests on old traditions", 1995:15.

Foreign policy was understood as being of subordinate interest, and party-political debates on international issues were largely absent.[288] Despite identifying divergent tendencies across the partisan spectrum, not least in the League accession debate in 1920, Tingsten argued that consensus later dominated. According to him, this became evident in the "immediate acceptance" of Sweden's League policy following the decision on a membership, illustrated by, for instance, the management of the Åland Island Dispute, the debate on sanctions against Italy, and in the dismantling of the sanctions system thereafter.[289]

As Nygren points out, the image of Swedish Interwar foreign policy painted by Tingsten and Lönnroth is thus one of a passive foreign policy elite and an uninterested public opinion, but it is an image that simplifies Swedish international thinking during this period.[290] It has also been complicated by later contributions. Klas Åmark, who analysed the Swedish public debate 1938-39, argued for a reconsideration of Tingsten's conclusions.[291] He illustrated that different modes of thought (realism or idealism) guided political actors' principal purposes, specified objectives, and specific policy positions, meaning that if they agreed on the means but not the goals, or vice versa, a distorted unity arose. An additional counter to the Interwar consensus claim has been provided by Ottosson who has explored both the Swedish public debate on the Italian-Ethiopian conflict and Sweden's policy on the Manchuria Crisis.[292] He maintained that opposing views on Sweden's League policy were characterised by two schools of thought (again realism/traditionalists or idealism/internationalists), and that these camps persisted also after the accession debate.[293]

Beyond Lönnroth and Tingsten, a bulk of the literature on Swedish Interwar foreign policy thus focuses on some of the period's major issues, and zeroing in on specific policy matters appears to muddle the suggestion of a broad unity on foregin affairs.[294] Additional research concentrating on the question of disarmament, for instance, illustrate a general support for the international regulation of armaments, but conflicts over national disarmament and defence

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[288] Tingsten 1944:401ff; Lönnroth 1959:28.
[289] Tingsten 1944:410.
[290] Nygren 2025:23.
[291] Åmark, K. 1973. *Makt eller moral. Svensk offentlig debatt om internationell politik och svensk utrikes- och försvarspolitik 1938–1939.* Stockholm: Allmänna Förlaget.
[292] Ottosson 1986; Ottosson, I. 2021. *Sweden, Japan, and the Long Second World War: 1931–1945*. London: Taylor & Francis, p.
[293] Ottosson 2021:33.
[294] See, for example, Torbjörn Norman's (2014) essays on both social democratic Prime and Foreign Minister Branting's engagements in the League and on Swedish nationalism against the international organisation in the 1920s.

cuts.[295] Another scholarly emphasis has been the specific dispute between Sweden and Finland over the Åland Island when the League ended up ruling in Finland's favour, something that Sweden accepted but not without protest.[296] This literature illustrates that during the negotiations Sweden's political parties appeared to unite behind the government's and its delegation's efforts in seeking a favourable outcome, but once the issue had concluded the domestic debate became far more vibrant, with different takes on what this decision meant for Sweden and the country's relation to the League emerging.

The literature on Swedish Interwar foreign policy consequently offers different takes on whether a domestic consensus truly underpinned Swedish international affairs in the 1920s and 30s. While some argue that a national unity on foreign policy was broadly attained, others have shown that partisan ideologies or opposing schools of thought still participated in both open and underlying political conflicts over Sweden's international orientations. Yet, this literature still remains scattered across specific issues or events, and with somewhat divergent conclusions on the consensus claim remaining. Moreover, it also predominantly differs between realism and idealism as ideal types to illustrate the lack of a coherent perspective on Swedish foreign policy during this time. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the suggestion of a Swedish political culture on consensus originating from the Interwar years have persisted and guided much of the research on Swedish foreign policy in the post-war context as well.

The politicisation of foreign policy: Party ideology or strategy

In *Foreign Policy as a Battlefield,* Ulf Bjereld and Marie Demker have sought to bring more clarity to the consensus-conflict quandary.[297] They provide a comprehensive outline of how and when party politics play into foreign policy. From their perspective, an overarching consensus in Swedish foreign affairs can be explained by parties taking on a national rather than ideological

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[295] See, for example, Wieslander, H. 1966. *I nedrustningens tecken. Intressen och aktiviteter kring försvarsfrågan 1918–1925.* Lund: Gleerup; Trönnberg 1985; Andersson, I. 2001. *Kvinnor mot krig: aktioner och nätverk för fred 1914–1940*. Lund: Team Offset & Media. For an outline of the debate on defence cuts 1918-1925, see the fourth chapter of Holmén, H. 1985. *Försvar och samhällsföränding. Avvägningsfrågor i svensk försvarsdebatt 1880–1925.* Kungälv: MI-NAB/GOTAB.

[296] See, for example, Norman 2014:105; Jansson 2020.

[297] Bjereld, U. – Demker, M. 2000. "Foreign Policy as a Battle Field: A Study of National Interest and Party Motives" *Scandinavian Political Studies* 28(1):17-36. See also Bjereld – Demker 1995.

responsibility in this domain, as well as by their strategic deliberations in connection to the domestic arena (e.g. public opinion or parliamentary composition). Still, foreign policy issues occasionally become politicised. The authors argue that such instances can be explained by the combined presence of ideological and strategic conditions, but when there is an absence of one or the other, foreign policy conflicts rarely play out openly.[298] Their research is notably illustrative of the two main ways of approaching the role political parties play in shaping Swedish foreign policy: party *strategy* or *ideology*.

The former tradition argues that the Swedish political parties act with the aim of securing political influence; that they "formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections to formulate policies".[299] Conflict may thus arise when there are strategic gains to be made. An example of this perspective can be found in Michael Karlsson's thesis in which he argues that the Swedish parties acted in accordance with strategic assumptions in relation to the Catalina affair and the question of the EEC.[300] The latter perspective, in contrast, gives attention to parties' foreign policy ideologies as reasons behind their policy positions, and argues that ideological motvies can also make a party more or less interested in pursuing a clear stance on specific issues.[301] Here Brommesson and Ekengren has, for instance, suggested that coherent systems of worldviews, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs makes up distinct foreign policy ideologies that can be divided across four ideal types: realism, rationalism, Marxian revolutionism, and liberal revolutionism.[302]

At the same time, these studies do not always contrast between parties' views on foreign policy, but often explore changes in governments' policies over time.[303] Perhaps as a consequence of the social democrats' strong position in Swedish politics during the time period that this literature often engages with, comparisons are actually quite few and limited in scope. The Social Democratic Party itself notably occupies a central place in the literature (see

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[298] Bjereld – Demker 2000:20. See also: Elgström 1982; Björklund 1992.
[299] Downs, A. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper Collins, p. 28.
[300] Karlsson 1995.
[301] Bjereld – Demker 2000:25f. See also: Norberg 2008.
[302] Brommesson, D. – Ekengren, A. 2012. "What happens when a new government enters office? A comparison of ideological change in British and Swedish foreign policy 1991-2011" *Cooperation and Conflict* 48(1):3-27. In this vein, other scholars have often differed between two ideal-types (e.g. liberalism and historicism, realism and idealism, and imagine-based or traditional realism), see: Edström, H. 2017. *Tradition eller förnyelse? Svensk utrikespolitik för och efter EU-inträdet.* Lund: Studentlitteratur, p. 28.
[303] These have, for example, analysed a so-called move from traditional security objectives towards ideas-driven goals, see for example: Lödén 1999. There is, however, a distinction between ideological objectives (driven by values or principles) in contrast to alternative objectives, versus as guided by different worldviews and ideological beliefs.

above as well), and it has long consisted of both pacifists and defence critics, as well as advocates of a more traditional security policy. This has been argued to have contributed to a party-internal struggle between idealism and pragmatism, between solidarity and neutrality (i.e. what has also been labelled a Swedish policy model).[304] While the other parties have not been entirely ignored, in terms of foreign policy, there is still a clear discrepancy in the party-focused literature on Sweden in the twentieth century.[305]

This scholarship nonetheless complicates the image of a Swedish foreign policy conducted in harmony, and it has contributed by showing some of the conditions under which disagreement can become visible: ideological difference and strategic opportunity.[306] As the literature discussed above points to, partisan conflicts can also arise from mismatches between, for example, different national role conceptions. However, disagreement is, mostly, conceptualised in overt terms (e.g. in contrasting position taken in the *Riksdag* or in public debates occurring between different camps), and lines of division are sometimes given in advance (e.g. in the use of two or more ideal types). While this has proven helpful in comparing and contrasting between different understandings of foreign policy in Sweden, the framework developed in Chapter 2 proceeds from a different angle. If national identity and foreign policy are mutually constitutive, then contestation is not only about which policy Sweden

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[304] Andrén, N. 1990. "On the Meanings and Uses of Neutrality." *Cooperation and Conflict* 26(2):67.83. See also: Huldt – Misgeld 1990. Another way of considering the role of party ideology on foreign policy has been to look at transnational ideological networks, but these studies are also limited to social democratic cooperation, see: Blidberg, K. 1984. *Splittrad gemenskap – kontakter och samarbete inom nordisk socialdemokratisk arbetarrörelse 1931–1945*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international; Gussarsson, M. 2001. *En socialdemokratisk Europapolitik.* Stockholm: Nordstedt Tryckeri. Although pointing to fundamental similarities between social democratic sister parties, comparable policies are also understood here as caused by similar national conditions, and divergencies are explained by national differences.

[305] The Moderate Party's trajectory – from protectionist and nationalist to Europe-friendly, market liberal, and democratic – has been addressed in the literature, see Nilsson, T. 2002. *Anfall eller försvar: högern i svensk utrikespolitik under 1900-talet.* Stockholm: Santérus Förlag.
Ann-Sofie Dahl has argued that activist elements can therefore also be found in the party's promotion of freedom, peace, and democracy abroad, see Dahl, A. 2014. *Du gamla, Du fria. Moderat utrikespolitik från Högerparti till Alliansregering.* Stockholm: Medströms Bokförlag.

[306] A middle-ground approach might be found in the SUAV-project (see more above), in which a number of theses analysed the political parties. The studies outline their positions on defence, economic policy, and war-time democracy, as well as their respective strategies in parliament. While the theses focus on individual parties, the authors draw some general conclusions on an initial parliamentary norm of consensus, but that the parties became increasingly profiled towards the end of the war. See, for example, Hirdman, Y. 1974. *Sveriges kommunistiska parti 1939–1945.* Stockholm: Allmäna Förlaget; Molin, K. 1974. *Försvaret, folkhemmet och demokratin. Socialdemokratisk riksdagspolitik 1939–1945.* Stockholm: Allmänna Förlaget; Zetterberg, K. 1975. *Liberalism i kris. Folkpartiet 1939–1945.* Stockholm: Liber Förlag.

should adopt, but which self-understanding informs and sustains it. If such accounts are theorised as being produced and potentially contested in narratives, then the absence of open conflict and disagreement is not evidence of a settled understanding at all, but something that may very well occur covertly in the telling of different stories about the nation and its place in the world.

3.4 Revisiting Sweden in the Interwar years

The literature(s) reviewed in this chapter approach Sweden in the twentieth century from different starting points, but a broader scholarly narrative still emerges from reading them: a foreign policy based the combination, the dilemma, or the transformation between neutrality and (international) solidarity; a national identity constructed around neutrality, welfare, and internationalism(s); and a political culture resting on a shared consensus on the state's international affairs. Despite the different objects of analysis (policy, identity, or politicisation), including the diverse theoretical perspectives considered in relation to each, these scholarships often share a noteworthy feature. Each of them, in one way or another, tend to refer back to the Interwar years as a time during which a certain policy model, a certain self-understanding, or a certain political culture either first took shape or was fully consolidated, yet each also leaves that period comparatively unexplored.

In the literature on Swedish foreign policy, the Interwar years appear as the moment when neutrality and solidarity were first articulated as either mutually reinforcing or tension-causing policies, with the former typically told as being held in reserve as Sweden entered the League, and with the latter becoming more sedimented as a distinct national commitment to supporting international cooperation. In the scholarship on national identity, the same decades often figure as the time that the post-war myths of neutrality, modernity, and Sweden's internationalist role were projected back to, with the 1930s retrospectively constructed as a "modern breakthrough" as the two former concepts gained their more sanctified status after 1945. In the literature on political culture and the politicisation of foreign policy, the Interwar years are told as the beginning and the consolidation of a Swedish consensus on foreign affairs – a consensus that contemporary politicians and scholars alike still refer to.

Across all three, the Interwar period thus features in some way as an origin story that sometimes appear to be asserted rather than fully explored. I argue that revisiting Sweden in the Interwar years therefore promises a set of contributions to these literatures specifically. The first is an empirical one. Research

on Swedish twentieth century foreign policy has shown surprisingly limited interest in Sweden's League membership and the Interwar period overall, and, although this review has pointed towards studies of a handful of issues, it also becomes clear that when scholarly interest has been taken, it has mostly been on the official foreign policy. A broader archival exploration of how Sweden's place in the League was narrated, produced, and contested during these decades thus fills a substantive gap in the current literature. However, it also does something more by returning to the period to which the origin stories of Swedish foreign policy, identity, and political culture in the twentieth century relate – it becomes possible to reconsider and complicate them.

The second contribution to these literatures is theoretical and methodological. As this chapter illustrated, approaches treating identity-associated concepts like culture and roles as intervening factors have dominated the study of Swedish foreign policy, while the IR inspired scholarship on national identity, which understands identity and foreign policy as mutually constitutive, has rarely been extended beyond the post-war context. Studies on Swedish identity in the Interwar years are correspondingly scarce, and when the period does appear, it tends to do so through the retrospective lens of post-war myth-making. Applying the framework developed in Chapter 2 to Interwar archival sources therefore brings a linguistic constructivist approach into a conversation with historical materials the have thus far largely been engaged with from more traditional approaches in both History and IR.

A final, albeit associated, contribution to these specific literatures is conceptual, and follows more directly from the framework developed in Chapter 2. If national identity and foreign policy are allowed to be understood as mutually constitutive, then it becomes possible to engage more in-depth with the question of how particular policy positions became imaginable, reasonable, and defensible for Sweden in the first place. This reframing has bearing on the consensus claim because, while existing scholarship has mostly conceptualised disagreement and conflict in overt terms, a narrative approach to identity allows sedimentation and contestation to appear in the very narration of stories of the nation. The suggested absences of open conflicts, in other words, does not need to be read as unity on foreign policy, because it can still be concealed in narrative (re)negotiations of what nation Sweden was imagined to be.

In sum, revisiting Sweden in the Interwar years, and focusing on Sweden in relation to League specifically, becomes warranted because of gaps in the current literature, but it more so becomes particularly interesting and fruitful because of what this literature simultaneously tends to presuppose about this time period. An extensive empirical engagement with the Interwar years thus

becomes a way to add new insights to, and potentially complicate and challenge, more established national and scholarly narratives on Sweden in the twentieth century. The next chapter of this part of the thesis therefore takes us the four Interwar crisis moments that the thesis engages with, and it seeks to both delineate the official Swedish policy with relation to each moment and further introduce the reader to present-day scholarly narratives on these specific crises in the Interwar period.

4 Sweden during four Interwar crisis moments

This chapter introduces the four cases through which the construction of Swedish identity in foreign policy narratives will be explored in the following empirical chapters of the thesis. The overview presented here draws on established scholarly interpretations of these cases and the dominant narratives through which they have commonly been understood. The chapter also integrates official documents from the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the League of Nations in order to situate the reader within the Swedish context, and to introduce the official positions Sweden communicated in the international organisation with regards to each case.[307] The chapter thus draws upon an initial mapping of the four crisis moments and serves a dual purpose. It provides the background necessary to follow the narrative analysis and identity reconstruction in later chapters, while also making visible how these crisis moments have been understood in the existing literature. The scholarly and official narratives presented in this chapter should not be seen as neutral accounts of what happened, but rather as part of a narrative landscape that the analysis in Part III of the thesis will complicate. Chapter 9 therefore revisits the dominant retellings presented here since the stories that emerged in Sweden across the cases were less coherent and settled than what the following accounts might suggest.

4.1 Sweden and the Corfu crisis 1923-24

Retellings of the Corfu crisis often begin with the murder of General Enrico Tellini, the Italian president of a Conference of Ambassadors' (henceforth the Conference) commission delimiting the frontier of the recently created Albanian state, and his staff on 27 August 1923. In response, the Prime and Foreign

[307] The initial mapping of the crisis moments draws upon the Swedish Foreign Ministry's yearly blue books, its yearly reports to the Foreign Policy Council, and its specific folders related to each crisis moment. It also draws upon the League of Nation's official journals and protocols over Council, Assembly, and committee sessions.

Minister of Italy, Benito Mussolini, sent Athens an ultimatum with a twenty-four-hour deadline, and, when the ultimatum was not met, retorted with the naval bombardment of the island of Corfu four days later.[308] The following events in late summer and early autumn 1923 have been framed as the newly formed League's first major test in solving international disputes as the crisis evoked interrogations into its authority in implementing international law.[309] Political scientist James Barros, who has provided one of the most comprehensive case studies of the crisis, focuses on the interaction between the great powers and the two international bodies that would come to be involved in a struggle over who had the competence to manage it.[310]

During the time of the Italian occupation of Corfu, a social democratic government under Hjalmar Branting had recently replaced with a conservative government with Ernst Trygger as Prime Minister of Sweden.[311] At this time, Sweden held a non-permanent seat in the Council, and Branting remained as the elected Swedish representative.[312] On 1 September, Greece presented its appeal to the Council under Article 12 and 15 of the Covenant. During the meeting, the Italian delegate maintained that the occupation of Corfu was a

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[308] Yearwood, P. J. 1986 "Consistently with Honour: Great Britain, the League of Nations and the Corfu Crisis of 1923" *Journal of Contemporary History* 21(4):559-579; Di Iorio, A. 2025. "Continuity and Change in Italian Foreign Policy under Fascism: A Re-examination of the Corfu Crisis of 1923" *The International History Review* 47(1):1-18. See also: UD [Utrikesdepartementet] 1924 "Nationernas förbunds råds verksamhet under år 1923 samt fjärde förbundsförsamlingen i Geneve" *Aktstycken utgivna av Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet* Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, p. 23ff.

[309] The literature points to how the organisation had not so far been involved in 'weighty' issues because the Allied powers kept more high-staked questions away from the League and handled them in alternative bodies. The French and Belgian occupation of Ruhr as a response to Germany's repeated defaults on reparation payments, which had been ongoing since January 1923, had not been brought before organisation, see: Yearwood, P. J. 2009. "Upholding the Covenant and the Public Law of Europe: The Corfu Crisis, 1923" in Yearwood, P. J. (ed.) *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914-1925.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 251. Still, the Allied powers had referred some 'minor' questions to the League, and recently settled disputes over the Free City of Danzig, Upper Silesia, and the Åland Island, see: Fosse, M. – Fox, J. 2012. *The League of Nations: From Collective Security to Global Rearmament.* New York: United Nations Publications, p. 34ff.

[310] Barros, J. 1965. *The Corfu Incident of 1923: Mussoloni and the League of Nations.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[311] The change in government was not because of new election results, but due to difficulties for the social democratic government in gaining parliamentary support for unemployment reforms, see Möller 2011:93.

[312] Carl Hederstierna, a conservative member of parliament who had previously served as a Minister without Portfolio in Lindman's government, became Foreign Minister. Hederstierna was forced to step down in November 1923 after giving a controversial speech on a defence union between Sweden and Finland. He was replaced by Erik Marks von Würtemberg who had previously served as a Minister without Portfolio in Karl Straff's government. The new minister had experience as a Swedish delegate to the League.

temporary pacific measure undertaken for the purpose of forcing Greece to make reparations.[313] The Swedish Foreign Ministry's report highlights that the Italian delegate requested that the Council should wait for the results of an inquiry already being made by the Conference.

Greece was not alone in seeking League competence. The initial stance of the British Foreign Ministry was to support the League's authority in handling the dispute, and to back the British delegate Lord Robert Cecil in his quest to "support the League on the first occasion on which a small power had appealed to it against the high-handed action of a great power."[314] Branting's interpretation of the matter also appeared to be clear from the start: the Council had a duty to involve itself in any situation between states that could threaten the foundation of the Covenant.[315] In correspondence to the Foreign Ministry, Branting stated his alignment with the British delegate's position and reported that he had sought out Lord Cecil before the Council first gathered.[316] They had agreed that the Italian action against Greece was in violation of the Covenant which meant that the League could not remain passive.[317] Branting's speech during the first Council meeting framed Sweden, not only as one of the main opponents to the Italian position, but as representing the sentiment "several smaller European power".[318]

Accounts of the crisis highlight how asserting League competence would not be so easy. Before the Council met, the Conference had already sent a note of protest to the Greek government, to which Athens had also responded. In its response, the Greek government had accepted an investigation and the determination of reparations by the Conference, and in turn proposed that an

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[313] Barros 1965:94. Since acts of violence had been committed, the Greek delegate raised the question if not Article 16 should be contemplated, but it was not part of the appeal. The Italian delegate disputed the relevance of the sanctions article as Italy had made it clear that it did not intend to commit an act of war.

[314] in Yearwood 2009:253. See also: Barros 1965:138.

[315] UD *Aktstycken* 1924:26

[316] In parallel with Branting's work in Geneva, the Swedish government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed a more restrained position, but it nonetheless gave its support to Branting to pursue the issue of League competence because it was, it argued, for the protection of small states necessary to support the organisation in all cases that could lead to war.

[317] Correspondence, Hamilton. RA [Riksarkivet, Swedish National Archives], UD 1920 års dossiersystem. HP33: *Konflikterna på Balkan och i Främre Orienten 1920-1939.* C: *Konflikten mellan Italien och Grekland*, 1:595a. According to the delegation's correspondences, both of them considered evoking Article 16, but Lord Cecil warned that Italy might exit the League before allowing the question to be decided by the Council, therefore wanting them to await clarifications from the Italian government.

[318] Branting, H. 1 September 1923. "Twenty-Sixth Session of the Council" LONA [League of Nations Archive] OJ [Official Journal] 4th Year No. 11, p. 1280f.

international commission should be appointed to oversee it.[319] According to Barros, Athens's communication with the Conference was met with dissatisfaction from the Greek delegate in Geneva as it gave weight to the Italian argument of the League's non-competence. The new Greek line was therefore to propose that an investigative committee should be instituted by the League rather than by the Conference, but the Italian delegate still maintained that while the Conference was dealing with the matter, the Council did not have the competence to address it. [320]

The proponents of the Greek position also faced a major problem since they could not get France to join them.[321] The French have been described as reluctant to allow the League to triumph over Italy, preferring the matter dealt with behind the closed doors of the Conference. In part because this had emerged as the only body whose authority both Rome and Athens seemed to accept, but mainly because France wanted to avoid risking Italian support for its own action in the German Ruhr.[322] When Branting was asked by the British delegate whether Sweden and the other small states would join in demanding the application of sanctions, the conservative government in Stockholm advised the Swedish delegate to decline.[323] Foreign Minister Carl Hederstierna interpreted the request as a British tactic to force Sweden to make an enemy out of Italy and France, and with little to gain, since he regarded the actual use of Article 16 as impossible due to the lack of unanimity.[324]

In Geneva, Branting still continue to pursue a forceful approach. When meeting in private with his Scandinavian colleagues, there was a concern among the delegates that the French position would render the Council passive, and they sought to align strategies.[325] Branting would push for their perspective in the Council, and the Norwegian delegate Fridtjof Nansen would

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[319] Barros 1965:117.
[320] Hudson, M. O. 1923. "How the League of Nations Met the Corfu Crisis" *World Peace Foundation Pamphlet Series* 176.
[321] Yearwoord 1986. There were also internal restraints as this policy was challenged by the lack of will, or ability, to implement League sanctions against Italy. The suggestion to use, if necessary, economic and military sanctions under Article 16 was met with opposition from the British Treasury and the Admiralty, see Barros 1965:178.
[322] Di Iorio 2025:39.
[323] Branting expressed wanting to confirm that Sweden would be ready to follow through on its obligations to implement diplomatic and economic sanctions
[324] In correspondences with Christiania and Copenhagen, the Scandinavian governments agreed to instruct their delegates to not pursue Article 16. The Swedish government also warned Branting that his strong rhetoric in the Council gave weight to the idea of sanctions, even if Sweden would not actively push for it, see: various correspondences in RA, UDA HP33, C2.
[325] Statement given to the Foreign Policy Council. 1924. RA, FPC [Tvåkammarriksdagen, Utrikesnämnden], Ö 1: *Redogörelser angivna till utrikesnämnden enligt 54§ regeringsformen*.

back the Greek position in Assembly settings. Their cooperation led to accusations, in both the domestic press and various international forums, that the Scandinavian delegates were planning a collective demonstration by walking out from the League's work if its competence on the matter was not reaffirmed. Whether or not such tactics were in the workings, they were halted by the respective governments, and Branting made clarifications to the Foreign Ministry that no such actions had been suggested by Sweden and that the delegates had not planned to leave Geneva on their own initiative.[326]

According to Peter Yearwood, a remaining leverage that the champions for League intervention had against the Italian and French positions was the threat of a debate in the League Assembly which had thus far not happened. This would force a reluctant France to pick a side, but it might also push Mussolini to leave the League and thus threaten the post-war order in its entirety. In parallel with the Council meetings, the Assembly had notably also gathered in Geneva for its fourth general session.[327] The Corfu crisis was never officially brought to it, but, even as its President urged delegates to refrain from speaking on the matter, his statement did not stop some delegates from voicing their opinions. The Danish and Norwegian delegates in particular argued for League competence and the Greek position.[328]

Despite the support from the British and the Scandinavians, Barros argues that Greece's initial appeal between two jurisdictions still made it easy for

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The Swedish delegation seemed to have been a point of contact for an "intimate Scandinavian cooperation" as the Danes and Norwegians did not want to work too closely together because of disagreements over the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, see Gyllenstierna, E. 1923, RA, UDA HP33, C2, No. 2/4.

[326] Branting, H. 12 September 1923. RA, UDA HP33, C2 No. 10a. Scholars have claimed that the Scandinavian delegates planned to threaten with withdrawal from Geneva, but this appears to have been accusations made from the outside and was dismissed by Branting in correspondence with the Foreign Ministry. See, for example: Barros 1965:141.

[327] While the Council addressed the Corfu crisis, the Assembly was focused on the negotiations over the Treaty of Mutual Assistance. The Swedish delegation critiqued the proposal for not including definitive commitments to disarmament nor corresponding to the system of conciliation and arbitration already provided by the Covenant, and expressed that the Corfu crisis was already showing the fragility of established security guarantees, see: "Records of the Fourth Assembly. Meetings of the Committees. Minutes of the Third Committee" LONA, OJ SS [Special Supplement] 1923 No. 16.

[328] Representing Sweden was also Marks von Würtemberg. He was able to join some of Branting's early deliberations with Lord Cecil, and here expressed sharing their view that the competence of the League should be reaffirmed. In the Assembly Committees, he took a more subdued position than Branting, and voiced the view that the Assembly was limited in questioning the Council's ongoing examination, but he also reaffirmed its right to later critique its work, see: Marks Von Würtemberg, E. 18 September 1923, "Records of the Fourth Assembly. Meetings of the Committees. Minutes of the First Committee" LONA, OJ SS 1923 No. 14, p. 23.

Italy to move the case from Geneva. Faced with Italy's unwillingness to compromise and France's lack of support, the Council members backing the Greek position begun regarding it as wiser to secure an agreement.[329] On 6 September, the Spanish delegation presented a resolution which set fourth measures to serve as a basis for settlement.[330] It declared the Council's intention of investigating, in conjunction with the Conference, the manner in which an inquiry should be carried out, and suggested the appointment of a commission of inquiry with representatives from the League to supervise.[331] It also proposed a submission to the newly established Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) for a decision on rules of procedure.[332] Branting had also, in dialogue with the British delegate, concluded that it would be best to opt from common action between the two bodies to avoid the risk of delegitimising the League in an attempt to assert its authority. Branting thus put Sweden's weight behind the proposal, but framed it as a suggestion which benefitted the image of the League as a capable and authoritative facilitator of peace.[333]

Italy ended up blocking the Council's acceptance of the draft proposal, but the minutes were sent to the Conference which continued negotiations in Paris the following day. Greece officially agreed to execute all the requests demanded by the Conference. These were largely based on the Council's own proposal, but excluded the appointment of League representatives to supervise.[334] Moreover, it did not clarify the evacuation of Corfu. Barros highlights that Italy refused to leave the island until Greece had made the demanded reparation payment, leading to further negotiations while a Conference appointed commission of inquiry was sent to Greece. According to his account, the Council had fully agreed to the role of the Conference in settling the dispute by 18 September, and was thus not involved in the commission's work.

The compromise, and the subsequent transfer of the matter to the Conference, was perceived as a sign of de-escalation by the Foreign Ministry in Stockholm – one that, in particular, removed the expressed worry of having to consider the sanctions article. Still, the Swedish government gave its support to the delegation's communicated wish to further pursue the broader competence issue which still remained on the Council's table. The Council had identified five questions that revolved around the future interpretation of Article

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[329] Barros 1965:158; Yearwood 2009:258f.
[330] Prior to the Council meeting, unofficial consultations without the Greek and Italian delegates had taken place, and the Spanish delegate had been authorised to draft a proposal.
[331] UD *Aktstycken* 1924:31f. See also: Barros 1965:157.
[332] Hudson 1923.
[333] Branting, H. 6 September 1923, LONA, OJ 4th Year No. 11, p. 1299.
[334] Hudson 1923; Barros 1965:188.

12 and 15, as well as what authority the Council held when the settlement of a dispute was being sought through alternative channels and what objections could be made to its competence.[335] Disagreements arose, however, as to whether these questions should be submitted to the PCIJ or not.

The British delegate suggested to submit the questions to a special committee of jurists rather than to the PCIJ.[336] The Swedish delegation, contrarily, communicated a new line to Stockholm: to continue pushing for submitting the questions to the PCIJ, as well as to reaffirm League competence should the Conference fail to reach an agreement on Corfu.[337] Following this approach, Branting argued for a continued discussion in the Council and attacked Italy's previous challenge to its competence.[338] His speech in the Council prompted protests directly from Rome to Stockholm. Prime Minister Trygger expressed, in a private meeting with Italy's representative, that Sweden had full sympathy for Italy, and that Branting's actions were not meant to be unfriendly, but rather sought to strengthen the League's authority. The Italian representative asked that instructions should be given to moderate Branting, but Trygger responded that once delegates were named they could be seen as independent judges rather than representatives of their government.[339] Sweden's delegation still redirected its attention more towards making sure that the questions on how to interpret the Covenant would be sent to the PCIJ, and thereafter aligned with the ambition to reach a unanimous conclusion.[340]

Following the report from the commission of inquiry, the Conference decided to award Italy the sum it had originally demanded. Greece agreed to pay it, albeit under protest, and the Italian troops evacuated the island on 27 September.[341] At the Assembly session on 22 September, Swedish delegate Erik Marks von held that it was necessary for "all the elements of good" to work for the League's recovery in the aftermath of the crisis.[342] On September 28,

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[335] They also asked to what extent a state was responsible for a political crime within its territory.
[336] Each member of the Council was to appoint a representative to a committee of jurists originally tasked with presenting a report at the Council session in December.
[337] Branting, H. 20 September 1923. "rör. den grekisk-italienska konflikten" RA, UDA HP33, C3 No. 33/22.
[338] Branting, H. 17 September 1923, LONA, OJ 4th Year No. 11, p. 1306.
[339] He also stated that, because of his previous attitudes towards the League, Swedish public opinion would not receive an intervention well, see Barros 1965:141f.
[340] Hederstierna, C. 2 October 1923. "ang. grekisk-italienska konflikten" RA, UDA HP33, C3; OJ 4th Year No. 11, p. 1350.
[341] Hudson 1923.
[342] Marks von Würtemberg, E. 22 September 1923. "Records of the Fourth Assembly. Plenary Meetings. Text of the Debates" LONA, OJ SS No. 13, p. 67.

Branting also took to the Assembly's podium to express his dissatisfaction that neither the Conference nor the Council had submitted any questions to the PCIJ.[343] As an agreement had been reached in Paris and Italy had begun its evacuation of Corfu, the delegations in Geneva then travelled home. The Corfu question was put to the side and the competence issue referred to the special committee.

Social democrat and law professor Östen Undén, Sweden's representative to the committee, was not called to Geneva for its first meeting until January 1924. In his report, Undén expressed satisfaction with its final answers.[344] However, he wrote that he could not back the fourth reply regarding measures of coercion not meant to constitute acts of war, a matter that, according to his report, had led to disagreements between the jurists. Undén interpreted the reply as leaving it up to the Council to determine whether such measures could be deemed as acceptable or not on a case-to-case basis.[345] These objections were supported by the Swedish government, leading to a final push to have the issue redirected to the PCIJ. The Foreign Ministry sought support for this standpoint in correspondence with both the British Foreign Ministry and the League Secretary General ahead of the Council session in March 1924.[346] Swedish efforts were futile however, and the delegation decided to accept the fourth reply, but emphasised that it continued to be of the opinion that the use of armed forces was not compatible with the Covenant and that the issue should have been referred to the PCIJ.[347]

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[343] Branting, H. 28 September 1923. LONA, OJ SS No. 13, p. 138; UD *Aktstrycken* 1924:88–90. Branting received a prolonged standing ovation from the League Assembly for his efforts in the Council, and it was an image that would be remembered in Sweden throughout the Interwar period, see Lönnroth 1959:41.

[344] He reported that it had clarified that a dispute should be regarded as having the character of risking rupture as soon a one party regarded it as such and thus fall under the competence of the Council, but that the Council did not have authority to overrule an ongoing arbitration by another judicial body that both parties of the conflict had agreed to submit themselves to. Undén had also supported the conclusion that objections such as national interest and honour, as well as territorial integrity and independence, could not be used to challenge League competence. The Committee also concluded that – despite the Conference having reach such a conclusion on Greece's accountability – a state could not be seen as responsible for political crimes committed within its territory if it had taken reasonable measures to prevent the crime and bring the criminals to justice, see Report given by Undén, Ö. RA, UDA HP33, C4 No. 170/4.

[345] He also expressed that he did not regard occupations, like Italy's of Corfu, as compatible with the Covenant, and had argued that as long as a dispute was up for arbitration, self-help actions could not be accepted.

[346] Various correspondences, see RA, UDA HP33, C4.

[347] UD 1925 "Nationernas förbunds råds verksamhet under året 1924 och femte förbundsförsamlingen i Genève" *Aktstycken utgivna av Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet* Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, p. 10–14. See also: Committee Reply. 13 March 1924. "Minutes of the Twenty-Eight Session of the Council" LONA, OJ 5th Year No. 4, p. 524.

In sum, the Corfu crisis has been commonly understood as a diplomatic crisis and explored from the institutional procedures, decision-making processes, and power politics involved in shaping an outcome that, in turn, has been framed as illuminating the League's weaknesses as well as its promises in the early days of its creation. Some scholars have argued that the incident was a warning that the League was powerless in the face of great power interests, while others have emphasised that it showed how international institutions could prevent escalation by offering a place for negotiation. For Sweden, Branting's forceful advocacy for League competence in the Council setting was pursued in tension with a government that sought a somewhat quieter position. At the same time, the Corfu crisis became the touchstone in a Swedish domestic debate that Herbert Tingsten has labelled one of the "most lively" foreign policy debates in Sweden during the Interwar years.[348]

4.2 Sweden and the Mosul crisis 1924-26

The Mosul crisis concerned the fate of the former Ottoman province of Mosul which was claimed by both Türkiye and the British-mandated Kingdom of Iraq after the First World War. The dispute's origin is often traced back to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the Mudros Armistice of 1918. The Turkish National Independent Movement had rejected the peace terms of the following Treaty of Sèvres, and instead formulated the National Pact in which Mosul was a central demand.[349] British forces had already occupied the province, but after Türkiye defeated Greece, who had invaded Anatolia in 1919, a peace conference was established.[350] At Lausanne, negotiations stalled over how to define the problem at hand. Lord George Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, treated it as a border question, while the Turkish delegation, led by İsmet İnönü, insisted that the issue concerned the sovereignty of Mosul.[351]

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[348] Tingsten 1944:82.

[349] Spencer, W. 1965 [1988]. *The Mosul Question in International Relations.* Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, Inc, p. 33; Coşar N. – Demirci, S. 2006 "The Mosul Question and the Turkish Republic: Before and after the Frontier Treaty, 1926" *Middle Eastern Studies* 42(1):123-132, p. 123.

[350] In 1920, a government was formed which, in addition to Mosul, also included the former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Basra. The League granted Britain the mandate over this territory a month later, see: Aytekin, C. E. 2022. "A Conflict Resolution Practice of the Idealist Peace Project: The League of Nations' Mediation in the Mosul Question" *KAÜİİBFD* 13(26):1214-1237, p. 1223.

[351] Coşar – Demirci 2006:123. See also: Güçlü, Y. 2003. "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations" *Middle Eastern Studies* 39(1):186-206; Aytekin 2022:1223.

Unable to solve the matter, the parties agreed to submit the dispute to the League Council if no bilateral solution was reached within nine months.[352] When later talks also lead nowhere, Britain referred the matter the international body on 6 August, and provided a memorandum claiming economic, political, and strategic grounds for keeping Mosul as part of Iraq.[353] Türkiye's counter-memorandum instead maintained that Mosul was juridically a part of Türkiye even if it was under provisional British administration.[354] During this time, Sweden had still been governed by Trygger's conservative government, but it resigned in October 1924.[355] A social democratic minority government was formed under Branting who had already been appointed as *rapporteur* with regards to the Mosul dispute. Undén, who would beome his Foreign Minister, was also accompanying Branting in Geneva as a legal advisor. In 1925, Branting passed away and was succeeded by Rickard Sandler, but Undén continued on as Foregin Minister and assumed the role as *rapporteur*.[356]

In Geneva, a disagreement soon arose around Türkiye's demand for a plebiscite, which, according to Mai Taha, had become an inter-European tool for post-war settlement, to also determine the will of the Mosul population.[357] Britain contrarily maintained that holding a plebiscite was not suitable when delimiting a frontier and would cause a disturbance to peace. It argued that a population consisting of "uneducated tribesmen [could] hardly be regarded as competent to deal with the complicated issues involved so often in boundary settlement."[358] Branting asked whether the delegations would considered themselves bound by the Council's decision, and if they agreed to it seeking any solution irrespective of their opposing views of *what* was under discussion.[359] Britain reaffirmed its willingness to abide by the Council's decision,

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[352] Beck, P. J. 1981. "'A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britian and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926" *Middle Eastern Studies* 17(2):256-276, p. 261; Makko 2010:633.
[353] Spencer 1965:58. See also: Coşar – Demirci 2006:126. The memorandum also stressed the rights of the Assyrian minority in the disputed territory.
[354] Spencer 1965:88f. The Turkish position in particular stressed Turkish sovereignty and argued that Kurds and Turks, grouped as one people, was a majority while Arabs were a minority in Mosul.
[355] It resigned after the *Riksdag* voted down its defence proposition.
[356] Makko 2010:635.
[357] Taha, M. 2013. "Self-determination, oil and Islam in the face of the League of Nations: the Mosul Dispute and the 'non-European' legal terrain" in French, D. (ed.) *Statehood and Self-Determination: Reconciling Tradition and Modernity in International Law.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also: October 1924. "Minutes of the Thirtieth Session of the Council" OJ 5h Year No. 10, p. 1317.
[358] In Taha 2013:338. See also: Spencer 1965:117f
[359] That is: Britain's view that is was a matter of a border question, and Türkiye's view that it was a matter of soverignity, see above.

but argued that the character of the decision was a juridical matter for the Council to consider. The Turkish delegate acknowledge that the League could seek any alternative solution, and that it would accept any frontier "based on the wishes of the inhabitants of the vilayet".[360]

Tensions escalated in October and fighting broke out along the disputed frontier. In response, an extraordinary Council session was convened in Brussels on 27 October. At the session, the Council, at Branting's suggestion, established a provisional demarcation line – the so-called "Brussels Line" – to serve as a temporary frontier. Branting asked for acceptance for its role as arbitrator, and the creation of an inquiry commission recognised by both parties. The Council agreed to the latter, and Undén, alongside the Belgian representative Paul Hymans, was tasked with putting the commission together. It ended up being chaired by Swedish diplomat Carl Einar af Wirsén.[361] Both sides, however, accused the commission of non-neutrality.[362]

Historian Aryo Makko writes that, during the commission's work on site, both sides regularly accused the other of violating *status quo* and attempted to bring the inquiry commission and the Council members to support their side.[363] When Undén took over the role as *rapporteur* following Branting's death on 24 February 1925, the commission's report had already been delayed beyond its original deadline, and Undén expressed concern over rising tensions in Mosul.[364] In correspondence from Stockholm, Wirsén was presented with two alternatives for the commission's report. One suggestion was particularly supported by Undén who argued that the border should be placed along the Little

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[360] Spencer 1965:118f

[361] UD 1926. "Nationernas förbunds råds verksamhet under år 1925 samt sjätte förbundsförsamlingen i Genève"*Aktstycken utgivna av Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet* Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, p. 26. It also included Count Paul Teleki, a Hungarian geographer and former Prime Minister, and Colonel Albert Paulis, a Belgian military officer with colonial experience. From late January through March 1925, they toured the province, interviewing local leaders and gathering information on ethnic composition and political preferences, see: Beck 1981:262f; Makko 2010:636.

[362] Britain accused the commission of conducting a covert referendum, while rumours circulated in London that Wirsén harboured pro-Turkish sympathies, see: Beck 1981:263. At the same time, the Turkish delegation also "complained about being subjected to an organised campaign aimed at discrediting their case", Makko 2010:638.

[363] Makko also writes that Britain had initially regarded af Wirsén as biased, "labelling him Turco- and Germanophile due to his former activities in Constantinople. Only after official assurances of neutrality from the Swedish government did Downing Street accept the appointment.", Makko 2010:637.

[364] Meanwhile, scholarly accounts highlight how the Kurdish *Sheikh Said* rebellion erupted in south-eastern Türkiye, prompting a massive Turkish military response. On the Iraqi side, the British also used force against Kurds in Dohuk who had demonstrated in favour of Türkiye following the Commission's visit, see Makko 2010:639f.

Zab River. The other suggestion was, however, more in line with what the commission ended up suggesting.[365] Its report, presented in August 1925, concluded that the Brussels Line should serve as the permanent frontier, thereby recommending that Mosul should remain part of Iraq.

The commission argued that the ethnic composition was too complex to serve as a basis for partition.[366] Strategic considerations (the British were described as best suited to defend the new state of Iraq) and economic viability instead favoured Iraqi sovereignty with the continuation of the British mandate for a period of twenty-five years.[367] Undén criticised the report for not including any pro-Turkish alternative, and he, together with the Under-Secretary of the State Erik Sjöborg, worked out the details of the Little Zab River alternative.[368] In addition to dividing the province along the river, they suggested to demilitarise the entire region, to guarantee the the rights of the various minority groups, and that no demands should be made on Britain to extend its mandate over Iraq.[369]

In the meantime, the publication of the commission's report had not eased tensions around Mosul, and violence at the frontier escalated in the autumn of 1925. Scholarly accounts highlight how both the British and the Turkish engaged in military activities. Britain also argued that the safety of Christians in the region was at stake, and asked the League to consider the mass deportations of Assyrian Christians as well as the violation of the status quo determined by the Brussels Line. Taha argues that, from the British point of view, Türkiye was spreading anti-Christian and, by association, anti-British sentiments. In response to these allegations, the Council appointed another commission to investigate on site. The so-called Laidoner commission confirmed and condemned the attacks directed at Assyrian Christians, but also argued that Türkiye had not intentionally violated the Brussels Line.[370]

Türkiye correspondingly signaled its unwillingness to accept what it regarded as an unfavourable outcome, and, at Undén's suggestion, the Council

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[365] See also: Rogers 2007:363.

[366] 16 July 1925. "Frontier between Turkey and Iraq –Report submitted to the Council by the Commission established by Council Resolution of 30 September 1924" LONA R607.11.45771.25888. See also: Aytekin 2022:1229.

[367] UD *Aktstycken* 1926:27f; see also Beck 1981:264; Rogers; 2007:361; Makko 2010:640f; Taha 2013:341

[368] Sjöborg also represented Sweden at a few Council sessions when Undén was unable to attend himself, see UD *Aktstrycken* 1926:7.

[369] Rogers 2007:363.

[370]While historians have argued that the commission's report therefore did not contribute to shaping the overall process, Peter Beck contends that it did not help Turkish claims to territories including non-Turks, see Beck 1981:266. See also: Makko 2010:642; Taha 2013:342.

appointed a sub-committee to reach a resolution. During its proceedings another disagreement appeared over the binding force of a Council decision which, from Undén's perspective effectively halted any constructive talks.[371] The British Colonial Secretary Leo Amery ended up demanding a clarification and proposed referring the question of the Council's legal authority to the PCIJ.[372] During a Council session in September, it also became clear to the Swedish delegation that a majority supported the commission's proposal. Undén nonetheless provided all Council members with the details of the compromise plan and the Little Zab River alternative, describing it as the best solution to the problem.[373] Makko writes, however, that London refused such a compromise and that Undén failed to convince the other two members of the subcommittee of the Swedish line. It therefore agreed to Amery's proposal and forwarded two question to the PCIJ regarding the nature of the Council's decision (arbitration award, recommendation, or mediation) and if it should be taken unanimously or with a majority vote. [374]

The court proceedings were delayed for two months as Türkiye did not send any representative to the PCIJ's hearings, and reports to the Swedish Foreign Ministry warned that Ankara was prepared to take military action.[375] The PCIJ eventually delivered its advisory opinion on 21 November 1925, stating that the Council's decision constituted a binding arbitral award requiring unanimity with the exception of the parties of the dispute.[376] Three days later, the FPC met in Stockholm to discuss the Mosul question. Its members received two memoranda from the Foreign Ministry which expressed that referring the question to the PCIJ had prompted what the Swedish delegation had feared: a clear statement from the Turkish side that it did not perceive itself bound by a

[371] UD *Aktstycken* 1926:33. The new sub-committee consisted of Undén as chairman alongside a representative from Spain and a representative from Uruguay. The problem emerging in the sub-committee was that the British argued that the Council itself was empowered to assume the role of arbitrator, whereas the Turkish maintained that it could only provide recommendations. See also: Taha 2013:341f.
[372] Makko 2010:641.
[373] Rogers 2007:364. See also: "V.P.M rörande Mosulfrågans behandling vid rådsmötet i Genève den 2-28 september 1925" RA, UDA HP33 , B3 *Mosulfrågan. Env. Af Wirséns uppdrag.*
[374] UD *Aktstycken* 1926:33; see also Makko 2010:641.
[375] The Swedish Foreign Ministry interpreted the military activity as a bluff from Türkiye, see, for example, Correspondence Undén, Ö. 29 September 1925. RA, UDA HP33, B3. See also: Makko 2010:642.
[376] UD *Aktstycken* 1926:34.

Council decision.[377] Undén also presented the Swedish compromise solution to the FPC which was divided on whether it was the best path to pursue.[378]

At the Council session on 8 December 1925, Türkiye's representative, Münir Bey, declared his government's refusal to be bound by the outcome as he argued that Türkiye had never committed itself to such a thing, and maintained that the PCIJ had been partial to British arguments. During the meeting, disagreements arose between Münir and Undén around the voting rights of parties of the conflict, whether the Council should adhere to unanimity, and if the Council's role was that of mediator or arbitrator. Undén argued that the Council should follow the PCIJ's advisory opinion, and that, although its primary mission remained that of mediation, it was the Council's task to take a decision if mediation failed.[379] After an intervention from the Council president, Vittorio Scialoja, it ended up adopting the PCIJ's advisory opinion based on a simple majority vote.[380]

Six days later, Undén met with Scialoja, and he was asked to reconsider his strong support of the compromise solution. According to his report to Stockholm, Undén had not agreed to let go of the Swedish line, but promised to consider options to ensure that the Council's management of the issue did not end with a failure.[381] Undén also met with the Deputy Secretary General, Joseph Avenol, for whom each member of the sub-committee presented their stance, and it was agreed that they could do a final mediation attempt.[382] However, while the Swedish delegation had expressed hopefulness in early November that its suggestion might finally gain some acceptance, it now began to declare its attempts as fruitless in correspondences with the Foreign Ministry.[383] While the sub-committee had presented two alternatives for the Council – the Brussels Line as the permanent frontier or the partition of the province along the Little Zab River – Undén's report to the Council read that it supported the former.[384]

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[377] "P.M. rörande rörande Mosul-frågans behandling vid rådsmötet i Genève". 1 October 1925. RA, UDA HP33, B *Prememorior m.m. Mosulfrågan.*
[378] Protocol No. 5. 24 November 1925. RA, FPC, A3 *Carl Sandgren's uppteckningar*.
[379] Undén, Ö. 8 December 1925. "Thirthy-Seventh Session of the Council" LONA OJ 7th Year No. 2, p. 127f . See also: UD *Aktstycken* 1926:34.
[380] Ibid. See also: Makko 2010:643
[381] "Samtal mellan Utrikesministern och Italiens rådsombud M. Scialoja den 7 december 1925" RA, UDA HP33, B4 *Mosulfrågan Env. Af Wirséns uppdrag*. See also Rogers 2007:364
[382] "Privat sammanträde i Mosulfrågan hos M. Avenol den 10 december" RA, UDA HP33, B3.
[383] Correspondence from the Swedish delegation to the Foreign Ministry, dated 11 December 1925, in UDA HP33, B3. See also: "Iraq Frontier – Proceedings of the Committee of the Council September – December 1925" LONA R609.11.48836.25888.
[384] 16 December 1925. "Thirthy-Seventh Session of the Council" LONA OJ 7th Year No. 2:190f.

The Council adopted this solution on 16 December when it met without the Turkish representative present. The decision was supplemented by three conditions: that the British mandate would be extended to twenty-five years or until Iraq joined the League; that the Kurds would be granted administrative, judicial, and educational autonomy; and that Britain would fulfil the economic recommendations and measures to ensure equal protection of the population presented in the first commission report.[385] The entire Mosul was thereby awarded to Iraq. Although Türkiye initially protested the Council's decision, scholarly accounts argue that strategic realities and British diplomatic efforts at reconciliation softened Ankara's stance on the matter.[386] Bilateral negotiations commenced in April and on 5 June 1926 the Treaty of Angora was signed. Türkiye accepted the frontier, while receiving, in compensation, ten percent of Iraq's oil royalties for a period of twenty-five years.[387] The oil question, which many historians regard as one of the actual root causes of the dispute, thus helped facilitate its resolution.[388]

In sum, the Mosul crisis has been understood as testing the capacity of the League as an instrument for international conflict resolution. Britain, as a dominant power in the League, has been mostly interpreted as benefitting from the final decision over a Türkiye that was not yet a member. For some, the dispute also underscored the nationalist struggles of the Arab provinces of the former Ottoman Empire as the vanguard of anti-colonial resistance. At the same time, historians have also read the outcome as the League successfully playing out its purpose by averting an armed conflict, and as assuming the role of a competent arbiter. The Mosul crisis had also placed Sweden at the centre of this process through the appointments of Branting as *rapporteur* and a Swedish diplomat as chair of commission of inquiry. After Branting's death, Undén's effort to advance a compromise solution has been argued to illustrate both the ambition and the limits of its influence, and told as reinforcing the image of Sweden as an engaged participant in the League's work.[389]

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[385] UD *Aktstycken* 1926:36f. See also: Makko 2010:644; Taha 2013:343.

[386] The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was also signed in January 1926. It extended the mandate as required by the Council decision, including a clause permitting early termination upon Iraq's admission to the League.

[387] UD 1927. "Nationernas förbunds råds verksamhet under år 1926, förbundsförsamlingens uritima möte, samt förbundsförsamlingens sjunde ordinare möte" *Aktstycken utgivna av Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet* Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, p. 51f. See also: Beck 1981:271; Coşar – Demirci 2006:127; Makko 2010:645

[388] Beck 1981:271; Coşar – Demirci, 2006:127.

[389] Lönnroth 1959:46.

4.3 Sweden and the Manchuria crisis 1931-33

Accounts of the Manchuria crisis often begin with 18 September 1931, when an explosion occurred on the Japanese-run South Manchurian Railway north of Mukden. The incident is commonly understood as sparking the mobilisation of Japanese troops in Manchuria, and setting off a series of events that would lead to an international diplomatic crisis following Japan's use of force in northeast China between 1931 and 1933. Three days after the explosion, China appealed to both the League under Article 11, and to the US under the Kellogg-Briand Pact, to take actions to stop the fighting.[390] The Council, however, initially accepted the Japanese delegate's reassurances that Japan had no territorial aims in Manchuria, and instead urged both sides to settle their disagreement peacefully and bilaterally.[391]

Scholarly interpretations of an initially slow response from the League is often attributed to its leading European powers – Britain, France, Italy, and Germany – being more concerned with events closer to home than with what they perceived as military skirmishes in East Asia.[392] The Japanese also maintained that their role was to establish order against a corrupt China and the possible spread of communist influence in Asia, and, as a result of its efforts on the side of the Allies, it already had some rights in Manchuria acknowledged by Britain and the US.[393] At the same time, Japanese society has been described as witnessing the emergence of strong nationalist sentiments during

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[390] Henig, R. B. 2010. "The Manchuria Crisis, 1931-3" in Henig, R. B. (ed.) *The League of Nations.* New York: Haus Publishing, p. 134.

[391] Following Japan's bombings of Chinchow in late October, the Council did issue a resolution calling for the Japanese troops to be withdrawn back to the railway zones, and suggested direct talks between Japan and China to settle the issue, see: O'Mahoney, J. 2018a. "The Manchuria Crisis" in O'Mahoney, J. (ed.) *Denying the Spoils of War: The Politics of Invasion and Non-recognition.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: , p. 34.

[392] Ruth Henig points to how the economic depression and the growth of Nazism in Germany were higher on the agenda in Europe, alongside discussions on reducing or postponing wartime reparations. The European powers were also focused on preparing for the disarmament conference. More importantly, they did not want a confrontation with Japan – the fifth permanent member of the Council. Henig argues that "there was also a blatantly racial filter through which Western governments viewed Japanese ambitions in Manchuria", Henig 2010:137

[393] The Treaty of Portsmouth (1905) which ended the Russo-Japanese War and gave a number of concessions to Japan, including the South Manchuria Railway; the so-called Nine-Power Treaty (1922) reached at the Washington Naval Conference where signatories agreed to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China; and the so-called Five-Power Treaty (1922) which aimed to prevent an arms race by limiting naval construction in the region.

the 1930s, posing challenges for its government to pursue pro-League policies.[394] The Kwantung Army, effectively autonomous from its civilian government, thus continued its operations undisturbed, and by November it had moved into northern Manchuria and occupied Tsitsihar.

At the time of the so-called Mukden Incident, Sweden was governed by a liberal minority government under Carl Gustaf Ekman, leader of the Free-minded People's Party. Ekman resigned before the end of his term, and between 6 August and 24 September 1932, Sweden was briefly under the leadership of the former Minister of Finance, Felix Hamrin. Fredrik Ramel, an independent liberal and career diplomat, served as Foreign Minister under both. After the 1932 election to the second chamber and the defeat of the liberal party, the Social Democratic Worker's Party came into power. Per Albin Hansson became Prime Minister with Rickard Sandler serving as Foreign Minister. It took some time, however, before events in Manchuria gained attention from the Foreign Ministry in Sweden.

Historian Ingemar Ottosson describes the early statements from the Ekman government on the Manchuria crisis as indecisive and cautious. They did, in many ways, reflect the struggle of the European states to make sense of what was going on in East Asia, their inclination to avoid upsetting relations with Japan, and the argument that "a stable Japan [was] a far more attractive prospect than a nationalist and revolutionary China."[395] In its report to the FPC, the government took an impartial stance and refrained from accusing either party of acting in violation of the Covenant.[396] The lack of information and assessments on events in Manchuria, as well as a reluctance to alienate the only great power in East Asia and Sweden's largest export market outside of the West, led to Stockholm initially seeking a balanced approach or directly defending Japanese actions.[397]

The League Council eventually responded to the events on 10 December by appointing a five-man commission, chaired by the British Lord Lytton, to investigate on site. Historians point to how the restraints on the Kwantung

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[394] Henig 2010:138f.
[395] Steiner, Z. 2007. "The Manchuria Crisis: The European Powers and the Far East" in Steiner, Z. (ed.) *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 722.
[396] Statement given to the FPC. 1932. RA, FPC, Ö2: *Redogörelser angivna till utrikesnämnden enligt 54§ regeringsformen*. See also: UD 1933. "Nationeras förbunds församlings trettonde ordinarie möte, förhandlingarna vid urtime förbundsförsamlingen, och nedrustningskonferensen i Genève 1932" *Aktstycken utgivna av Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet* Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, p. 50.
[397] Ottosson 2021:29.

Army had loosened further as the sitting Japanese Cabinet fell the same month, and it had occupied Chinchow by January 1932. The Council retorted by appealing to the Japanese to not infringe on the territorial integrity of a League member, but, 1932 would rather see an intensification of Japan's activities and a consolidation of its presence in the region.[398] In February, fighting broke out in Shanghai – the centre of Western economic interests in China – trailed by Japanese bombings of the Chinese districts. The twelve neutral members of the Council issued a joint protest directly to Japan, but it did not take further action, and an Extraordinary Assembly was summoned at China's request in March .[399]

Over time, the Swedish government increasingly described Japan as the aggressor. Ottosson has argued that a particular dilemma emerged as Japan had become the centre for Swedish trade in East Asia, and openly condemning the great power risked economic and political costs. At the same time, Sweden, and its liberal government in particular, had made advocacy for the Covenant and its principles the cornerstone of its foreign policy.[400] To the Ekman government, maintaining support for the League in Asia was expressed as a way to uphold the authority of the international organisation in Europe. As Sweden began working on its policy for the Extraordinary Assembly, the task of drafting the instructions for the government's delegation was given to the former Foreign Minister and social democratic politician Undén. His draft was openly critical of Japan's actions in Manchuria.[401]

While the liberal Foreign Minister took a back-seat in discussions in Geneva, Undén's sentiment was supported by the Prime and Foreign Ministers in domestic contexts. However, in a letter sent to Prime Minister Ekman following allegations in the press that Sweden sought to take initiative on certain measures and, together with other smaller states, protest Japan's actions during the Extraordinary Assembly, its signatories – the Swedish East Asian Company – held that such steps would cause major concerns for Swedish shipping and export.[402] After also meeting with the FPC ahead of the Extraordinary Assembly, the government's official instructions were slightly modified by Foreign Minister Ramel and Karl Ivar Westman, the Swedish envoy to Switzerland. Rather than openly criticising Japan, the protection of the League's

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[398] O'Mahoney 2018a:35.
[399] "Sixty-sixth Sesson of the Council" LONA, OJ 13th Year No. 3 (Part I), p. 383f.
[400] Ottosson 2021:38.
[401] "Utkast till instruktion den 2 mars 1932" RA, UD NF [Utrikesdepartementet NF-byråns arkiv och trycksamlingar 1918-1947], B1: *Instruktioner*.
[402] Correspondence, 26 February 1932. RA, UD NF, B1.

principles became the Swedish delegates' main task in Geneva.[403] The delegation was still authorised to organise an *entente* of likeminded small states, express its approval of the twelve-power-appeal, and increase pressure on the League's case (crossed out: against Japan) to cease hostilities in Manchuria.[404]

Before the Extraordinary Assembly opened its doors on 3 March, the delegation met within the so-called "small state group" to align strategies.[405] Scholarly accounts highlight how the Scandinavian states, alongside the representatives of Spain, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland, ended up intervening on the side of China during the Assembly session.[406] Despite the adjusted instructions, representative Löfgren's speech entailed a strong critique of Japan, and he maintained that "no one can deny that what is taking place is war in everything but name."[407] Sweden, together with Switzerland, also put forward a draft resolution calling for negotiations and the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Shanghai. The Extraordinary Assembly ended up adopting a more "diplomatic" solution, but it established that the Covenant was indeed applicable and called for cease-fire, negotiations, and a withdrawal of Japanese forces from Shanghai.[408]

At the session, Sweden was also elected to the Committee of Nineteen, tasked with supervising the steps taken to settle the conflict. It oversaw the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Shanghai, sought an amictic between the parties, and managed the extended deadline for the report. Sweden was initially represented by Ramel, but, even before the social democrats assumed office, Sandler attended one of the private meetings. Both the liberal and the soon-to-be social democratic Foreign Ministers encouraged the committee to pressure Japan to withdraw its troops sooner, to increase transparency by holding more public meetings, and to leave the decision on an extension of the Lytton Commission's deadline to the Assembly.[409] However, the committee was restricted in further tasks while awaiting the commission's report.

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[403] Ottosson 2021:30.

[404] Updated draft, RA, UD 1920 års dossiersystem, HP20: *Internationella politiska frågor 1920-1952*, G: *Konflikterna i Fjärran Östern*, 7:121.

[405] The 'small state group' or the 'eight power group' consisted of Belgium, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. See, for example: "P.M." 25 February 1932. RA, UDA HP20, G7.

[406] Jones 1930:256f1; O'Mahoney 2018a:56f; Ottosson 2021:40f.

[407] Löfgren, E. 5 March 1932. "Records of the Special Session of the Assembly, Volume I" LONA, OJ SS No. 101, p. 49.

[408] LONA, OJ SS No. 101, p. 81f.

[409] "Sino-Japanese dispute – Committee of Nineteen Experts appointed by the Extraordinary Assembly, 1932. Proceedings of private meetings" LONA R6227.1A.35933.31334; "Sino-Japanese Dispute – Committee of Nineteen Experts appointed by the Extraordinary Assembly,

Historians have pointed to how Japanese ambitions on mainland China were limited and that the talks did nothing to halt its subjugation of Manchuria.[410] A puppet state, Manchukuo, was set up in the region, and Japan gave its recognition in August.[411] The report from the inquiry commission – the so-called Lytton Report – was published in October 1932. It handed out even blame for the crisis by condemning Chinese provocation and Japanese retaliations alike, but it did assert doubt as to whether the new state of Manchukuo had been created without Japanese interference. However, the larger powers in the League still considered accepting Manchukuo as Japan had made it clear that the establishment of the new state was non-negotiable or it would withdraw from the League.[412]

A day before the Extraordinary Assembly met in December to discuss the report, the "small state group" gathered again, in a secret meeting, to coordinate their strategies.[413] While both France and Britain had expressed hesitancy regarding the proposed action against Japan, Sweden, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and the Irish Free State ended up drafting a resolution condemning Japan's military occupation and recommending a non-recognition policy for the state of Manchukuo.[414] According to Joseph O'Mahoney, the Secretary-General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond, demanded that the draft be revoked, fearing that a too strong condemnation might result in Japan withdrawing from the League.[415] Their resolution lost in favour of a more restrained one that referred the matter to the Committee of Nineteen, and tasked it with reviewing the report and present proposals for a settlement.[416]

1932. Proceedings of Public meetings." LONA R1873.1A.36529.31334. Sweden was also represented by independent conservative Hjalmar Hammarskjöld and diplomat K.I. Westman during the Committee of Nineteen's public and private meetings between 1932 and 1933.

[410] Henig 2010:148-9.

[411] Mageli, E. I. 2010 "A Real Peace Tradition? Norway and the Manchuria Crisis, 1931-1934" *Contemporary European History* 19(1):17-36, p. 25.

[412] Henig 2012:150.

[413] Correspondence, 6 Decmber 1932. RA, UDA HP20 G15:365a; Correspondence, 6 Decmber 1932. RA, UDA HP20 G15:367a. See also: O'Mahoney 2018a:65.

[414] "Records of the Special Session of the Assembly, Volume III" LONA OJ SS No. 111, see p. 32 and p.56.

[415]O'Mahoney 2018a:65f. See also: "Statesrådet Undéns anförande den 6 december 1932 vid Nationernas förbunds urtima församling", RA, UDA HP20, G16; Correspondence, 9 December 1932. "ang. den kinesisk-japanska konflikten inför Nationernas förbunds urtima församling" RA, UDA HP20, G15.

[416] The Committee of Nineteen had been set up in the Extraordinary Assembly in March 1932 with the purpose of supervising the steps taken to settle the conflict.

As a member of the committee, Sweden joined the negotiation of its recommendations. When the committee negotiated and drafted its recommendations, however, the Swedish delegation held that it was plagued by 'uncertainty' as several members were hesitant to use the Lytton Report as a basis for settlement for the fear that it would evoke the sanctions article.[417] Czechoslovakia, Spain, and Sweden contrarily argued that the report needed to serve as a basis or the committee would discredit the League's own work.[418] A concern was expressed amongst the Swedish delegates that Secretary General Drummond sought to keep the committee at arm's length, and that Britain would go behind its back to seek a conciliation outcome. When the Swiss delegate, Max Huber, expressed a tentativeness to using the Lytton Report as basis for settlement, it was also framed as the treachery of a fellow small state doing the bidding of Drummond and Britain's representative Sir John Simon.[419]

While the negotiations of the committee dragged on, the Kwantung Army reembarked on an offensive campaign early 1933. This renewed military action and Japan's refusal to compromise on Manchukuo led to Britain changing its stance, and the committee eventually agreed upon a Japan-critical statement.[420] On 24 February 1933, the Assembly reconvened to discuss its recommendation. The renewed military action in Manchuria in January contributed to an Assembly resolution adopting the first eight chapters of the Lytton Report. It did not explicitly condemn Japan nor recommend sanctions, but insisted on the withdrawal of Japanese troops and the recognition of an autonomous Manchuria under Chinese sovereignty. The Swedish delegation participated in the drafting of the final resolution and the government went on to support the proposal.[421] Japan was the only member voting against it, and retorted by formally exiting the League in March 1933.[422]

The members of the Committee of Nineteen, together with the Netherlands and Canada, formed an advisory committee (the Committee of Twenty-one), to which the US and the Soviet Union were invited but only the former agreed

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[417] See various reports from the Swedish delegation on the committee's work in RA, UDA HP20, G15-18. In parallel with public and private committee session, the Swedish delegation continued to meet within the 'small state group' to discuss what its recommendation should be, see, for example: Correspondence, Sandler, R to Undén, Ö. 4 February 1933. RA, UDA HP20, G17:55a.

[418] LONA R6227.1A.35933.31334; LONA R1873.1A.36529.31334.

[419] Correspondence, 14 December 1932. RA, UDA HP20, G16:380a.

[420] Steiner 2007:742. See also: "Sino-Japanese Dispute – Discussions at Extraordinary Assembly. Committee of Nineteen. Report." LONA R3624.1.2233.630.

[421] "Records of the Special Session of the Assembly, Volume IV" LONA OJ SS No. 112, p. 24.

[422] Steiner 2007:743; O'Mahoney 2018a:36. The delegate of Siam/Thailand abstained.

to attend. They tasked a sub-committee to review an international weapons embargo. Sweden briefly cooperated with Britain to achieve an international arms embargo and a recall of foreign diplomats from Tokyo, but they failed to reach an agreement as Undén did not want it to affect both states, only the aggressor, and Foreign Minister Sandler expressed the need for a Geneva consensus before moving forward with a Swedish ban.[423] Japan thus continued its expansion into East Asia without interference from the League. Historian Rana Mitter has emphasised how Japan embarked on a mass resettlement of ethnic minorities in the Manchuria region.[424]

In sum, modern interpretations of the Manchuria crisis have been that the League, being a European organisation, took too long to respond because of the geographical distance and a general support for a more "westernised" Japan.[425] The emphasis on the League's slowness to respond in scholarly accounts has, moreover, framed the Manchuria crisis as the organisation's first grave failure, and one that would later embolden Italy and Germany to pursue expansionist policies without fear of repercussions. At the same time, it has also been described as an "epoch-making" moment with the development of symbolic sanctions and the use of non-recognition as a new way to maintain the illegitimacy of an aggressor.[426] For Sweden, the Manchuria crisis illustrated a move from an initial hesitancy on taking a clear stance, including some support for the Japanese side, to a forceful condemnation of Japan's action, and even an openness to the consideration of the sanctions article.

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[423] Report from Undén, Ö. 27 February 1933. "ang. Vapenexport till Fjärran Östern" RA, UDA HP20, G18:87; Sandler, 6 March 1933. RA, FPC, A1: *Protokoll, huvudserie*. See also additional reports on the work of the Committee of Twenty-One in RA, UDA HP20, G18. International cooperation was partly hampered by the ongoing difficulties to establish a praxis as the Council also discussed an arms embargo response with regards to the Colombia-Peru War. Only Britain suspended the export of weapons to both China and Japan, but Britain was not a major arms exporter itself. According to scholarly accounts, the ban was thus likely to hurt China, while having minor impact on Japan. Britain's ban did not draw response from other governments, and was ended after less than a month, see Henig 2010:152.

[424] Mitter, R. 2000. *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China.* Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 114. See also: Mageli 2010:33f. However, scholars have also highlighted that the Assembly did set up a sub-committee on the collective non-recognition of Manchukuo, see O'Mahoney 2018a:69f.

[425] Henig 2010:137.

[426] O'Mahoney 2018a:33.

4.4 Sweden and the Abyssinia crisis 1935-36

Recounts of the Abyssinia crisis typically start with a border incident between Ethiopia and Italian-held Somaliland that occurred on 5 December 1934.[427] Ethiopian troops protesting the Italian fortification at Wal-Wal, located on the Ethiopian side of the border, clashed with an Italian garrison. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini both claimed aggression by the other.[428] The incident was followed by several Ethiopian appeals to the League to manage the growing tensions in the spring of 1935, but talks did nothing to halt Italy's military build-up.[429] The Italian invasion on 3 October 1935, on the other hand, promoted a quick response from the League. The Council found that Italy had resorted to force in violation of the Covenant four days after its commencement, and the Assembly confirmed the same soon after, setting in motion, for the first, the use of economic sanctions.[430] During this time, Sweden was governed by a social democratic government under Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson and Foreign Minister Rickard Sandler. In late spring 1936, the social democratic government resigned, and Sweden was thus also under the leadership of the agrarian party with Axel Pehrsson as Prime Minister and Karl Gustav Westman as Foreign Minister during the time when the League eventually decided to end its sanctions regime.[431]

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[427] Scholars point out that it was not the first time the two countries clashed over territorial disputes. Michael Breacher argues that the deaf at Adwa in 1896 had "shocked and humiliated" Italy, and had a "great impression" on a young Mussoloni, see: Breacher, M. 2008. "Ethiopian (Abyssinian) War 1934-36, Multipolarity, Africa" in Breacher, M. (ed.) *International Political Earthquakes.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 165. Ethiopia also laid between two existing Italian colonies: Eritrea and Somalia. The conquest of the former would therefore allow Italy the possession of a contiguous territory in East Africa. The invasion is thus often understood as driven by the dual ambitions to revenge the Italian loss and to strengthen Italy's colonial empire, see Fosse – Fox 2012:84. See also: Strang, G.B. 2013. *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact.* London: Routledge, p. 16-27.

[428] O'Mahoney, J. 2018b. "The Abyssinian Crisis" in O'Mahoney, J. (ed.) *Denying the Spoils of War: The Politics of Invasion and Non-recognition.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 75.

[429] The term Abyssinia applied to a region in the Horn of Africa, but was regularly used as another name for Ethiopia during the Interwar period. It was, alongside Liberia, the only country in Africa that had not been colonised, and it was accepted as a member of the League in 1923, see Fosse – Fox 2012:84; Strang 2013:13f. Its membership had originally been opposed by Britain and some of its allies on the grounds of slavery, and its membership was based on the condition that Ethiopia's rulers committed to abolishing slavery, see Brecher 2008:165. This was used by Italy as a humanitarian motive for its invasion in talks with the League.

[430] The League had previously recommended, for instance, arms embargos, but not activated Article 16.

[431] Their time in office was brief, and the second Hansson government returned following the September election. While Westman's position in the foreign office was short-lived, he was the

Emperor Sellassie first brought the situation to the attention of the League Council on 14 December 1934, and made his appeal to the Secretary General Joseph Avenol under Article 11 of the Covenant. In comparison to the Manchuria crisis, the European powers had more (colonial) interests in East Africa. However, they also needed to keep Italy on their side to present a united front against Nazi Germany, and therefore initially sought appeasement by welcoming the possibility of solving the problem outside of Geneva.[432] In parallel with the Ethiopian appeals, Mussolini reached an agreement with the French Prime Minister Pierre Laval in which the latter would give Italy a secret "free hand" on the Abyssinia question.[433] Michael Breacher describes Italy's agreement to arbitration of the Wal-Wal incident as being based on the belief that France and Britain would pressure Ethiopia to retract its request.

On 17 March, both parties agreed to the creation of a neutral zone, but no progress was made on the arbitration until May when a conciliation and arbitration committee concluded that neither party was to blame. In the meantime, following the Italian military preparation in its bordering colonial territories and the delay of an arbitration agreement, Emperor Sellassie invoked Article 15 concerning disputes likely to lead to a rupture.[434] After receiving another request, the Council decided to make the Committee of Five responsible for reaching a peaceful solution. In late September, the Council concluded that it had failed, and passed the matter to a new Committee of Thirteen. As it was preparing its report, however, the Italian invasion commenced.[435]

Over a month before the invasion, the foreign ministers of the Nordic states had notably met in Oslo, after which they issued a statement on their firm will "to support every effort to guard the peace and maintain the legal principles

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brother of Karl Ivan Westman – a career diplomat and Swedish delegate to the League Assembly who participated in the sanction coordination committee during the Abyssinia crisis.

[432] The cornerstone of the British position in the Middle East was Egypt and the Suez Canal – the imperial artery to India – and Ethiopia bordered British colonial territories in Somaliland, see: Morewood, S. 2020 "An opportunity missed: Britian and the Abyssinia Crisis" in Aterrano, M.M. – Varley, K. (eds.) *A Fascist Decade of War: 1935-1945 in International Perspective.* 1st edition. London: Routledge, p. 13. France, on the other hand, albeit also having bordering colonial territories, has been understood as more concerned with German revisionism in Europe. In April 1935, Britain, France, and Italy famously met at Stresa and reached an agreement on resisting German rearmament, see O'Mahoney 2018b:75. At the same time, scholarly recounts highlight that the relationship was still strained due to lingering resentments over France and Britain failing to fulfil all of their pledges in granting Italy concessions in return for its entry into the war against Germany, see: Tollardo, E. 2016. *Facist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922-1935* London: Palgrave Macmillan p. 48

[433] Brecher 2008:179.

[434] Fosse – Fox 2012:85; O'Mahoney 2018b:75

[435] "Ethiopian – Italian Relation. Reports and resolutions of the various Committees of the Council. (Committee of Five – Committee of Thirteen)" LONA R3654.1.20044.15227.

of the League."[436] The foreign ministers had agreed that, if Britain participated, they would be willing to support economic sanctions against Italy. During the meeting, Sandler read a letter from his Dutch colleague, Andries de Graeff, who worried that the great powers were planning to solve the matter outside of Geneva. According to the foreign ministers, it was the duty of the smaller states who were in favour of conducting international affairs on an "ethical basis" to prevent them from doing so.[437]

Italy invaded Ethiopia on 3 October 1935, and a unanimous Council found that Italy had acted in violation of the Covenant on 7 October. The Assembly followed suit in a resolution that was adopted fifty to four.[438] During the Assembly, Sandler called out the Council for taking too long to deal with the growing tensions, and stressed that the Covenant should apply equally to great and small powers since "a law which is not applied to all ceases by that very fact to be law."[439] His statement had been preceded by a session in the FPC which gave its support for sanctions against Italy, *if* collectively enforced.[440] The view that Sweden should wait for the great powers was shared by the government which, in its instructions to the Swedish delegation, urged double preparedness: to be ready for collective action or a let-down. Yet, the instructions stated that a "a solidarity-based prevention of war implies a greater protection than neutrality can provide […] our effort in favour of a development in accordance with the line of solidarity is currently at the fore."[441]

After Britain and France's affirmation that Italy had acted in violation of the Covenant, Sandler was thus given the green light to pursue sanctions. On 11 October, the Assembly confirmed the use of the sanctions article.[442] Yet, despite the overwhelming majority, the vote had no legal effect due to its non-unanimity. The Assembly nonetheless referred the matter to a coordination

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[436] 29 August 1935. "Pressmeddelande" RA, UD HA [Utrikesdepartementet Handarkiv 1860-1959], Sandler, R. 3(5) *Ämnesordnade handlingar: Konflikten mellan Italien och Ethiopien.*
[437] van Diepen, R. 2013. "The Former European Neutrals, the Ethiopian Crisis and its Aftermath, 1935-1938" in Strang, G.B (ed.) *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact.* London: Routledge, p. 341.
[438] "Records of the Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly. Plenary Meetings. Text of the Debates" LONA OJ SS No. 138. See also O'Mahoney 2018b:102. The Council unanimous Council decision excluded Italy, and with Assembly resolution was adopted with Italy against and Austria, Hungary, and Albania abstaining.
[439] Sandler, R. OJ SS No. 138, p. 62.
[440] Protocol, 11 October 1935. RA, FPC, A1: *Protokoll, huvudserie.*
[441] 11 October 1935 "Utkast till instruction för de svenska ombuden till Nationernas förbunds sextonde ordinarie möte" RA, FPC A2: *Memorialprotokoll jämte handlingar från utrikesnämndens sammanträdanden*. See also: Report 18 October 1925 "ang. utförsel av krigsmateriel m.m. till Abessinien och Italien" RA, UDA HP35: *Kriget mellan Italien och Abessinien*, A1: *Allmänt.*
[442] LONA OJ SS No. 138, p. 114f. Fifty of the fifty-three members present voted affirmative.

committee which was tasked with providing recommendations for unilateral implementations. The committee ended up recommending an arms embargo, a prohibition of certain financial dealings (credit and loan stop), a complete ban on Italian imports, and a partial ban on exports to Italy. Sweden participated in all measures suggested by the committee, and was represented by diplomat K.I. Westman in another committee overseeing their implementation.[443] The Swedish support of the operation was illustrated by its rapid application of the recommended sanctions.[444] However, he also argues the initial hopes for the effectiveness of sanctions were cut short by two events in December 1935.[445]

First, the British Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare and the French Prime Minister Laval had come up with a secret plan that involved adjustments of sovereign territory and Italian economic monopoly over two thirds of Abyssinia. This was more than Italy had conquered thus far, and would allow its annexation of the southern half of Ethiopia. When the so-called Hoare-Laval plan was made public it was met with outrage. Both cabinets backed on their initial approval, and Hoare was forced to resign.[446] Although Swedish officials expressed that they had not expected less of France as they were already suspecting Laval of pacifying Mussolini, Britain's support for Article 16 in October had been well received and the news of the plan were described as a betrayal by the British .[447]

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[443] This committee was an extension of the Assembly itself, with all members what had originally supported the resolution included. The actual measures were formulated by a smaller committee (the Committee of Eighteen) in cooperation subcommittees dealing with economic sanctions, financial sanctions, and the mutual support between members respectively, see: "Ethiopia-Italy – Committee of co-ordination: committee of eighteen – Provisional minutes" LONA R3665.1.20308.20306.

[444] See Ross 1981:70ff. See also: "Ethiopia-Italy – Documentation – Coordination Committee" LONA R3668.1.20311; Various documentations in RA, UDA HP35, B: *Sanktioner*. Most measures were implemented with existing legislation, but the financial prohibition and the ban on credit had to be strengthened with new legislation. In the meantime, the government enacted temporary stops on credits to Italy, and presented its desire to keep on preventing the granting of loans and credits to Italy. Their proposal was eventually passed by the Swedish *Riksdag* in the spring of 1936, see: Prop. No. 67. 1936. "Kungl. Maj:ts proposition till riksdagen med förslag till lag angående rätt för Konungen att i vissa fall förordna om kreditspärr" *Riksdagens dokument och lagar*. The economic and legal possibilities and constraints in relation to the sanctions were discussed by the FPC, see: Protocol, 24 October 1935. RA, FPC, A1.

[445] Ross 1981:78.

[446] Holt, A. 2010. "'No More Hoares to Paris': British foreign policymaking and the Abyssinian crisis, 1935" *Review of International Studies* 37(3):1383-1401. See also: O'Mahoney 2018b:83.

[447] The Swedish government had, for instance, blamed Laval for the Council's failure to resolve the issue during the spring of 1935, see: 10 October 1935 "P.M. angående vissa länders inställning till frågan om sanktioner mot Italien" RA, HP35, B1. This view was also strengthened by the correspondence with the Swedish envoy in Paris, see: Correspondence, 5 October 1935.

Second, Italian war planes bombed a Swedish Red Cross ambulance on 30 December, and several patients and one Swedish doctor were reported killed. The Hansson government described the attack as purposeful, and as a way to retaliate against Sweden's outspoken criticism towards Italy and support for the League's sanctions. The event provoked a formal protest by Sandler to Italy's ambassador in Stockholm.[448] While he received condolences over the accident from the ambassador, the Italian Press Ministry simultaneously declared the attack as justified since Abyssinian commanders allegedly took refuge with the Swedish Red Cross. It even accused Sweden of being unneutral by harbouring the leaders of Ethiopian forces.[449] Sweden brought the matter to the League, but no investigation of violations was undertaken.[450]

There was a general concern over the effectiveness of the sanction operation throughout the spring as Italy continued its military operation without halt.[451] The committee of experts charged with determining the progress of the operation concluded that not all memers followed their declared intents.[452] In parallel, the so-called "small state group" became torn on how Denmark and Spain, their representatives in the Council, should proceed.[453] On 15 April, Sandler received a letter from De Graeff, proposing to make a final attempt

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"ang. arten av franska sanktioner mot Italien" RA UDA HP35, B1:880. For the Foreign Ministry's response towards the British, see: Statement given to the Foreign Policy Council. 1936. RA, FPC, Ö1, p. 26ff. See also: 16 December 1935 "V.P.M. rörande orsakerna till ändringen i den engelska hållningen gentemot Italien" RA, HP35, A4; Correspondence, Westman, K.I. 14 December 1935. "den italiensk-abessinska konflikten; samtal med Laval" RA; Correspondence, 16 December 1935. RA, UDA HP35, A4; Report, 19 December 1935 "Telefonsamtal mellan envoyén Westman and Utrikesministern" RA, UDA HP35, A4.

[448] UD 1937. "Aktstycken rörande den svenska röda korsambulansen i Abessinien 1935-1936" *Aktstycken utgivna av Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet* Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, p. 12f. For more on the Red Cross ambulance incident, see specific folders in RA, UDA HP35, D: *Röda corsets verksamhet*.

[449] Ross 1989:78f.

[450] "Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Bombardment of the Swedish ambulance by Italian aeroplanes" LONA R3654.1.21818.1522. See also: UD *Aktstycken* 1937.

[451] Strang 2008: 225f; O'Mahoney 2018b:103; Morewood 2020:23f.

[452] The export ban had been especially tricky as it, on the one hand, was implemented to various degrees, and, on the other, did not include iron and steel. The effectiveness of the sanctions was further halted by the combination of Italian threats of retaliation, the non-membership of key oil producers (the export from the US rose considerably), and the parallel efforts by Britain and France to keep Italy allied within the so-called Stresa Front, see Strang, G. B. 2008. "'The Worst of All Worlds': Oil Sanctions and Italy's Invasion of Abyssinia, 1935-1936" *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19:210-235.

[453] The President of the Committee of Thirteen, Salvador de Madariaga of Spain, had early declared himself in support of British and French appeasement attempts, but had to let his colleagues know that their efforts remained futile, see: Westman, K.I. 18 April 1936. "italiensk-abessinska konflikten, trettonmannakommitténs förlikningsförsök" RA, HP35, A8:33.

by turning to Britain and France. The letter was followed up by several meetings among the group's foreign ministers.[454] They discussed whether they would render military assistance to Britain in the event of a confrontation (Sweden would not participate in military sanctions); their view on Italy's position within the League (Sandler suggested Italy's exclusion to reaffirm the October resolution); and the future of the League itself.[455]

Italian advancements eventually led to the occupation of Addis Ababa in May 1936. Emperor Sellassie had left the Ethiopian capital four days earlier to plead with the League, but there was not much more it was willing to do.[456] According to Steven Morewood, the new Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden argued that there was no support for military action; a burden that would predominantly fall on Britain as the most proximate power.[457] Italy proclaimed the annexation of Ethiopia into the Italian Empire on 9 May. The League upheld the sanctions regime for two more months, but the will to sustain them was low, and the scholars argue that Britain and France had already turned their eyes to a more pressing matter: the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland.[458] In July, the League voted to formally end the sanctions, but it still recognised Ethiopia as a member.[459]

The representatives of the small state group had also met again towards the end of June. Their talks resulted in a joint declaration expressing their doubts as to "whether the premises under which we have taken upon ourselves the obligations contained in the Covenant still continue to exist to satisfactory extent", and noting that "we would place it on the record that, as long as the Covenant as a whole is applied so incompletely and inconsistently, we are obliged to bear that fact in mind in connection with the application of Article 16."[460] This statement clarified that they no longer considered themselves

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[454] The meetings were held in Geneva in conjunction with the 92nd session of the Council.
[455] While the Swiss and Norwegian foreign ministers wanted to remove Article 16, Sandler argued for a reform of the League by enhancing Article 11 which dealt with the prevention of conflicts instead, see: Report, Westman K.I 9 May 1936. "sammanträde med fem- och sjumannagruppen" RA, UDA HP35, A8:33. See also: van Diepen 2013:399
[456] Brecher 2008:190.
[457] Morewood 2020:14.
[458] Holt 2010:1400f; Morewood 2020:23f.
[459] The annexation of Ethiopia was followed by Italian attempts to have it recognised by the international community. Some states, like Austria, Germany, and Japan recognised the Italian conquest in 1936. Britain and France gave their recognition in 1938 as part of the Anglo-Italian agreement to stop Hitler, and by the end of 1938 forty-seven states had given recognition to the Italian Empire, including Sweden, see O'Mahoney 2018b:76.
[460] van Diepen 2013:400. Later instructions to the delegation still clarified that Sweden was to, to the extent possible, follow its obligations under the Covenant, but that experiences from its

bound by Article 16, and would participate in sanctions solely on their own terms in the future. Although Sweden refrained from arguing for a removal of Article 16, delegate Undén reasoned along a Swedish line on reformation and revision of the Covenant during the next Assembly session, reflecting a general disappointment expressed by the Swedish government.[461] It had managed to get broad domestic support for its participation in the sanctions against Italy, but understood the League's efforts as a failure since they had not brought an end to the Italian invasion.

In sum, the Abyssinia crisis has broadly been understood as a disaster for the League. It drew in almost all of its members through the unprecedented use of economic sanctions, however present-day interpretations tend to frame the crisis as the moment the League was exposed as incapable of constraining an aggressor when the great powers prioritised strategic relationships over obligations to the Covenant. At the same time, the Abyssinia crisis has also been told as a formative moment in the development of collective security since it was the first time that Article 16 was activated and economic sanctions were applied on such a scale. In Sweden, a broad parliamentary consensus supported sanctions, yet by 1936 the failure of those measures prompted a shift in the domestic debate, and the literature broadly recognises the joint statement of the small state group as Sweden's return to a neutrality policy.

4.5 Sweden's foreign policy across four cases

This chapter has used insights from previous research to introduce the four Interwar crisis moments around which the analysis in this thesis centres. In short, the Corfu crisis has broadly been described as a contest over legitimacy and authority between the League and another international body, and told predominantly through the power politics and the institutional procedures of the League. The Mosul crisis has mostly been understood as testing the League's capacity for conflict resolution and a moment marking it as a capable arbitrator, but also as an example of colonial resistance or of the importance of oil interest above diplomacy and international law. The Manchuria crisis has been described as an international diplomatic and military crisis, but more

implementation with regards to the Abyssinia crisis required a revision, see: 26 June 1936. "ang. instruktion för ombuden vid Nationernas förbunds församling" RA, UDA HP35, A9.

[461] Undén, Ö. 29 September 1936. "Verbatim Record of the Seventeenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, Tenth Plenary Meeting" LONA Vol. 0673368, p. 1f.

so as a moment illustrating that the League was a European organisation responding too slowly to events it regarded as distant. Finally, the Abyssinia crisis has been narrated as a moment exposing the League as weak in the face of great power interest and strategic alignment, but also as a formative moment for the idea of collective security.

The chapter has also used archival records to introduced Sweden's official policy and League activities in relation to the four Interwar crisis moments. During the Corfu crisis, Sweden's Council representative Branting pursued a forceful defence of League competence, yet this activism was enacted in tension with a conservative government that preferred a quieter approach and was reluctant towards the sanctions article. The Mosul crisis then placed Sweden at the centre of the League's conflict resolution machinery, with Branting and later Undén serving as *rapporteurs*. By the time of the Manchuria crisis, Sweden's governments shifted from initial caution and sympathies towards Japan, to a strong condemnation of its actions, including a willingness to consider sanctions. During the Abyssinia crisis Sweden participated in the implementation of a sanctions regime against Italy, but did so with a "double preparedness." In 1936, Sweden declared that it no longer considered itself bound by the sanctions article, and urged for a reform of the League.

Across the Interwar period, the four cases thus follow an arc in Swedish foreign policy from early activism in defence of League authority, through a sustained but also constrained engagement within the international organisation, ending with a re-evaluation of Sweden's obligations under the Covenant. This retelling is, however, itself a narrative construction, and the dominant interpretations presented above should not be taken as settled accounts of what Sweden did and why, but as one part of the narrative landscape within which these crisis moment were, and indeed still are, given meaning. The following part of the thesis engages with how Swedish policy with regards to the above cases were made possible, as well as what alternative paths were imagined, by turning to the narratives that were told in Sweden when these crisis moments emerged on the League's agenda. By exploring the particular issue narratives told in relation to Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia, and by tracing how they drew upon and reproduced broader foreign policy narratives acoss these crisis moments, the following chapters uncovers how the continuous retellings of who Sweden was, and who it ought to be, contributed to both the sedimentation and contestation of its identity.

PART III

5 The Guardian of Geneva

> However far away we may be,
> we are still members of the
> great community of civilised states,
> we are a forest chapel under the
> great mother church of Europe.[462]

This chapter explores one of the foreign policy narratives reproduced across the four crisis moments. It proceeds through the narrative elements of settings, characters, and emplotments, and illustrates how each contributed to the construction of the identity concepts positions, self- and other-portrayals, and programmes. This foreign policy narrative was predominantly narrated in the stories told by social democratic and liberal narrative agents, and can be characterised as a *progressive-reformist* narrative.[463] The setting focused on Geneva as a site of progression, order, and community, and Sweden was positioned as a moral power within it. The narrative included protagonists who defended the Geneva order and antagonists who threatened it, and Sweden was portrayed as an engaged member of the same. The emplotment selected and ordered events that formed around a disordered past that had led up to a great war, a present that represented a break from that past through the creation of the League, and two potential futures of either continued progress or a relapse into history. It subsequently connected Sweden to a programme of active participation in the League. The chapter shows how the foreign policy narrative positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in a way that made it inseparable from the past, present, and future progression of the Geneva-centred order.

[462] Quote from a poem by Esaias Tegnér cited by Ivan Pauli in: FC [First Chamber of the *Riksdag*] 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 44, translated.
[463] This narrative was reproduced by narrative agents who, in other scholarly accounts, have also been classified as internationalists and (Christian) pacifists. See: Ottosson 2021:33.

5.1 Settings and positions

The progressive-reformist narrative constructed a set of interconnected **spatial settings**. The issue narratives on Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia located each crisis moment within Geneva. Around this core setting, additional spatial settings emerged: Sweden which was closely connected to Geneva; the European great power capitals that both sustained and complicated the core setting; and the particular regions which were constructed as peripheral and relational sites of *dis*order. The narrative also situated the crisis moments within a **temporal setting** centred around progression. Geneva became a temporal marker for development and modernity, and it was constructed as a space where the relations between states were *becoming* more ordered. This section dives further into how the narrative constructed spatial and temporal settings that also worked to **position** Sweden within them. Since Sweden was frequently placed within a Geneva order rather than outside of it, it also became located in relation to the hierarchal categories that defined that order. Sweden was positioned as belonging to a democratic world society that was told as superior because it represented progression. It was also positioned as European through the construction of the League as a European institution and Sweden's association with other European states, as well as as a small state that, within the Geneva setting, was attributed a moral power and influence.

Critical decision-making moments in Geneva

The core spatial setting of the foreign policy narrative was Geneva. It was a space that often became synonymous with the League as the main context of each issue narrative, and it was constructed as a place where a novel institutional structure and legal order had been built, and where a new way of doing international politics was being tried and enacted. Both the Corfu and Mosul issue narratives thus narrated each conflict as tests or threats towards Geneva rather than in connection to the island or the province. Manchuria and Abyssinia were similarly told as linked to Geneva, and as constituting dangers to the League rather than within the named territories. An editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* held that "the League of Nations has never had a more difficult case to deal with than the Japanese occupation of Manchuria", and four years later Sweden's Foreign Minister said the Abyssinia crisis "undeniably constitutes

a serious crisis for the League of Nations."[464] Such descriptions collapsed the geographical distances since, what was described as peripheral conflicts, were instead narrated as crises *for the League*. This meant that the each moment unfolded against the backdrop of the League's institutional context, and the issue narratives made them about the processes taking place there.

On the one hand, the spatial setting was told as representing an international order, as reflecting the world's "collective moral consciousness", and as being a space that organised "world opinion".[465] Geneva was narrated as the capital of an emerging world community, and it was often related to the advancement of a democratic movement which had progressed international society towards new ideals.[466] A parliamentarian described the importance of Geneva in this way:

> If the League was dissolved and fell together […] world opinion would lose the only organisational support it has to rely on when it comes to gaining ground for the legal order, which especially the smaller states should have reason to guard for.[467]

On the other hand, the issue narratives also constructed Geneva as a conflictual setting, and descriptions of internal tensions can be found in the Manchuria and Abyssinia narratives. Here the core spatial setting was increasingly told as strained. A struggle between different collective characters operating within the core spatial setting was narrated, and often related to the great powers. A parliamentarian stated that the "tasks which belongs to the Council as a whole, has at times been handled by certain individual great powers, has not been shown to be fortunate."[468] Character portrayals will be further discussed below, but this show that Geneva was also described through a vocabulary of tension and conflict emanating from within.

Although the setting framed each crisis moment as critical decision-making moments transpiring in Geneva, Sweden and Stockholm also emerged as a

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[464] Editorial, 6 Oct. 1932 "Japan och Folkförbundet" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 3, translated; Sandler, R. FC 36 May 1936 No. 36, p. 1, translated. For the other cases, see for example: Editorial, 5 Sep. 1923 "Dragkampen i Geneve" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 3. Editorial, 1 Dec. 1925 "Rådsmötet" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 3.

[465] See, for example: Editorial, 4 Sep. 1923 "England för Folkförbundet som medlare i Medelhavskrisen" *Arbetet,* p. 3; Åkerberg, H. FC 1936 No. 36, p.

[466] This will be further discussed below, since the core spatial setting, including the more detailed characterisation of the League as a protagonist, was constructed as being threatened by the specific portrayals of "anti-democratic" and "nationalist" characters.

[467] Åkerberg, H. FC 28 Feb. 1933 No. 14, p. 43, translated.

[468] Sandler, R. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 11, translated. See also: Åkerberg, H. FC 28 Feb. 1933 No. 14, p. 43.

key spatial setting. Geneva was described as a space where Sweden could participate in the new legal and moral order through its membership in the League. The issue narratives provided a spatial link where a Swedish decision-making setting was closely connected to an international one. As opposed to constructing Sweden as removed from international politics, either geographically or because of a lack of power or influence, the issue narratives placed Sweden and Swedish representatives in the very centre of it.

This was produced in a public speech which held that "our membership [has] made Sweden better known in the world than before, increased our prestige and brought us recognition from different directions for a mission completed with honour."[469] A parliamentarian followed a similar line when stating:

> We are no longer a small state for us up here. We are parts of a large whole, the League of Nations. […] Sweden is no longer an Ultima Thule, it is no longer a country far up at the North Pole, but a part of the world, a part of the community of nations [...].[470]

At the same time, the centrality of Geneva (and Sweden) was complicated by additional settings. London and Paris were also narrated as sites of significant decision-making. Although Geneva and the League context was the centre stage in each issue narrative, this was often constructed as implicated by the European great power capitals, creating a tension between two spatial contexts. On the one side was a setting based on legal order and world community, and, on the other, was the "great power logic" in which the outcome of each crisis moment was steered by the capitals of Europe's largest powers.[471]

In relation to Corfu, the Conference was, for example, constructed as a rival institutional site. Its seat in Paris was told as a space where the great powers negotiated without the participation of smaller states, and the move between these settings was described as a challenge to Geneva. London similarly became a key site in the Mosul issue narrative with details given to the decision-

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[469] Speech given Östen Undén in Gothenburg October 1925, cited in: 19 October 1925 "Undén i Göteborg: Skarp vidräkning med Genevekritiken" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 4, translated.

[470] Åkerberg, FC 28 Feb. 1933 No. 14, p. 43, translated. See also: Front page headline, 29 September 1923. *Arbetet,* translated.

[471] See, for example: Editorial, 5 Sep. 1923 "Dragkampen i Geneve" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 3; Editorial, 3 Jan. 1926. "Kring Mosul" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 2. The emphasis on the European capitals participated in constructing the respective issues as a matter for European state decision-making. Even in the particular Manchuria issue narrative, Japan – as the other permanent member of the Council – was mostly absent as a key spatial context. While Japan emerged as the main antagonist in this narrative, events were seldom told with Tokyo as a key context, whereas Geneva, London, and Paris emerged as settings that were significant for how they unfolded.

making taking place there vis-à-vis corresponding processes in Geneva. Following this line, an editorial emphasised the centrality of Britain:

> Since the Council decision was made, there are a few aspects that deserve some interest. First and foremost, there is the stance of the English public on the Council's decision. […] The acceptance of the Council decision with the attached conditions was, as the Prime Minister emphasised, only a logical continuation of the policy that previous British governments […] had adhered to.[472]

This is, perhaps, expected given that Britain, through its mandate, was one of the parties of the dispute. However, although both the Corfu and Mosul narratives constructed Athens and Angora/Ankara as settings, these played a marginal role compared to the emphasis on London and Paris in all issue narratives. This meant that non-great power, as well as non-European, capitals became, in comparison, less significant settings for the narration of the crisis moments.

The core spatial setting of Geneva was also contrasted with the settings of the crises origins. These spaces were detached from a Geneva that was more essential to the narrative, but also linked to it as the fates of the conflict areas and the future of the Geneva order were woven together. In the issue narrative on Corfu, Geneva was under threat from an alternative context where military violence played out, but, beyond being a relation site of disorder, Corfu itself did not hold a central place.[473] For Mosul, the province itself as well as the territory of Iraq were rarely constructed as significant settings on their own. A parliamentarian still presented Mosul in the following way:

> The question was whether the area should be fully or partially assigned to the Arab state of Iraq or to Turkey. […] complications in considering the composition of the population were caused by the fact that these different ethnic groups were so unevenly distributed within the area. […] If the ethnic composition of the population did not provide sufficient guidance for the decision, perhaps some conclusion could be reached if one examined its wishes. It was also in this way that the decision was subsequently sought. The direct means of determining the population's wishes through a referendum, however, proved to be unusable.[474]

Mosul is described, but only in relation to procedure in Geneva, and it notably does not provide much room for meaningful agency within the setting itself. Iraq as a spatial space was similarly described as a mandated territory, but

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[472] Editorial, 3 Jan. 1926. "Kring Mosul" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2, translated.
[473] As the issue narrative also emphasised the risk of military action on the Balkans, it extended the spatial danger by evoking a memory of the region as Europe's "powder keg" before the war.
[474] Undén, Ö. FC 18 Jan. 1926, No. 3, p. 80f, translated.

rarely emerged as neither an important setting nor as its own character. This can be contrasted by the centrality of London as a significant setting, and to the construction of Britain as a key character (see below).

Manchuria was likewise narrated as an "obscure" place in the "Far East", and references were made to a special "Orientalist mentality" prevailing there. As an editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* held:

> It is true that the war events in the Far East take place under conditions that, from the perspective of the League of Nations, are the most unfavourable imaginable: the geographical distance is immense, the attacking state does not belong to the Western cultural sphere and does not even possess the modest degree of sensitivity to moral pressure that one at least likes to attribute to the European great powers […].[475]

This issue narrative further constructed the Manchuria crisis moment as a conflict transpiring between Japan and the League, more so than between Japan and China. Another editorial reproduced this when stating that:

> The Japanese government announces as openly as it can express itself in diplomatic language that it is engaged in a struggle against the League, cold-bloodedly sabotaging the entire international legal order that it itself pretends to be helping to build in Geneva.[476]

Japan, who was narrated as an antagonist (see below), was thus placed in a spatial space that was largely detached from a story transpiring in Geneva, but from where it was able to place the entire legal order under threat.

The Abyssinia issue narrative similarly linked the war between Italy and Ethiopia mainly to the threat it posed to the order built in Geneva. Although it, more so than one on Manchuria, acknowledged violence in this spatial space, it predominantly highlighted how the war had implications in, as well as for, Geneva and Europe. A parliamentarian narrated a forceful intervention from the League as necessary precisely because "from this hotbed of unrest, completely unforeseeable difficulties could develop."[477] The issue narratives thus located the four crisis moments within Europe, and created a danger closer to home because each threatened the future of the legal order established in Geneva. The crisis locations were rarely narrated as significant on

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[475] Editorial, 30 Jan. 1932 "Det japanska kriget" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3, translated. See also: Editorial, 22 Nov. 1931 "Nytt uppskov: Japan och Nationernas förbund" *Dagens nyheter*, p. 2, translated.
[476] Editorial, 22 Nov. 1931 "Nytt uppskov: Japan och Nationernas förbund" *Dagens nyheter*, p. 2, translated.
[477] Branting, G. FC 27 Feb. 1935 No. 12, p. 10, translated.

their own, instead they were described as abstract sites of disorder to be managed within the institutional context of the League.[478]

The progression of international order

The temporal settings of the issue narratives encompassed, on the one hand, an immediate temporal frame in which the narrating of "critical tests" conveyed an urgency in relation each crisis moment.[479] It suggested that these were issues that could not be delayed, but demanded Sweden's and the League's attention. The Mosul issue narrative was the only one not emphasising urgency, but, because of the temporality running through the progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative, it nonetheless constructed a moment of significance and exceptionality. Because, on the other hand, the overarching temporal setting found each crisis moment within a longer trajectory constructed around progression.

There was, throughout all issue narratives, a clear differentiation between the concept of a pre-League international order, and the creation of the international organisation after the world war. The "old order" was told as shaped by national self-interests and the use of force. The creation of the League suggested a break from such a time, and the narrative constructed a temporal understanding of international politics as gradually becoming more ordered. This was described extensively in an editorial in *Arbetet:*

> […] must not this alone be sufficient to justify the claim that the League of Nations represents an essential step forward from the situation in which the world found itself in such circumstances before the world war? For the small, outside the conflict standing nations, it is nonetheless an entirely new opportunity for influence that has opened through the League of Nations. It is no longer exclusively a matter for the great powers to deliberate, one through actions of the same kind as Mussolini's, created situation. For the first time, it has been achieved that even the small states can play a role in the concert which, on similar occasions, was always conducted by the so-called great powers. It ought to be evident even to the most rabid conservatives that the spectacle of, for example, a delegate from Sweden participating in the Council of great power representatives, deliberations concerning a warlike conflict, in which our country is not involved, is something entirely new in political history. Already this, that the voice of the small states

[478] A spatial hierarchy was also produced in which European capitals, and Geneva as the symbolic capital of a new world community, emerged as centres of meaningful political action. This that had implications for whether the characters associated with the central and peripheral settings were given agency in the stories told (see below).

[479] See, for example: Wickman, J. 8 Sep. 1923 "Internationell anarki. Folkförbundet och den grekiska-italienska konflikten." *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3; [479] Undén, Ö FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3:79.

> can make itself heard, that viewpoints beyond and above the crude egoistic power interests have a say, and that no difference in rank and dignity between states is presumed – is this not proof that the handling of these kinds of questions is moving onto entirely new, and for the prospects of peace, paths? […] The League of Nations embodies, despite all its fragility and frailty, in reality a giant step forward, and it would be criminal folly to, for the sake of its ailments, demand its dissolution.[480]

This longer quote notably contains multiple references to novelty and the passage into a new era. However, the transformation of the new order was often told as having to be gradual, not radical, to succeed. This created a paradox between the urgency of the crisis moments, and the need for steady development. A parliamentarian constructed as following the "law of development":

> Some love to call such perceptions realistic. I would rather describe them as based on a reality-alienating romanticism, which closes its eyes both to the law of development and to the fact that it is human individuals and masses who shape the destinies of peoples themselves and thus can influence the course of development. [...] This does not necessarily imply an uncritical belief in rapid progress from the current state. On the contrary, precisely those who apply the concept of development are more inclined to recognise the difficulties encountered and, for the time being, to be content with relatively small steps forward at a time.[481]

What this points to is a narrated necessity of a slow progression, and it allowed setbacks to be presented as a natural part of the order's progression. In the Corfu and Mosul issue narratives especially, the new international order was often constructed as "developing" and as "young".[482] A parliamentarian held:

> Like all new organisations, it has its major faults and shortcomings, that cannot be denied, but as a foreign observer said: One should not blame the child because it has no moustache. The League of Nations needs its time to grow strong.[483]

This reference to the League as "child" illustrates the narration of a time from its birth to infancy, and the future was often told as offering the possibility of it reaching maturity.[484] However, the foreign policy narrative also constructed a risk of a slide backward in time as each crisis moment described the threat

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[480] Engberg, A. 6 Sep. 1923 "Ödestimmar: Nationernas förbunds existens på spel" *Arbetet*, p. 6, translated.
[481] Undén, Ö. FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 75f, translated.
[482] See, for example: Engberg, A. 19 Sep. 1923 "I hr Lindmans skola" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.
[483] Sandler, R. SC [Second Chamber of the *Riksdag*] 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 19, translated.
[484] The latter was typically told as a consolidation of the new international norms that the League represented. This temporal setting became central for the construction of programmatic objectives and actions in the narrative (see section 5.3).

of a regression to the old order. Yet, while its infancy explained some of its limitations, this co-existed with an understanding of the Geneva order as the only available option for development. As was narrated in an editorial, "the leap backward to the old order would be tantamount to collapsing what has already been built" and the choice was "not between this League and another and better. It is between this League and the great order that unleashed the world war."[485] The narrative, in others words, defined what progression meant by defining what threatened it, and a reoccurring theme was the construction of a struggle between old and new times.

References to the infancy of the new order became fewer in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives. These narratives emphasised an order that had been strengthened, and especially highlighted Sweden's presence in developing it in the past decade. While these narratives did not frame the new order as having reached maturity, it could still be seen as having "now entered a new phase."[486] The temporal setting of progression thus provided the underlying logic through which each crisis moment became intelligible as "critical tests" because the present was understood as a passage from an old era into a new one. Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia were constituted as moments on which the direction of that developed hinged. A temporality of progression also reinforced the spatial hierarchy introduced above since it associated Geneva with moving forward, while simultaneously casting relational spatial settings as temporal opposites of disorder and violence.

Positioning Sweden

The spatial and temporal setting of the progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative contributed to the positioning of Sweden as belonging to specific **hierarchal categories**. Geneva was the spatial centre of the narrative, and Sweden was recurrently positioned within this context. This meant that Sweden's hierarchal categorisations were largely based on spatial and temporal understandings of the Geneva-centred order vis-à-vis what was narrated as standing outside of it. At the same time, the narration of the League context in

[485] Engberg, A. 6 September 1923. "Ödestimmar: Nationernas förbunds existens på spel." *Arbetet* 1923, p. 6, translated. See also: Undén, Ö. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 33, translated.
[486] Westman, K.G. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 26, translated. Another difference was the shift from an optimistic to a more pessimistic outlook. While Corfu and Mosul were told against the backdrop of an undesirable past that had been left behind in favour of a present that was fundamentally different, the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives rather stressed present moments threatening a collapse of what been consolidated in Geneva.

Geneva also constructed hierarchal categories within it, especially between (non-)European and (non-)small state categorisations.

Swedish identity was positioned within Geneva and narrated as belonging to a world community and a democratic society of states. Since Sweden was narrated as spatially and temporally interlinked with Geneva and the League, it was positioned in relation to the categorisations that were also attached to the international organisation. Especially emphasised was how the Geneva order offered a "clear democratic perception of how life should unfold both within and outside states."[487] Since Sweden was positioned in relation to Geneva, it was also linked to Europe. Although the Geneva setting was constructed as a world community, this context was simultaneously constructed as a distinctly European space, including in the categorisation of the League as a European institution. A parliamentarian, for instance, held:

> This purely European attitude of the League of Nations is of course a weakness, but it is at the same time a strength, because it implies a limitation to certain tasks, and it naturally also implies a strength above all for the European states.[488]

This common linkage between the institutional setting and Europe created internal hierarchal categorisations where the European member states (including Sweden) were narrated as more closely connected to the international order, whereas non-European (member) states became less critical to that context. The narrative thus positioned Swedish identity as European within the core spatial setting of a legal order in Geneva. This was reaffirmed by emphasising and associating Sweden to other states placed within that category. Consider, for example, the following statement in a press release from the liberal party:

> This goodwill towards Sweden became even more apparent when Mr. Ramel came down from the podium. The first to rush forward was Tardieu, who shook the Swedish Foreign Minister's hand heartily and for a long time. The German Bülow also offered his congratulations, as did the US's chief delegate, Mr. Gibson, the Italian Foreign Minister Grandi, Holland's van Blokland, the Dane Munch, the representatives of the Baltic states and many others. We Swedes were proud of our team.[489]

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[487] Vougt, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 71, translated.
[488] Åkerberg, H. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 29f, translated.
[489] Press release, 1932 "Efter Exc. Ramels stora tal" *Sweden's Freeminded Press Association* No. 16, RA [National Archives], Frisinnade landsföreningen B3: Cirkulär (pressmeddelanden), translated.

Although this quote does not explicitly name neither the League nor Sweden as European, it is illustrative of a tendency in the specific texts to highlight both the League and Sweden as acting alongside other states given this category as well – they are the ones performing meaningful action.[490]

Swedish identity was also specified within the Geneva setting as a distinct small state identity. This category was, on the one hand, acknowledged as materially inferior as small states were told as having limited material power, and as being vulnerable when faced with threats of military violence. On the other hand, the narrative encompassed a reinterpretation emphasising moral power. This was commonly narrated as the small states having "formed a bloc through their representation" that "taught us all the moral judgment of the world,"[491] In Geneva, material power was contrasted with moral power, and small states – especially Sweden itself – were commonly told as being morally superior. Consider, for example, the following quote from a parliamentary speech:

> This interest in what is said from the Swedish side is not due to the fact that people abroad have any exaggerated ideas about our country's importance as a military or political power factor, but it is due to the fact that in many places people have become accustomed to considering Swedish opinion in international issues as representative of Nordic or ex-neutral public opinion and to the fact that people are kind enough to consider the moral influence of these small states in world affairs to be an asset […].[492]

Euroepan small states, or the Nordic and ex-neutral small states as a final common categorisation, were thus constructed as a position in possession of a moral power and a normative influence in Geneva. Moreover, military power was often narrated of as representing old ways, and as being regressive or unmodern. The power gifted to the small states instead signified progression. The issue narratives still constructed a past, and the threat of a future, where the new order would disappear, and with it the power of the small states. This suggested, as was narrated in an editorial, that "the small nations in particular have clearly seen the sad future that awaits them if the nations that claim to be the great should have the right to resolve conflicts by arbitrary brutal action."[493]

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[490] See, for example: Sandler, R. FC 26 May1936 No. 36, p. 7.
[491] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen: Någonting har ändrats" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated. Consider also the common narration by Swedish delegates casting themselves as representatives of the smaller states' moral judgement. See, for example: Branting, H. 1 Sep. 1923. OJ 4th Year No. 10, p. 1280.
[492] Pauli, I. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 42, translated.
[493] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen: Någonting har ändrats" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.

The positioning of Swedish identity as belonging to a progressive and democratic category, to a European (sometimes Nordic) category, and a small state category, also relationally differentiated Sweden from what was narrated as non-democratic, non-European, and non-small state categorisations. These categories were thus hierarchial: a first democratic position placed Sweden among those moving forward with time and who were superior to those holding on to a nationalist and authoritarian past; a second European position located Sweden close to the institutional centre of the narrative, while rendering those more peripheral to it less significant; and the third position placed Sweden amongst those considered "small states" whom were given a moral superiority contingent on the survival of the Geneva order.

5.2 Characters and portrayals

The progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative was carried by a set of **characters** who were defined by their relation to the international order centred around Geneva. Its protagonists – the League itself, the European small states, and Sweden in particular – were portrayed as upholding and advancing that order. Its antagonists were portrayed as threatening or seeking to undo it, and encompassed the aggressive powers, namely Italy and Japan, and nationalist forces running through each issue narrative. The narrative was also populated by additional characters: the European powers Britian and France (often linked to the Council as another character) who were portrayed as significant yet unreliable allies or leaders; the victims of the aggressors, Greece, China, and Ethiophia/Abyssinia who were told as law-abiding but powerless; and Türkiye who was portrayed as an obstructing actor. This section presents the portrayals of the narrative's main characters, and ends with how this contributed to the **self- and other-portrayals** of Swedish identity. Sweden was notably cast as a main protagonist in all issue narratives. It was given the traits of an honourable and law-abiding member of the emerging world community; the roles of an activist, peace-broker, and caretaker of the Geneva order; and as having the responsibility to participate in, advance, and protect the League. These self-portrayals were also reproduced relationally as Sweden was associated with the European small states and the League; differentiated without antagonism from the European great powers and the non-European small states; and set in opposition to the antagonists.

The League and its small state activists

The League in Geneva was not only a core spatial setting in the foreign policy narrative, it was also one of its most essential characters. It was portrayed as one of the protagonists in all issue narratives, and occupied a central place in the telling of them. However, it was simultaneously being cast as a hero and a victim. An exception to this portrayal emerged in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives, where the League *Council* became an obstructive force from the inside. The League itself still remained a protagonist that was, in contrast, the target of internally disruptive actors and external aggressors.

In the Corfu issue narrative, the League was portrayed as fulfilling its role as a "practical mediator of peace and law".[494] A narrator held that "world opinion has not failed to observe that the League in Geneva, this time without delay and without a trace of weakness, sought to prevent a political entanglement and a war."[495] It was also, in the narrative told in relation to Mosul, depicted as a a "peace broker" seeking to prevent military escalation.[496] With regards to Manchuria and Abyssinia, the issue narratives similarly emphasised the League as a character that represented the only obstacle to the aggressive acts of the narrative antagonists.[497] An editorial held that League's "intervention in the Japanese-Chinese conflict is […] the greatest and most striking demonstration so far for the value of existing guarantees."[498]

The League was thus portrayed as an institution with the authority and responsibility to assert the new legal order. At the same time, a tension emerged in portrayals of the League as a future ideal, and of the League as an institution that was vulnerable, or even a victim, in the present.[499] As the temporal setting had detailed, the weaknesses and failings of the League were often narrated as an expected and natural part of its progression from youth. This contributed

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[494] Editorial, 21 Sep. 1923. "Slutet gott." *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2f, translated.
[495] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen: Någonting har ändrats" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.
[496] Editorial, 1 Dec- 1925 "Rådsmötet" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3.
[497] The League was also notably often relationally portrayed in the characterisations of the antagonists in the issue narratives, and it was explicitly told as standing in opposition to their "outdated" nationalism (see below).
[498] Editorial, 22 Nov. 1931 "Nytt uppskov: Japan och Nationernas förbund" *Dagens nyheter*, p. 2, translated.
[499] The League was also portrayed as, presently, having limited means and ways to enforce the order it represented, and as sometimes not living up to the expectations placed upon it. These constructions became especially prevalent in the Manchuria and Abyssinia narratives where the League was understood as struggling to response to crises due to internal restraints.

to the portrayal of the League character since any criticisms were accompanied by the clarification that it was still the "best available option."[500]

Since the League was frequently portrayed as young and evolving it needed protection and nurturing. In the foreign policy narrative, small states – and especially European, Nordic and/or ex-neutral small states – were portrayed as the guardians and caretakers of the League as both an institutional character and a broader ideal. Since each issue narrative constructed Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia as critical tests to the legal and moral international order, the small states, and Sweden especially, were described as having a unique mission and duty to ensure its development and future existence.

In the Corfu and Mosul issue narratives, Sweden was portrayed as acting "honourably" when defending the League's principles, and narrated through its "dutiful acceptance" of significant roles in the League's work.[501] A narrator held that Sweden had "performed a historic task when he calmly and wisely asserted the position of the League."[502] In the Manchuria Abyssinia narratives, Sweden's portrayals became more intertwined with the construction of European small states as collective protectors of the League, where "Sweden's intervention" was often narrated as taking place "in parallel with that of certain other smaller European states."[503] A parliamentarian further stated:

> […] it is probably also the case that it is thanks to a very energetic behaviour of small states like Sweden that the League of Nations gradually got to the point where one must say today that it has not suffered a complete defeat against Japan.[504]

However, the association and portrayal of the small state collective was also accompanied by constructions of betrayals when another small state acted in dissonance with their given duties.[505] It is also necessary to point out that the small states were still positioned as materially inferior outside of the Geneva setting, and the narrative therefore contained portrayals of the small states,

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[500] Moreover, unfavourable portrayals were linked the narrative antagonists and obstructive characters, and the League was thereby unburdened from responsibility for its own narrated incapacities (see below).
[501] Article, 29 Sep. 1923. "Branting är centralfigur i Geneve" *Arbetet*, p. 1; Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen: Någonting har ändrats" *Arbetet*, p. 1.
[502] Wickman, J. 15 Sep. 1923 "Italien och folkförbundet" *Dagens Nyhter*, p. 5, translated.
[503] Sandler, R: SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 24, translated. See also: Vougt, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 71.
[504] Vougt, A. SC 1 Mar. 1933 No. 17, p. 22, translated.
[505] For example, in relation to depictions of the Norwegian Foreign Minister Birger Braaland, who was accused of expressing uncertainty because of a Norwegian interest in remaning favourable ahead ot the settlement over Greenland.

including Sweden, as having limited means beyond the moral plane. Even so, this was often narrated as making their engagements all the more admirable.

Aggressors and nationalist forces

In the particular Corfu, Manchuria, and Abyssinia narratives, the main antagonists were the states who were identified and narrated as initiating the conflicts, as using military violence against another member state, as acting in violation of the Covenant, and as attacking the order in Geneva. In relation to Corfu and Abyssinia, the aggressor was Italy, and for the Manchuria crisis, it was Japan. Both characters were portrayed as aggressive, authoritarian, and law-breaking great powers, and their actions were told as representing the old ways, often by invoking explicit parallels to the past, and as thus threatening the progression of the new order in Geneva.

Italy's actions towards Greece was narrated as a return to "the diplomacy of the fist", and its actions towards Ethiopia was later told as an attempt to "reawaken the imperial age".[506] Its appeal to national honour was portrayed as mirroring pre-war justifications for violence, and its invasion was presented as an attempt to rebuild a Roman empire. Portrayals of Mussolini were also used to construct Italy as an antagonis, and an editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* portrayed Italy as driven by "national passions" and "facist atmosphere".[507] Another editorial similarly held:

> Obeying the law that applies to every dictator, Mussolini has led Italy into the conquest of militarism and chauvinism. After more than a decade of preparations, for which the militarisation of the Italian people's soul from the individual's childhood was as important as the material armament, Mussolini has found that the hour of the bloody opening game has come – he directed his tanks and his bombing flights towards Abyssinia because this country offered the point where he expected the least resistance in his attempt to begin the realisation of his hot and diffuse dream of a neo-Roman empire in the Mediterranean.[508]

Japan was likewise narrated as a militaristic and "barbaric" great power that misused the right of self-defence as a disguise for its "expansionist ambitions"

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[506] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen: Någonting har ändrats" *Arbetet*, p. 1; Editorial, 10 Jan. 1936 "Internationell moral" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3.
[507] Wickman, J. 19 Jan. 1924 "Vi måste pröva våra muskler: Fascistisk utrikespolitik." *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 5, translated.
[508] Editorial, 10 Jan. 1936 "Internationell moral" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3, translated.

in East Asia. Japanese delegates were portrayed as "hostile" and "unreasonable" also within the Geneva setting, and it was told as attacking both China and the League. As was held by an editorial in the liberal press:

> Japan aims at the complete destruction of the League. [...] Such a policy has been pure imperialism [...] to attack with fire and blood another member of the League, to systematically, deliberately, and cold-bloodedly violate all its solemnly sworn international obligations [...] It is on these terms that Japan, with monumental cynicism, offers to go "hand in hand" with the League of Nations for the preservation of peace and justice.[509]

While these aggressors were emphasised in the respective issue narratives, the foreign policy narrative also constructed another antagonist: nationalism. While this character was not at the centre of the crisis moments, it was portrayed, throughout all issue narratives, as the main threat to the Geneva order. It encompassed any nationalist or authoritarian forces; whether portrayed as specific states, political leaders, or broader movements and ideologies (also in Sweden). This collective character was described as supporting national prestige and supremacy above a solidarity across national borders, and as championing domestic authoritarianism and the rule of the powerful above the democratisation of both domestic and international politics. This was, for example, narrated in an editorial as follows:

> But on the other hand there is an irrational factor, which is one of the two powers against which even the gods struggle in vain: nationalism. It concerns the name, the honour, the flag. It is not the least grotesque thing in the present situation that it is Mussolini's closest soul mates in other countries who will most heartily revile the League of Nations for its powerlessness. [510]

This construction of nationalism as a principal enemy was then linked to the portrayed aggressors as Italy and Mussolini was narrated as embodying fascist ideals, and both Japan and Italy were told to be imperialist states who sought a return to a past where powerful states were free to conquer and dominate. However, nationalism was also told as an antagonist character on its own, as the political forces that still permeated domestic and international affairs

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[509] Editorial, 27 Jan. 1933 "Den svarta handen: Japan och Nationernas förbund." *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3, translated. See also: Editorial, 18 Feb. 1933 "'Verbot': Barbariets högkonjunktur." *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2.

[510] Wickman, 8 Sep. 1923 "Internationell anarki. Folkförbundet och den grekiska-italienska konflikten." *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 4. See also: Undén, SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 20, translated.

where singled out as the most evident threat towards the progression of international society.[511] Another editorial stated:

> It is no coincidence that the states that disturb the peace of Europe, Italy and Germany, were formed in a sphere of literary-romantic atmospheres: the young Italians, who now sit across the Mediterranean, are excited by Romulus and Caesar; I do not write one thing to the debt account of fascism, any more than I write to the debt account of Nazism, that the Germans are excited by Charlemagne or Barbarossa. It is perhaps on the contrary that both fascism and Nazism have tried to modernise ways of thinking; but they have not succeeded, they have succumbed to the temptation to lift the dangerous cultural heritage; they have only added that temperature of brutality, that violent reaction against the humane, which characterises nationalism.[512]

The antagonists were thus portrayed as the anti-thesis to what Geneva signified and what the narrative protagonists were portrayed as guarding. Legal order, democratic ideals, world community, and so on, gained their meaning vis-à-vis these characters' law-breaking actions, authoritarianism, and nationalism. The Geneva order required defending and nurturing precisely because these enemies were arranged against it.

Unreliable powers and vulnerable victims

In addition to key protagonists and antagonists, the foreign policy narrative encompassed several reoccurring characters. Two actors who were portrayed across the issue narratives were Britain/England and France. These characters, and especially Britain, emerged as significant allies. Such portrayals of the European great powers emphasised their participation in the League's efforts. An editorial suggested that the "two leading powers of the League" had "given a firm and unreserved assurance" that they were prepared to assume their share of responsibility for the enforcement of the international legal order."[513] These characters were portrayed as acting with authority and leadership in Geneva, and as having a particular responsibility in ensuring that the international organisation fulfilled its duties. Britain and France were therefore also associated with Sweden, and especially so when their representatives in Geneva worked together towards common goals.

However, Britain and France were also portrayed as being obstructive, and as distinct great power-characters that prioritised their own self-interest over

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[511] This included the portrayal of domestic characters, most often the conservative press, which was told as hampering both Sweden and Geneva from developing towards "modern ideals".
[512] Editorial, 10 Sep. 1935 "Från gräns till gräns" *Arbetet* p. 10, translated.
[513] Editorial, 14 Sep. 1935 "Ett historiskt ögonblock" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3, translated.

the new order.[514] When the League was constructed as weak or limited, responsibility for its failings was commonly placed on Britain and France through their portrayed passiveness or appeasement. This was, for example, constructed in the Corfu issue narrative. An editorial held that "there is a danger that France continues to act as Italy's advocate to prevent the League of Nations from issuing a disapproving statement."[515] France, as well as Britain, were thus also characters that Sweden was set against. A press statement from the liberal party read that "the people and government of Sweden had observed with the deepest concern the indifference and incapacity […] which had characterised the Council's handling."[516] What it points to its how the Council, in its association to the two powers, also emerged as an unreliable or negligent character, especially with regards to Manchuria and Abyssinia.[517] At the same time, these issue narratives – albeit constructing Britain, France, and the Council as characters that slowed down the League's work – also encompassed portrayals of them as being under pressure and as bearing a greater burden.

In the Mosul narrative, neither Britain (Iraq was mostly silent in the narrative) nor Türkiye had been portrayed as law-breaking aggressors. Both were told as being, to some extent, law-abiding, and, to some extent, obstructing. Britain was portrayed as making the League process difficult by refusing to accept unfavourable propositions, and portrayals of Türkiye often emphasised its reluctance to allow the Council to handle and determine the outcome of the dispute. Moreover, the Mosul crisis was narrated as representing the potential risk of war, and, in this regard, Türkiye, not Britain, was portrayed as threatening to turn to the use of military force. As an editorial held:

> That England would, in her indignation at disappointed expectations, refuse to accept the Council's decision must be considered completely out of the question. [...] It is of course different with Türkiye. The Angora government is on the spot and has, according to credible information, gathered significant numbers of troops on the border with the Mosul area. […] If we are to believe those who know Orientalist conditions, it is not impossible that the Turkish stubbornness is solely intended to force the most satisfactory solution possible for Türkiye.[518]

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[514] France was, for example, told as appeasing Italy due to its own occupation in the German Ruhr during the Corfu crisis, Britain and France were narrated as effectively halting the work of the Council in response to Japan's invasion, and the two European great powers was narrated as betraying of their obligations during Abyssinia (albeit not after the sanction decision).
[515] Editorial, 11 Sep. 1923 "Den politiska ambulansen" *Dagens Nyheter,* p. 3, translated.
[516] Press release, 1932 "Efter Exc. Ramels stora tal" *Sweden's Freeminded Press Association* No. 16, RA, Frisinnade landsföreningen B3: Cirkulär (pressmeddelanden), translated.
[517] The Conference of Ambassadors was portrayed in a similar way in the Corfu narrative.
[518] Editorial, 1 Dec. 1925 "Rådsmötet" *Dagens Nyheter* p. 3, translated.

Finally, the issue narratives also contained portrayals of victims. Greece was portrayed through its innocence, and associated to Sweden as a fellow European small state. It was narrated as dignified for having submitted to, and complied with, the League's and the Conference's processes. Ethiopia was portrayed as another victim. It was constructed as weak in the face of Italian aggression, but it was also portrayed as the heroic frontier of the League's battle against fascism. Abyssinia was thus narrated as having been "attacked by a great power, which is equipped with all the resources of modern military technology, it is fighting heroically for its independence and freedom."[519]

At the same time, these portrayals were accompanied by references to Ethiopia as a "primitive culture" or an "undeveloped existence". Even if the narrative refused Italy's civilising claims, it did not refute distinctions of Ethiopia as "uncivilised". This was described in an editorial which held:

> There may be something in the Italian newspapers' talk of Abyssinia as a black barbarian land, inhabited not by a "natural people" in the more romantic sense, but by an extremely backward, misguided population, who, under more than oriental oppression, drag out a dirty and miserable existence. It could be said that from our European or general humanitarian view it may be desirable that this matter be prolonged, and that the present empire has so far shown rather little ability to bring about a change. [...] But unfortunately it is not such constructive pictures of the future that come to mind when one considers the Italian advance as it has so far turned out. What one sees is how solemn agreements are neglected and circumvented, how the instrument of peace in which Europe, however weak it may be, has to place its trust, is dismissed with the boot.[520]

All constructed victims, including China, were however, for the most part, silent in each issue narrative.[521] They were commonly narrated as being on the receiving end of both the antagonists' aggressions and the protagonists' assistance. They were also constructed as warnings: Sweden was associated with them as fellow small states, and risked a similar fate if the new order could not be preserved (see emplotment). The non-European victims were still differentiated because where Sweden and the European small states were given agency as protagonists in Geneva, these victimised characters were not narrated as significant for moving the story forward.

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[519] Editorial, 18 Apr. 1936 "Fredsförhandlingarna" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2, translated.
[520] Editorial 15 Jul. 1935 "Det fega våldet" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2, translated.
[521] China was rarely portrayed beyond being an attacked party, with the exception of narrations of China lawfully submitting the dispute to the League. T

Portraying Sweden

Sweden was placed among the protagonists in the progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative, and it, first of all, portrayed Sweden with a set of explicit **traits**. Across the issue narratives, Sweden was told as "honourable", "courageous" and as acting from moral principle rather than self-interest. This was often condensed in the figures representing Sweden in Geneva as their narrated courage and morality also marked the Swedish self. In the following quote, Branting is portrayed in this way, thereby associating Sweden itself to the portrayal of the nation's representative in Geneva:

> For there is unanimity in world opinion that Hjalmar Branting – marked by wisdom, courage, firmness of purpose, and a deeply moral outlook – was not only the League of Nations' greatest asset during the critical days in Geneva, but also contributed in a decisive way to strengthening the League's moral prestige, and thereby its capacity to be of service in averting war.[522]

Sweden was likewise portrayed as a model citizen of the emerging world community, and narrated as a state accepting its obligations under the Covenant and as being "brave " for upholding the Geneva order even when doing to brought no direct advantage. To "stand outside all of it, […] is not Swedish nor brave. It is rather un-Swedish and cowardly to act in such a way."[523]

These traits were also accompanied by a set of **roles**. Sweden was often portrayed as an active participant and as a state that dutifully accepted significant tasks in Geneva. Through these roles Sweden was cast as a caretaker of the League, and told as a guardian or an activist charged with safeguarding its principles and ideals. In the 1930s, this guardianship was increasingly told collectively, with Sweden often acting alongside the other European or Nordic small states. Yet, the role itself remained constant. As a parliamentarian held:

> It is therefore necessary to dare something for peace, and I believe that our beautiful peace traditions oblige us to do so. […] Sweden has behaved in such a way that I believe that we can without any pretension describe ourselves as a pioneer of peace in the world – but such an honour obliges. I want the people of Gustav II Adolf to now show that they are prepared to dare something for the great idea of humanity, which is world peace.[524]

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[522] Engberg, A. 19 Sep. 1923 "I hr Lindmans skola" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.
[523] Hallén, H. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 63, translated. See also: Undén, FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 80.
[524] Hellberg, H. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 40, translated.

The foreign policy narrative correspondingly produced a set of **responsibilities**. Sweden was portrayed as having a duty to participate; it was an active rather than passive responsibility that followed from its membership in the Geneva order as well as from the moral standing it was attributed therein.[525] Sweden was also frequently portrayed as fulfilling these duties by participating in the League's work. A parliamentarian asserted during the Abyssinia crisis moment that Sweden had "done its duty" and "demonstrated the same respect for the principles of the League Covenant that were guiding principles in the Manchurian Crisis."[526] At the same time, the narrative differed in how it allocated responsibility in times of failure. Since Sweden was also portrayed as materially weak, as possessing means that lay predominantly on the moral plane, it was not held responsible for the League's own limitations. Those were placed upon the antagonists as well as the leading European powers.

These traits, roles, and responsibilities were also strengthened by the other-portrayals. At one end, Sweden was repeatedly linked to European and Nordic small states, as well as to the League itself. These actors were collectively cast as the protectors of the legal order in Geneva, and they shared a certain moral authority and distinctiveness in their support of democratic principles, of a solidarity across national border, and of peace ideals more broadly. Sweden was, in contrast, held a part from failing instead attributed to Europe's larger powers. While Britain and France were not enemies, Sweden was distinguished from them by acting from duty and principle. The non-European small states, in particular the narrated victims China and Ethiopia, were associated to Sweden as fellow small states that were exposed to similar dangers should the Geneva order be cast to oblivion. At the other end, the aggressors, Italy and Japan, as well as the nationalist forces that threatened the new order, supplied everything Sweden was portrayed *not* to be. To be aggressive, militaristic, imperialist, law-breaking, authoritarian, nationalistic, and so on, was to be *un*-Swedish. The self-portrayals of Sweden as a peace-loving, law-abiding, democratic, and brave nation thus developed in tandem with the narration of these antagonistic others, whether individual leaders, states, or larger movement. The narrative antagonists subsequently did more than threaten the new order that Sweden was charged with defending in Geneva; they ultimately also threatened everything that Swedish identity was narrated to be.

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[525] Engagement was told not as a departure from Swedish interests, but as an obligation that was both morally right and necessary from Sweden's own perspective (see programme).
[526] Sandler, R. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 6, translated.

5.3 Emplotments and programmes

This section turns to the **emplotment** of the progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative. Across the issue narratives, the past was constructed around 1914, and told in tandem with sub-pasts that constituted the crisis moments as legal-procedural issues. The present was constructed through a sequence of procedures and decision-making moments in Geneva. The work of the League was foregrounded while the local events of each crisis were kept in the background. Each present was also told as concluding, however haltingly, as a victory for the Geneva order. This was often narrated as due to the intervention from Sweden and the European small states. The future was constructed as two possibilities: the continued progression of international order or its relapse into the old disorder. What path the future would take hinged on actions taken in the present, but its construction was also accompanied by a longer trajectory which promised progression through reform regardless of setbacks.

This section further explores the narrative's construction of past, present, and future events, before illustrating how the emplotment as a whole was connected to a **programme** for Swedish identity. The selection and ordering of past(s), present(s), and future(s) connected Sweden to a specific set of reasons, objectives, and actions that ultimately worked to narrate why Sweden should engage in Geneva, what that engagement was meant to achieve, and how it was to participate. In short, because the new order secured and gave a voice to the small states, but could not fully sustain and speak for itself (reasons), Sweden was to safeguard and strenghten that order, including smaller state's place within it (objectives), by participating, speaking out, and perservering alongside its European small state allies in Geneva (actions).

A disordered past

There was a past of disorder running through all issue narratives. This past was connected to 1914 and the outbreak of the world war, and included descriptions of what the relations between nations before the creation of the League had looked like, in turn explaining how the war had been made possible. It was narrated as an order that had allowed powerful states to conquer territory and dominate through the use of military force, and that had lacked an institution aimed at ensuring peace or an instrument for guaranteeing justice. It was also a past that had been absent of democratic ideals challenging the rule of the few and mighty. This past was almost always drawn upon to illustrate how the present was different from it. Consider the following words:

> […] if the League of Nations had existed in 1914, the catastrophe would have been avoided. […] The fundamental change between then and now lies, of course, in the fact that there now exists a body, the Council of the League of Nations, which legally intervenes and protects a state that is being violated.[527]

> Before the world war, this whole campaign down in Abyssinia would have been regarded as an episode – a mere tourist enterprise or a feat of sport. Now it has stirred all peoples. […] One must not ignore the importance of having an instrument of negotiation. If such an instrument had existed in August 1914, it is not impossible that the world war would never have occurred. [528]

Here 1914 was a past that the present was distinguished from as the narrative constructed a definitive break from it via the creation of the League. A past leading up to the world war was also often used, in all issue narratives, as a warning for what a world without the League entailed.[529]

Second, the issue narratives also emphasised certain historical events of the antagonists. The Corfu, Manchuria, and Abyssinia issue narratives especially constructed a past linking the antagonists to the re-emergence or lingering of old and outdated sentiments and ways (e.g. nationalism or the use of military force). These histories also illustrated that a return to the past would mean war and violence, including the reappearance of an old order where smaller states would find themselves at the mercy of the powerful once again. In the Corfu and Abyssinia narratives, the spread of fascism in Italy, the fascist coup, and the rise of Mussolini's dictatorship was connected to its present aggressions towards Greece and Ethiopia respectively. An editorial in *Arbetet* emphasised how a past fascist coup, and a past breakthrough of democracy, linked together to construct the former as an antagonistic other in the Corfu crisis moment:

> The fascist coup became a bonfire for all those who, after the breakthrough of democracy in the old autocratic states and their spiritual successors, had begun to feel homelessness and despair about the future of their cause. […] If a bold fascist coup was feasible against Italian democracy, why should it not be applied with prospects of success in an international situation?[530]

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[527] Editorial, 16 Nov. 1931 "Rådsmötet i Paris" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3, translated.
[528] Åkerberg, FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 30, translated.
[529] As has been discussed under temporal setting, the Corfu and Mosul issue narratives were told against the backdrop of a closer undesirable past that had recently been left behind in favour of a present that was fundamentally different, whereas the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives to a greater extent stressed a threatening moment in the present, including a more prominent danger of a collapse back into the undesirable past. However, these narratives correspondingly, and more so than the ones told in the previous decade, emphasised an alternative, immediate past in which a desirable present had been gradually solidified in Geneva.
[530] Engberg, 3 Sep. 1923 "Mussoloni och hans apor" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.

In the Manchuria issue narrative, Japan's past offenses and "similar attempts" towards China. The the arrival of nationalist sentiments in Japanwere likewise linked to its present advancements and use of military force in northern China.[531] The construction of a *continuation* of both anti-democratic sentiments and expansionist agendas thus became illustrative of both the stickiness of the disordered past and the dangers that a complete return to it signified.

Third, the construction of a past in relation to the particular crises also identified these antagonists as the belligerent party and the unlawful aggressor. In other words, their pasts became relevant in relation to Geneva in the sense that they were simultaneously legal-procedural markers. These pasts were told in a way that constructed each issue as decision-making moments in the context of the League. Past events – whether previous treaties, border settlements, or population movements – were given substance in the narratives as a relevant part of a present transpiring in Geneva. This was narrated in the Mosul issue narrative which emphasised previous negotiations in Lausanne as well as the Treaty of Sevres.[532] It was likewise narrated in relation to the Manchuria crisis moment with descriptions of, for example, the Washington Conference.[533]Former agreements or previous conferences then allowed for a continuation of legal language into the present. This contributed to the construction of the crisis moments as more than distant conflicts, but as legal histories that all eventually led to the League.[534]

Finally, all issue narratives emphasised an immediate past detailing the emergence and development of the Geneva order. Especially the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives constructed the past decade as a time period that had strengthened and solidified the League as an ideal, institution, and instrument for peace. Sweden's past was often explicitly linked to this progression, which was described in the following way in a parliamentary speech:

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[531] Editorial, 16 Nov. 1931 "Rådsmötet i Paris" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 3, translated.
[532] Editorial, 20 Oct. 1924 "Mosul" Dagens Nyheter, p. 3, translated.
[533] Undén, Ö. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 19, translated.
[534] Here the Mosul crisis was about picking up unfinished business from Lausanne where the past treaty became the causal ground for what followed in the present. The Manchuria crsis was, in turn, the resumption of a history of Japanese demands in the region. In casting the present as continuous with a juridical past, the particular narratives placed them within a legal framework in which they appeared as questions of treaty negotiations and obligations.

> From the very beginning of the existence of the League of Nations, Sweden has repeatedly submitted proposals intended to expand the arbitration procedure and the conciliation procedure, and we have, among other things, submitted proposals in that direction in connection to the consideration of the various guarantee agreements.[535]

Sweden's loyal past to the League was thus narrated as having established a Swedish tradition within the organisation. Sweden was also given a past dating further back than the creation of the League, and was narrated as having a long practise of doing humanitarian and peace work.

The presents as legal procedure

First, the issue narratives established an initial event, or a set of initial events, that made the crises relevant to the League. For Mosul, the crisis began when the matter was referred to the Council and Sweden appointed its *rapporteur*. For Corfu and Manchuria, the start was the first unlawful act by the narrative antagonists.[536] For Abyssinia, it was rather the *threat* of a break against the Covenant that became the beginning of a specific crisis.[537] While these starting-point thus referred to events external to the core spatial setting, the following events were constructed through the tension between continued disorder there and ongoing attempts to sustain order in Geneva.

Italy's aggression towards Greece was initially told by descriptions of the violence taking place on Corfu. However, as is illustrated by the following description, it's hostility towards the League was more so emphasised through narrations of Italy's challenge towards Geneva specifically:

> […] the Italian fleet bombards Corfu and the Italian government simultaneously takes action against Geneva [...] Three weeks after the beginning of the bloody self-pledge procedure in Corfu, Mussolini thus finds himself obliged to gratefully acknowledge the internationalisation of the "private conflict" […].[538]

A similar duality was narrated in the Mosul issue narrative. While there was a risk of confrontation on site, the present was sustained around narrations of difficulties in reaching a compromise in Geneva. In the Manchuria issue nar-

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[535] Undén, Ö. FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 77, translated.
[536] While the murder of the Italian general was acknowledged, it was Italy's ultimatum and bombardment of the Greek island that was narrated as setting off the crisis. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria similarly constituted the beginning, as opposed to the railway explosion.
[537] Starting with the so-called Wal-Wal incident and the following mobilisation of Italian troops.
[538] Wickman, 15 Sep. 1923 "Italien och folkförbundet" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 5, translated.

rative, Japan's aggression towards China was partly constructed via descriptions of its military advancements, but its actions within the context of the League was highlighted.[539] Moreover, Sweden was often direcly placed in this context. As an editorial in *Arbetet* held:

> [Undén] characterised the situation in Manchuria as a disguised war. The League of Nations offered means for the peaceful settlement of disputes and it was the duty of each member of the League to use these. [...] the Assembly had already invoked Article 10 of Covenant in March and thus stated that the operations in Manchuria had infringed on the integrity of a member of the League.[540]

Italy's threat towards Abyssinia was likewise accentuated through depictions of its mobilisation and eventual use of military force, but so was the dominant construction of its attack on the Covenant.[541] By constructing each crisis moment as starting from its relevance for the League, the narrative emplotments thus contributed to making Geneva the core spatial settings for all of them. This also followed in the selection of key events, making the crisis moments matters of legal procedure in the context of the League. The main present events in relation to Corfu was the Council sessions, and the parallel meetings of the Conference. This was, for exampled, described through Branting's actions in an editorial:

> Mr. Branting has made the correct remark in an interview that the Council's mediation or statement in a conflict does not necessarily require direct consideration by the Council. It can entrust the investigation to some appropriate body, for example the Conference of Ambassadors. Equally apt is the Swedish Council member's regret that the Conference, due to France's consideration for Italy, has not received this expressed mandate [...] Italy, for all its dispute about the competence of the League Council, cannot deny that the Council exercises a decisive real influence on the settlement of the conflict.[542]

For Mosul, the present was likewise understood as a major task being placed on the shoulders of the League – and on Sweden. The present was dominated by a recurring scene of Council sessions and the work of its *rapporteur* and committees. As an editorial stated:

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[539] Often told as Japan evading judgement and providing false reassurances albeit never ceasing to act in disregard of the provisions of the Covenant.
[540] Editorial, 7 Dec. 1932 "Undén sjunger ut vid NF-möte" *Arbetet*, p. 10, translated.
[541] Description of violence on site especially followed the later bombing of the Swedish Red Cross ambulance.
[542] Editorial, 9 Sep. 1923 "Kompromissen" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2, translated.

> First of all, the Council proceeded with its own investigation of the conditions on the ground and put forward a commission, the members of which were all from the small states of Europe (with a Swedish diplomat as chairman). On the basis of this report, the thoroughness and impartiality of which was not disputed by any party, the Council first sought to reconcile the parties, without exercising its right to immediately adjudicate the dispute. [...] At the request of the rapporteur, the Swedish member of the Council, the Council unanimously decided, with the exception of Türkiye's vote, to adhere to the view expressed by the Court, without therefore abandoning its attempts to reconcile the partners. [...] Thus this long-standing and malignant dispute was brought to an end.[543]

The Corfu and Mosul crises subsequently became organised around the procedures of the League. However, the present became more complicated in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives. For the former, a war was told as being allowed to proceed and escalate under passivity from the European powers in the Council. Still, the present remained narrated predominantly through legal procedure in Geneva, whereas Japanese advancements in northern China occurred mainly in the background. The latter narrative stressed the League processes, but the present was narrated as being dragged out by "the delaying tactics that had been followed during the Council's handling of the matter."[544]

In addition to the selection of events pertaining to what took place in the Council, the Assembly, and other League bodies, the issue narratives also emphasised a moral dimension as each crisis was proving that disputes could be settled by adjudication rather than force. Although the matter of Corfu was referred to the Conference, the issue narrative constructed the episode as a win for the League as it had played a major role in ensuring that the crisis did not escalate, and narrated it as the League functioning as a powerhouse for peace:

> The Council and the League Assembly have thus undoubtedly functioned as a powerhouse for the peace policy that was successful at the Conference of Ambassadors thanks to the direct contact with Geneva. It was therefore with full right that Lord Robert Cecil referred to this when he, before the League of Nations, valued his participation in the resolution of the conflict according to the rule that all is well that ends well.[545]

As similar success story was narrated for the Mosul case. Although there were some narrations of the "mills of the League grinding slowly", it was still narrated as eventually showing effectiveness responding to Japan's aggressions. Here a parliamentarian noted:

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[543] Editorial, 24 Sep. 1926 "Praktisk fredspolitik" Dagens Nyheter, p. 3, translated.
[544] Sandler, R. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 24, translated.
[545] Editorial, 21 Sep. 1923 "Slutet gott." *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 2f, translated.

> From the side of the League, after the outbreak of the war, there came a firm and measured assertion of the provisions of the Covenant. For my part, I would like to maintain that this is a fact which should be received by our country, as well as by other smaller countries, not only with the statement that there was no other option than to participate in securing collective security, but also with an expression of satisfaction that at last the League of Nations, at the eleventh hour, has shown the cohesion and effectiveness needed to carry out this serious attempt to uphold the principles of the Covenant.[546]

The sanctions that followed Italy's invasion of Abyssinia were, in turn, told as a great triumph for the ideals and instruments of the League. This was told as a great historical moment, and another victory for the Geneva order having eventually arrived. Yet, for the latter issue narrative, a conclusion was not met with the sanctions. After the League decision, the present became constructed as a novel "experiment" for the Geneva order. This experimental framing was described as the "next step" in its evolution by a parliamentarian:

> one must say that what has been accomplished in the autumn of 1935 constitutes a breakthrough in world history. […]. It is a large-scale experiment that is now underway. The question at stake here is whether it is possible and conceivable to restrain a state – indeed, a great power – from committing an act of aggression against another state, using solely the peaceful world community's own economic means of power.[547]

Later narrations did not, however, construct the decision on sanctions as a complete victory because the military advancements had not been stopped.[548] Tellings of a victorious League had likewise followed the Manchuria crisis, but later reconstructions (e.g. in references to it in the Abyssinia case) regarded it more as warning of what passiveness from the League could lead to.

These presents were nonetheless told as representing significant shifts where the world community had come together in a united reproach of the antagonists' unlawful aggressions. Consequently, while both issue narratives presented a present illuminating remaining weaknesses in the Geneva order (e.g. in the narrations of ongoing delays or persisting internal struggles), they were still told as steps that were representative of its gradual progression. A speech in the *Riksdag* acknowledge that it had been:

> an extremely long, time-consuming, painful and laborous procedure before the China-Japan affair reached the result that has now been achieved, but it must still be said that

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[546] Sandler, SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 21, translated.
[547] Vougt, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 68, translated.
[548] In this present, Sweden was made an associated victim following the Swedish Red Cross ambulance incident, and the so-called Hoare-Laval plan became another key event highlighting how the order in Geneva was complicated by the appeasement between great powers.

> the manifestation of the unity of the states towards the aggressor Japan, which has been achieved after this year of difficult negotiations […] if not to protect the peace, then in any case to achieve a unified front of the other states towards the aggressor and to awaken a general opinion that not even a great power is able to overcome in the long run.[549]

Finally, all the issue narratives also emphasised Sweden's and the European small states' significant relevance in the present by underscoring events in which their representatives acted in Geneva. The Corfu crisis was narrated mostly through the acts of Branting in the Council, and the Mosul crisis was told through Sweden's efforts in bringing about a solution. The Manchuria and Abyssinia narratives were, however, made complicated. Sweden was no longer represented in the Council, and was thereby distanced from its procedure. Sweden was still narrated as active in the Assembly together with other European small states who worked together to ensure that the League responded despite obstructions in the Council. In other words, Sweden and its allies became critical for the telling of the League's hard-won victories.

Progression or regression

The foreign policy narrative's temporal setting emphasised the development of a new order, yet that setting was also contrasted with the threat of regression and a future relapsing back into the old order as it had been before the creation of the League. This tension ran through all issue narratives, and the future progression became hinged on the outcome of the crisis moments. While these futures did not encompass explicit events, the narrative's drew upon past and present events to construct two possible paths. First, there was the connection between the present and a more immediate future that would come to determine how (well) the League could respond to its critical tests.

For Corfu, this immediate future was told with anxity as the outcome of the crisis risked both enabling fascist aggression and casting aside the League's principles for the benefit of great power interests. For Mosul, the outcome was projected as setting a precedent that would determine the future role of the League. For Manchuria, the immediate future was narrated as the potential collapse of the Geneva order if Japan's crimes against the Covenant were not adjudicated. A similar way of narration encompassed Abyssinia, where a potential future where the League would fail and be cast aside was told. After

[549] Vougt, A. SC 1 Mar. 1933 No. 17, p. 21, translated.

the decision on sanctions, the instant future would also determine the practical worth of economic sanctions.

This construction of a more immediate future thus clarified what was at stake in each issue narrative, namely whether the new order could pass its tests or not. Here the issue narratives often circled back to the cautionary tales of the past, and used retrospection to illustrate what one of two potential futures – success or failure – really meant: "One should clearly understand how much is truly at stake in what is now happening, by recalling what the situation was before the outbreak of the [world] war."[550] While the past was constructed as disordered and the present as ordered, the future was thus told as having the potential of becoming either one, and it all depended on actions taken in the present.

For Corfu and Mosul, what was at stake was the principles of the League, the usefulness of the methods it had at its disposal, and the credibility of the organisation as such. For Manchuria and Abyssinia, what was at stake was far direr in the sense that they were not only critical tests of the new order's standing and practicality, but also moments that risked completely eradicating what had been developed in the past decade. These issue narratives subsequently made the crises *existential* for the Geneva order, and this was narrated in the respective issue narratives as a risk that "the entire international legal order would be torn apart."[551] An this was also expressed by a Swedish delegate in the Assembly:

> If the League does not succeed, in present circumstances, in establishing peace based upon justice, the proper and loyal application of its own constitution, there is a danger of the more or less complete collapse of those ramparts which we have built up together with so much patience and zeal in order to prevent force from supplanting justice.[552]

Second, however, all issue narratives additionally constructed a more long-term future. Both Corfu and Mosul were narrated as having set an important precedent for what the League could develop into. The future was told as one where the new order was further advanced based on these initial successes. Following the Mosul crisis, a public speech described the moment as having been a part of the gradual strengthening of the League:

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[550] Sandler, R. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 21f, translated
[551] Westman, K.G. FC 26 May 1926 No. 36, p. 24, translated.
[552] Löfgren, E. 5 March 1932. "Records of the Special Session of the Assembly, Volume I" LONA, OJ SS No. 101, p. 49.

> Has the League of Nation's met all expectations placed upon it by its friends? Yes and no. We have experienced several disappointments, but the essential is the direction of development. The League is, in the present moment, a more solid legal-political organisation and a stronger psychological reality than during the first years of its history.[553]

Although disappointments in the present were constructed, the issue narratives still held that important milestones had been reached, and the future promised was therefore one of sustained progression. Even if the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives stressed the threat of regression following let-downs, they also constructed a long-term future centred on its continued development:

> This failure […] can neither be concealed nor embellished, but on the other hand it would be unrealistic and pointless to explain that we are already in such a situation where everything is over and nothing remains but to throw the alliance axe into Lake Geneva [...] It has been said by a historian of the Romans that during the time of the republic and liberal civic politics – well to distinguish them from their modern descendants – they placed the fulfilment of treaties and commitments higher than an immediate advantage and that this became a belt of strength for their development. That belt of strength is also the essential thing for the international republic called the League of Nations. We hope and believe that it will last. But if it were to break, and the League also break apart, one thing is certain in any case – it must be rebuilt in some more reassuring form.[554]

As the quote illustrate, even when the League was narrated as having failed in the present, the longer trajectory remained one where the Geneva order prevailed through its own reformation, or, at the very least, was reinvented anew. By retaining a longer horizon of progression even when the immediate future was told as uncertain or as deteriorating, the narrative could absorb disappointments without abandoning this course.

Connecting Sweden

The emplotment of the progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative laid the ground for an explicit Swedish programme. First of all, it connected Sweden to a set of **reasons** that answered why it should involve itself in the affairs of the League. Since the past had been narrated as a disorder in which the materially powerful were free to use military force, it followed that small states were vulnerable in the old order. A relapse into that past was therefore a threat

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[553] Undén, Ö. in 19 Oct. 1925 "Undén i Göteborg: Skarp vidräkning med Genevekritiken" *Dagens Nyheter*, p. 4, translated.
[554] Pauli, I. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 42f, translated. See also: Undén, Ö. 25 Jan. 1933 "Stadsrådet Undén om konflikten Japan-Kina" *Östergötlands Folkblad*, in KB [Royal Library], Undén's samling 8C Nationernas förbund 1928-42.

to the security and survival for states like Sweden. The new order was contrarily narrated as having transformed the position of small states. It did not merely provide them with greater stability, but also with a moral influence. This was reproduced by two parliamentarians which held:

> […] I must say that the strongest impression I received there was the impression that in the League of Nations, with all its shortcomings, the small powers have an opportunity to assert their will, an opportunity that they would lack if there were no equivalent to this League of Nations.[555]

> […] in the conviction that they will be supported almost unanimously by all the small states of Europe. These states have a vital interest in ensuring that a breach of the provisions of the Covenant should not be allowed to pass without protest and without energetic steps being taken.[556]

Yet, this favourable position was narrated as contingent on the survival of the new order. Since the portrayals of the characters showed that Europe's leading powers could not always be trusted to fulfil their responsibilities, the reason for Swedish engagements was clarified. The Geneva order was what made the small states, including Sweden, both secure and influential, but said order could not fully secure itself, and so its survival was placed upon the very states that depended on it the most.

However, to protect the League was also told as the moral thing to do in and of itself. A greater cause was thus narrated as another reason. As the section on the portrayal of Sweden illustrated, to be moral, to act honourably and bravely, was to *be* Swedish. The narrative constructed these two main reasons as inseparable across the crisis moments. Active engagement was thereby never told as sacrificing Swedish interests to principle, but as a point where a constructed national interest (i.e. the protection and influence that the new order provided) and international ideals (i.e. safeguarding morality and legality in international life) coincided. Another parliamentarian said:

> Especially in the Japanese-Chinese conflict, has Sweden had the opportunity to play an honourable role as a promoter and protector of resistance to the policy of violence. Sweden's withdrawal from the League of Nations would thus mean a weakening of the forces within the League, and thus within the entire world community, that can truly lead humanity towards a state of happiness […].[557]

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[555] Vougt, A. SC 1 Mar. 1933 No. 17, p. 22, translated.
[556] Branting, H. 1 Sep. 1923, "Twenty-Sixth Session of the Council" LONA OJ 4th Year No. 11, p. 1280f.
[557] Åkerberg, H. FC 22 Feb. 1933 No. 14, p. 53, translated.

These reasons then connected to a set of **objectives** that specified what Swedish engagement was to achieve. The first objective was to protect and safeguard the Geneva order against the narrative antagonists. Since each crisis moment had been constructed as testing or threatening its survival, the objective was narrated, not primarily as the resolution of a distant dispute, but as the preservation of the Geneva order. The second objective was reformist, namely to work for, care for, and strengthen that order, and to help it mature into a universal peace organisation.[558] This objective was described in a parliamentary speech:

> It cannot be allowed to remain the private affair of a few gentlemen, but must become the business of the whole people. And I believe that we are already in the process of conquering the League in this way and making it the guarantee of peace we have never ceased to dream of it actually becoming. […] in the event that we ourselves do not betray our predecessors, in the event that we ourselves preserve our love of peace, the coming time will not have any more risky moments for us than the 110 years during which we have sat in peace and quiet.[559]

A third objective thus emerged in advancing the specific standing and influence of the small states within Geneva. The positioning of Sweden within this category notably endowed it with moral power, but the emplotment also clarified that they remained limited beyond the moral plane. The great powers still dominated the Council, and to reform the League by making it truly universal became as a secondary objective. However, the recently gained standing of Sweden and the European small states existed only so long as the Geneva order that recognised it survived, making this the primary aim.

Finally, the issue narratives connected the critical tests to a set of **actions** for Sweden to take in the present or to pursue in the future. Since the crisis moments were emplotted around the procedures of the League, the prescribed actions were often procedural. The first was active participation: Sweden was to partake in the work in Geneva alongside its likeminded friends and allies.[560] For small nations to unite and leave neutrality behind was described as a specific duty by a parliamentarian:

> For, in a situation where both the objective of justice – as far as it can now be determined – and the interests of a powerful great power collide, we small nations are faced with a

[558] The temporal setting of a gradual progression made this a distinct objective as the order was to be advanced through the patient consolidation of its norms and instruments.
[559] Olsson, O. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 29, translated.
[560] Sweden was, for example, to accept any role it was tasked with, and to remain active through its Council seat as well as in the Assembly or during committee meetings.

> clear duty: to unite, and not to remain in a sterile neutrality regarding the protection of international law.[561]

The second action was to speak out: to voice support for the Covenant and to criticise aggressors and obstructers. Since Sweden's power had been located on a moral plane, speech was told as an action through which it could, without any use of material force, shape world opinion. A third action was perseverance and reform. This meant that Sweden was to improve the League even when it faced obstacles. Sweden was to stand against calls to dissolve an admittedly imperfect organisation.[562] Difficulties, this narrative held, instead provided all the more cause for Sweden to remain active, in cooperation with likeminded states, in seeking the betterment of the Geneva order:

> It finds the situation and the interests of its own country to call for active participation, in close contact with other states with a similar attitude, in the forthcoming investigation of the meaning of this crisis and the possibilities for overcoming it. In such circumstances, it does not consider any step to detach our country from international cooperation, now faced with a test, the successful outcome of which must be recognised as being for the common benefit of all peoples.[563]

The emplotments in all issue narratives thus connected Sweden to a specific programme. Since the new order protected and gave a voice to the vulnerable small state yet could not secure itself (reasons), Sweden was to safeguard and strengthen that order, including smaller state's place within it (objectives), by participating, speaking out, and persevering alongside its allies in Geneva (actions). By connecting Sweden's engagement to the high stakes that the emplotment had set out, the narrative made a particular foreign policy and a specific course of action appear not only as an option, but as required of Sweden.

5.4 A progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative

This chapter has traced the progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative as it was (re)produced across the four crisis moments. The narrative analysis illustrated how the spatial and temporal settings of the narrative positioned Sweden

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[561] Hallén, H. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 62, translated.
[562] This action notably became particularly emphasised when domestic debates in Sweden turned towards new calls of neutrality following the Abyssinia crisis, and the programme constructed in this dominant narrative became increasingly contested by alternative narratives.
[563] Sandler, FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 12, translated.

within a progressing Geneva-centred order; how the characters of the narrative supplied Sweden with more detailed self- and other-portrayals which cast Sweden as an engaged member of that order; and how the emplotment connected a disordered past, a presently tested order, and two possible futures into a story that required a Swedish programme of active participation in Geneva.

First, this foreign policy narrative was (re)produced in a particular **Corfu** issue narrative which described the first occasion in which the new order in Geneva would be tested against a great power. The dispute between Italy and Greece was located within the League rather than on the island itself, and was emplotted as a critical test of whether the principles of the Covenant would hold whenever a powerful belligerent was involved. Here Branting's acts in the Council were foregrounded as the events driving the story, albeit the Conference in Paris emerged as a rival site. The crisis was eventually narrated as an early, forward-looking victory in which due process had restrained the diplomacy of the first, and set a precedent for what the League could become.

Second, the foreign policy narrative was also (re)produced in a particular **Mosul** issue narrative which constructed a territorial dispute between Britain and Türkiye as an opportunity for the League to prove its worth as an impartial mediator and arbitrator. The province itself was rarely given significance on its own, instead the dispute was placed within Geneva where Sweden was narrated as having been entrusted with a key mission in securing a settlement that would solidify the League's standing. The outcome was told as proof that compulsory arbitration could work, and that legal procedure could hold back the use of force. The crisis moment was thereby emplotted as another precedent in the steady development of international society.

Third, the foreign policy narrative was likewise (re)produced in a particular **Manchuria** issue narrative which described a struggle that transpired between Japan and the League in Geneva. The narrative was carried by Sweden and the European small states working together in the Assembly, often in tension with a more hesitant and passive Council. Japan was constructed as the antagonist who sabotaged the legal order, China was given little agency beyond that of a victim, and the present was narrated as marked by delay and with a victory arriving late and only in part. The case made the issue existential because, not only was this a test of the order's practicality and viability, but a crisis that risked the eradication of what had been built the decade before.

Finally, the foreign policy narrative was (re)produced in a particular **Abyssinia** issue narrative which labelled Italy's invasion of Ethiopia as another crisis for the League, but also for peace in Europe, and, by extension, for the safety of Sweden. The violence committed in Abyssinia was narrated less for

its own sake, and more so for its implications in and for Geneva. The sanctions regime was told as a 'major experiment' of one of the order's novel instruments, but as becoming undermined by the appeasement between great powers. The case was thus emplotted as the grimmest of the four, but was still narrated as a partial success on the longer road of progression, with the League having to be reformed rather than abandoned for its flaws.

In sum, the issue narratives were a part of the construction of a progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative in which the development of a legal and moral international order, centred on Geneva, was made the cornerstone of a Swedish foreign policy programme. Each case located a more distant dispute in the heart of Europe, and described it as a critical test for the attempt to create a world community. It told of small state protagonists who valiantly defended that order, of powerful antagonists who threatened to destroy it, of unreliable leaders who at times neglected it, and of victims who the League was tasked with saving. Across the four issue narratives, an old order of power politics connected with the present test of a new one, and the future was placed between progression or the risk of relapse into a far more dangerous past.

The foreign policy narrative thereby positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in relation to all four crisis moments. Sweden was positioned as belonging to a democratic world society told as superior because it represented progression; as belonging to Europe through its association with the League and other member states; and as belonging to the small states who were endowed, within Geneva, with a significant moral power. Sweden was portrayed as an honourable and dutiful member of the Geneva order; given the role of activist, peace-broker, and guardian of the same; and charged with the responsibility to advance and preserve it. This self was defined relationally through its likeness to the European small states and the League; through its distinction from the law-breaking aggressors and nationalist forces; and through its differentiation without antagonism from Europe's leading powers and the victimised states. Sweden was thus connected to the origin, present, and future of the Geneva order in a way that made their survival and standing inseparable, and active participation became the only intelligible path for Sweden to take.

6 The Neutral of the North

> The survival of the fatherland is
> what should come before everything else.
> On that path, but only on that one,
> can we serve humanity.[564]

This chapter explores another foreign policy narrative reproduced across the four crisis moments. The chapter proceeds through the narrative elements of settings, characters, and emplotments, and illustrates how each contributed to the construction of the identity concepts positions, self- and other-portrayals, and programmes. This foreign policy narrative was narrated in the stories told by conservative, liberal, and social democratic narrative agents, and can be characterised as a *traditional-realist narrative*. The setting focused on Sweden and the Nordics as a stable corner within an unstable world dominated by great powers (including in Geneva), and Sweden was positioned as a distinct (ex-)neutral Nordic state. The narrative made the Nordic small states, including Sweden, its rational and reliable, albeit also vulnerable and exposed, protagonists. It was populated by additional characters ranging from self-interested great powers and a fragile institution, to powerless, disordered (non-)victims and the future threats associated with them. The emplotment selected and ordered events that formed around a past of recurring conflict and rivalry, a present exposing the subordination of a legal order to politics of power, and a future likely returning to renewed instability. It subsequently connected Sweden to a programme of self-reliance and caution, while still remaining a reliable member of the League. The chapter shows how the foreign policy narrative positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in a way that made it the neutral observer of a world that still remained restricted and unsafe of smaller nations.

[564] Trygger, E. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 58, translated.

6.1 Settings and positions

The traditional-realist foreign narrative constructed a set of connected, but separable **spatial settings**. Each issue narrative emphasised Sweden as the core spatial setting. They also placed Sweden in an associated spatial setting, namely the sheltered nest of the Nordics. The narrative further constructed Europe as a key spatial setting, and often tied it to an institutional context in Geneva. Europe was further connected to the capitals of its largest power, who dominated both inside and outside of Geneva. The narrative additionally constructed a core **temporal setting** that constructed time as cyclical, constructing the post-war peace and the Geneva order as partial and temporary. Each issue narrative still marked the present(s) as urgent because they signalled that the world was likely set towards renewed instabilities. This section dives further into how the narrative constructed spatial and temporal settings that also worked to **position** Sweden. First and foremost, Sweden was positioned as a materially inferior and vulnerable small state. However, through its second position as a distinct (ex-)neutral small state, Sweden regained some superiority within the small state category. Third, Sweden was positioned as a Nordic/Scandinavian state – a position closely linked to the previous two, but distinguished from its fourth positioning as also belonging to Europe.[565]

A nest of stability in an unstable world

The core spatial settings, running through all issue narratives, was Sweden which emerged as a secluded decision-making space. It was told as a place where Sweden was to determine its policy separately from that of the League and its leading powers. This spatial setting was often narrated through domestic metaphors, for example, as a household that must be able to stand on its own two feet and take responsibility in relation to an external setting marked by instability. A parliamentarian maintained that "as remote as a secure international order still seems, it seems to me that it becomes a compelling duty for a people who love peace and independence to look after their own house.[566]

Sweden was thus a context separable from the additional spatial settings. However, although the foreign policy narrative accentuated Sweden as its own household, Sweden was still closely associated to another key spatial setting, namely the Nordics/Scandinavia. This setting was often referred to as a "nest"

[565] This fourth position as European was consequently marked by tension as Swedish identity was both defined as European and differentiated from it.
[566] Lindman, A. SC 17 Jan. 1924 No. 3, p. 29, translated.

within the larger spatial framing of Europe. Sweden was thus distinguished as part of a calmer and more stable Northern sphere, that prevailed even when "winds of different strength and in different directions have, at certain intervals, whipped Europe for more than two decades".[567]

Another key spatial setting was thus Europe. On the one hand, this spatial setting was constructed as a space where the European great powers steered the course of events. By concentrating on London, Paris, and, albeit to a lesser extent, Rome, the decision-making taking place there became essential for telling the issue narratives. Their deliberations in the Conference, as well as outside of it, set a dominant scene for the one on Corfu, and it was the politics of London vis-à-vis Geneva that was highlighted in the Mosul issue narrative. It events in-between these settings was likewise accentuated in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives (see emplotment).

On the other hand, Europe was also narrated as an institutional space via the League in Geneva, and this was a context where Sweden held a presence. However, even if the League was told as relevant, both for the telling of the crisis moment and for how Sweden was connected to them, it was still one that the major European characters controlled. Geneva was thus described as a space that the most powerful European states, in practice, also steered. An editorial described that reality:

> Hardly ever have the factors of *realpolitik* in Europe been so complicated at the outbreak of a major crisis as is now the case. [...] presented as something other than what it is in this case – great power politics, cloaked in the garb of international law.[568]

All issue narratives nonetheless constructed the crisis moments as being of significance to the League, but the context of the international organisation was narrated as restricted. Geneva was a key European context in which each crisis moment partially played out, but its relevance was subordinate to both European great power capitals and Sweden's own corner of the world.

Still, narrations constructed the Geneva setting as having bearing on Sweden and the Nordics. A parliamentarian, for example, stated that the Mosul crisis moment "could lead to several sad possibilities, perhaps even for us up here in the Nordic countries."[569] Even if all crisis locations were told as distant, remote, sometimes without a self-evident connection to Sweden, nor to the Nordics/Scandinavia setting. As is shown by an additional citation however,

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[567] Trygger E., FC 10 Jan. 1936 No. 1, p. 1, translated.
[568] Editorial, 8 Sep. 1923 "För att skydda Korfu" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 6, translated.
[569] Ljunglund, L. FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 50, translated.

this narrative still understood events from far away as having potential consequences for the core spatial setting. A parliamentarian also held that "when a serious war is raging in the Far East and no one knows what complications it may bring. […] An earthquake on one side of the earth can travel like an earthquake through the crust to our country in a few short moments."[570]

However, Geneva and European great power capitals were more direcly related to Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia, and these spatial spaces gained their bearing in the issue narratives by becoming linked to an institutional European context rather than to Sweden.[571] In other words, the fate of these spaces would be determined by the leading powers of Europe, including, but not solely, through their actions in the Geneva setting. Yet, since Sweden was narrated as holding a presence in Geneva as well, they were not irrelevant in connection to the setting of Swedish decision-making.

Since the spatial settings – Sweden and the conflict sites – were connected to an institutional European one, they were narrated as mutually implicated by it. As the character portrayals will illustrate further, the issue narratives constructed also these settings as fundamentally different, but the issue narratives still pointed to why Sweden, within the confines of its own home in the North, should pay attention to how it acted in relation to ongoing events there. How Sweden chose to perform in Geneva, including in relation to these peripheral spatial settings, had consequences for how the household would fare. A parliamentarian, for instance, expressed concern over what Sweden's presence in Geneva might bring for the country:

> Of all the matters that have come under the consideration of the League of Nations while Sweden held a seat on the Council, the Mosul question has been the least suitable for a Swedish action. In this very matter, however, Hjalmar Branting allowed himself to be drawn in and locked Sweden's Council representative into a task that could only by a miracle lead to anything other than discomfort – possibly great discomfort – for our country. [...] This was advanced by His Excellency Undén to such an extent that it made our position very exposed and raised expectations of an almost catastrophic persistence.[572]

The spatial settings of the foreign policy narratives thus constructed each crisis moments as matters of decision-making in Europe, but distributed that across separate forums rather than into a single centre. Europe (i.e. the great power

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[570] Forssell, C. SC 24 Feb. 1932 No. 17, p. 48, translated.
[571] The particular Corfu narrative, for instance, made the Greek island a more associated space because it was placed within Europe. It was often related to the Ruhr occupation as a comparable occurrence, but in a spatial context closer to home.
[572] Editorial, 16 Dec. 1925 "Ett överflödigt nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 5, translated.

capitals and the League context) became settings steering the course of events. The conflict sites became peripheral and removed from Sweden, even if their fates were similarly caught up in Geneva. Sweden and the Nordics as the core spatial setting thus became partially detached from, and partially implicated by, these additional spatial settings.

Time as cyclical: The peace as temporary and partial

The overarching temporal setting of the foreign policy narrative constructed time as cyclical and repretitive. In this narrative, an anarchic and disordered world had never been left behind even after the League had been established, and new conflicts and war were likely to reappear. The new international organ in Geneva had not abolished the underlying conditions of international life so much as added a new institution to a system that remained characterised by the imbalance between more powerful and weaker states. This temporal setting was subsequently narrated as a more or less constant stage of conflict and competing interests, or, at the very least, of latent conflicts temporarily held in check, but as likely to return in the future.

The narrative's construction of the connection between the past, present, and future illustrated a certain temporality (see emplotment). Memories, both from the world war and previous wars in relation to each crisis moments, were used to show that history always arrived at a similar destination. Although the world was currently at peace, that stability was told as nominal because the legal order meant to secure it remained fragile and subordinate. This temporal background placed the spatial setting of Europe in a deceptive peace where the new order in Geneva co-existed with a reality where the powerful still ruled and the weak endured. This was described by the conservative party:

> During the world war, there was above all *one* idea that steeled the resolve of the most idealistically minded on both sides: that this dreadful trial of strength would be *the last war*. […] the League of Nations was to become a strong and respected guardian of lasting peace, founded upon the realisation of the nations' right to self-determination – a right solemnly proclaimed as one of the war aims of the victors, and now to be enshrined as the new order, once the ideals of power philosophy had replaced the arms-race system of past times […] this judgement showed a whole array of wrongful premises. […] We travel now along the old path, on which Europe travelled before the great war; if we continue there, we shall end at the same unfortunate result.[573]

[573] Allmänna Valmansförbundet. 1924. *Politisk Valhandbok 1924*. Stockholm: Svea, p. 19, translated, in: RA, Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF [Allmänna valmansförbundet/Högerpartiet – riksorganisationen", Trycksamlingen.

The temporal setting consequently framed the establishment of the League as a false dawn for world peace, and each issue narrative described Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia as proving that the so-called old order of self-interested powers and the use of military force to further national aims persisted.

Alongside this overarching temporal setting, each issue narrative was still told with a sense of urgency. They constructed the crisis moments as significant ones where the new European institution would either be proven as valuable or confirmed as hollow. This was described in an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* which stated:

> […] no one could mistake the intense menace of the situation. The parallel with Sarajevo spontaneously presented itself to the observer; with each passing hour it has acquired an increasingly vivid content. [...] It is trivial to say that this mercilessly arranged situation puts the League of Nations to a test that will determine whether its Council and Assembly will be regarded as anything other than what the Reichstag in Regensburg was in its time within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. [...] The world awaits with interest the answer from Geneva. A precedent should in any case not be able to be set – a precedent that in one direction or another must have significant effects, if not for the world then for the League of Nations.[574]

The issue narratives thus allowed for an uncertain or unsettled future despite a dominant cyclical temporality. However, such immediate temporal settings were predominantly told in relation to Corfu and Mosul, whereas the issue narratives on Manchuria and Abyssinia stressed the core temporal setting more. This urgency was also related to the significance of how Sweden acted during each crisis moment. Given that these episodes were commonly cast as proof that the world was once more moving towards renewed hostilities, they were told as critical moments for Sweden specifically:

> The path of collective security is uncertain, to say the least. Consequently, we must for our own country's concern, draw the necessary conclusions and put our house in order before the storm outside swells into a hurricane, threatening our homes and hearths with destructions.[575]

The momentum constructed in all issue narratives remained part of the cyclical temporality, and, in which, especially the Manchuria and Abyssinia crises,

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[574] Editorial, 2 Sep. 1923 "En prövostund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 5, translated.
[575] Bagge, G. 1935. *Politiska tal under sommaren och hösten 1935*. Stockholm: Egnellska Boktryckeriet, p. 47f, translated.

illustrated an urgent need for Sweden to adjust. The temporal setting thus constructed time as repetition where the threat of war and violence never went away. This meant that each crisis moment was often narrated as a symptom or a confirmation of the cycle. At the same time, the temporal setting was not without tensions since the cyclical frame ran alongside the construction of more open-endedness (e.g. could the League project prevail?). These framings were, however, often accompanied by the suggestion that the answer was a pre-given *no,* at least in terms of it being able to thwart the cycle.

Positioning Sweden

The spatial and temporal setting of the traditional-realist foreign policy narrative contributed to the positioning of Sweden as belonging to specific **hierarchal categories**. First, Sweden was positioned in the narrative as a small state. It located Sweden among the materially weaker states of the international system who were exposed to the will of those with greater material means. In terms of hierarchy, this placed Sweden among the materially inferior states. A parliamentarian held:

> […] it is, however, clear that we must under all circumstances avoid risks that do not, now or in the future, yield reasonble results, and above all, risks that our country cannot bear given its position and limited resources.[576]

While this point to the positioning of Sweden as a small state unable to influence the course of event, Sweden was still given a moral superiority, not because it was a small state *per se*, but rather because of its capacity for rationality (see self-portrayals for more detail). This was especially connected to Sweden as belonging in a bloc of (ex-)neutral small states.

Second, although Sweden was positioned as an observer in a world dominated by the great powers, it was not told as powerless. Swedish identity was constructed through a dual attribution of belonging to a group of materially vulnerable states, yet, it was narrated as possessing the clear-sightedness to recognise that position and act accordingly. This superiority found within its own inferiority was constructed in the distinction between the small states themselves: in Sweden's corresponding position as an (ex-)neutral small state. Another parliamentarian described this:

[576] Bagge, G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 2, translated.

> The neutral states, which did not participate in the war, have found it easier than the belligerents to impartially assess the situation that the war has brought about and that has arisen after the war. Every attempt, every approach to a better relationship between victors and vanquished must naturally be liable to win the greatest sympathy and the warmest support of thise who were neutral during the war. [577]

This position connected Sweden to a group of states with peaceful histories, and, as will be further discussed below, the foreign policy narrative constructed a difference between rational neutral small states, and non-neutral small states whose violent pasts made them additionally exposed. Yet, Sweden was also narrated as having gradually moved away from this traditional position. A differentiation from its current position and that of its past was narrated by a parliamentarian which held:

> The old neutrality has been pushed aside. The right of neutrality that Sweden invoked during the world war and sought to uphold as a safeguard for the nation's peace, based on impartiality as its guiding principle, has, in the manner set forth in the Covenant of the League of Nations, been replaced by its system of sanctions.[578]

Third, and in close relation to this positioning, Swedish identity was also placed among the Nordic/Scandinavian states. This category was commonly bound up with its position as an (ex-)neutral state because the Nordic sphere – the stable nest that the spatial setting constructed as a corner of calm in a stormy Europe – was told as the home of peace-loving but rational polities with distinct traditions of neutrality:

> Where is there a greater love of peace, where can one trace a more awake sense of right and justice, where is the inclination for brotherhood with other peoples stronger than in the Nordic countries?[579]

However, although the Nordics were narrated as a culturally superior space, the Nordic nations (individually and collectively) were still constructed as smaller states who remained materially weak and with limited influence.

Finally, Sweden was also positioned as a European small state, although it was often distinguished as a northern European one. Europe's eastern and southern parts were often, alongside non-European spaces, told as more tur-

[577] Trygger, E. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 53, translated.
[578] Westman, K.G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 36, translated.
[579] Trygger, E. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 58, translated.

bulent and disorderly places. Sweden was thus positioned within the most superior part of an already significant European space. Still, a parliamentarian held:

> We have recently experienced in a rather tangible way that Sweden's fate is linked to Europe's. Europe's distress is our distress. […] We have also recently had a direct feeling that the clouds of trouble have drawn closer to our shores.[580]

References were made, in all issue narratives, to Sweden as belonging to Europe more broadly as well.

6.2 Characters and portrayals

The traditional-realist foreign policy narrative was carried by a set of **characters**. Its protagonist – Sweden and the Nordic and (ex-)neutral states – were constructed as reliable characters that fulfilled their obligations, yet were limited in doing so. Its (semi-)antagonists were the self-interests great powers, in particular Italy, and the League who was portrayed as a noble ideal, but an organisation serving the interest of the powerful and adding ambiguity to an already uncertain world. The narrative also involved additional characters, including the powerless victims (Greece and Abyssinia) and a disordered China, as well as more diffuse ideological threats spreading insecurity into the future. This section explores the portrayals of these characters, and ends with how they contributed to the **self- and other-portrayals** of Swedish identity. Sweden was portrayed as reliable, and peaceful, yet as materially weak and vulnerable. It was given the roles of a limited but dutiful League member, but primarily that of a stable neutral observer. Sweden's (non-)responsibilities were to honour its commitments while also prioritising its own security and not overcommitting. These were also reproduced relationally as Sweden was associated with the Nordic and (ex-)neutral small states with whom it shared similar traits, roles, and (non-)responsibilities; differentiated with some antagonism from the great powers and the League itself; and differentiated with less antagonism from the powerless victims, although this was complicated through various associations with antagonistic ideologies as future threats.

[580] Anderson, I. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 79, translated.

The (un)willing protagonist

The foreign policy narrative constructed Sweden, not only as a key spatial setting, but also as one of the main characters. Sweden was not the protagonist in the sense that it played a major role in moving the issue narratives forward.[581] It was nonetheless a character that all of them centred on. Sweden as a character, including the portrayals of it, thus encompassed a notable tension: Sweden was, on the one side, told as taking responsibility by fulfilling its obligations to the League. On the other, it was also narrated as becoming more exposed by such actions, and as contributing more than it gained.

In the Corfu issue narrative, Sweden was constructed as hopeful but realistic about the League's prospects, but as still taking its obligation as a Council member seriously. For Mosul, Sweden was likewise told as acting in accordance with its responsibilities by accepting the *rapporteurship*. In both instances was Sweden constructed as a character that was being loyal to the international institution and who acted in its best interest, even when such acts did not necessarily serve its own. The construction of Sweden as being a member state that lived up to promises, even by participating loyally in economic sanctions, also accompanied the Abyssinia issue narrative. Here the conservative party leader stated:

> As far as the present situation is concerned, it is obvious that Sweden must fulfil its obligations under the Covenant, as long as we belong to the League and other important members take the same position. In my opinion, it is also both our country's duty and its own obvious interest to try to contribute to the best of its ability to ensure that, in the face of the uncertain and frightening prospects facing the world and especially Europe, nothing is neglected that can reasonably be done for the benefit of peace and justice in the world. […] it cannot be considered fortunate from any point of view that Sweden occupies a particularly conspicuous and leading position in the question of the formulation of sanctions. Wisdom and restraint are absolutely necessary.[582]

However, Sweden was also told as restricted in what it could (and should seek to) achieve in Geneva. In the Manchuria issue narrative, it was emphasised that Sweden would not benefit from naming Japan the aggressor, because doing so risked exposure to an already exposed nation. When domestic debates focused on the suggestion that Sweden planned to act against Japan in Geneva or enforce a unilateral arms embargo, these narrations highlighted that doing so would be irresponsible, unfavourable, and unnecessary because the actual

[581] It was rather the European great power that had the agency – the political power and the means – to drive them to their conclusions (see below).
[582] Bagge, G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 2, translated.

influence of Sweden on such matters was restricted to begin with. An editorial illustrates how the narrative encompassed a tension between an emphasis on Sweden's record of "diligent work" for the League, and the construction of that work as standing in opposition of Sweden's own concerns:

> At almost all critical moments the League has appeared as the humblest servant of conjunctures and circumstances, rather than as a protector of peace and the weak. Little reason is there to blame us for even we in our northern countries have suspected something of this truth and directed our actions accordingly. Instead we would have expected a word of recognition for the diligent work our delegates have done for the League's cause. Have we not given up our most distinguished statesman to the League? Have we not answered with all due courtesy all those inquiries on various subjects with which the industrious Secretariat is accustomed to court all the governments of the world? And have we not, in accordance with the high command of the League, refrained from starting a war with our neighbour in the east? Indeed, our merits seem more impressive than those of most and should certainly have earned us a higher grade [...] However, we are not members of the League exclusively for the pleasure of being in good company. We can do without that pleasure, but we cannot willingly give up our own interests and concern for our own security in order to stand better in Geneva.[583]

In Geneva, Sweden's delegates were thus narrated as representing Sweden responsibly, but also as overreaching. In cases of the former, this was often told as illustrative of Sweden's own dutifulness and its "selfless concern for the maintenance of fundamental legal principles".[584] In cases of the latter, Sweden's representatives were also told as acting against the best interest of the home. In overcommitting to the League, they acted in discordance with their own nation, and these now internally differentiated individual characters put Sweden's position as a traditionally neutral state in the balance. In the Mosul issue narrative, Swedish representatives were, for example, called out for having placed Sweden in a more exposed position and as having undermined its prestige as a neutral nation. As a parliamentarian suggested:

> […] it would be a good rule for a statesman to always strive to be on the safe side. We all wish to see our Sweden on the safe side, not least in the matter of what is right and proper, and certainly our Foreign Minister shares this wish heartily. He sought in the Mosul question a feasible path […] Was this path really the best? [...] Sweden's representative in Geneva has become involved in a conflict decided by power politics, and he and Sweden must bear the consequences. [...] I allow myself to wonder whether these circumstances are not a particularly strong support for the opinion that I have allowed

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[583] Editorial, 12 Feb. 1924. "Fredsgaranti eller krigsrisk" *Göteborgs handels- och sjöfartstidning*, p. 8, translated.
[584] Statement to the Foreign Policy Council, 1924. RA, FPC [Tvåkammarriksdagen, Utrikesnämnden], Ö1: *Redogörelser angivna till utrikesnämnden enligt 54§ regeringsformen*, p. 84.

> myself to entertain and still entertain, namely that Sweden should not have any eggs in this basket.[585]

In the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narrative, there was a similar tension between how Swedes acting in Geneva were characterised, and how Sweden as a collective character was portrayed. Especially in relation to Manchuria was the former told as being irresponsible vis-à-vis a Sweden that was, at its core, a rational state acting with integrity and restraint. The Swedish delegation's work in Geneva was also portrayed as representing a naïve and foolish idealism with the potential to harm the nation, and a parliamentarian suggested that it should not "make an empty gesture in outer space and then pretend that nothing has happened."[586]

Sweden was not the sole hero in this foreign policy narrative. Across all issue narratives, but especially so in the latter two on Manchuria and Abyssinia, its associated neighbours emerged as additional protagonists. The Nordic small states as well as the bloc of (ex-)neutral small states were frequently referred to as League members, and as characters outside of the Geneva setting, who, much like Sweden, were exceptionally reliable and peaceful affiliates. Another parliamentarian described a Nordic friendship:

> Against the darkening foreign policy horizon, the trust and friendship that characterise the Nordic states' relationship with each other stand out as a real bright spot. […] This Nordic entente is not only a consequence of increased international pressure, which we all Nordic countries feel, but it is also a natural expression of the Nordic peoples' historically conditioned inner togetherness and common interests. It has been emphasised that this peace bloc of free Nordic states in turn seeks its anchoring in the League of Nations, which is fully in order […].[587]

These characters were often given agency in the sense that they fulfilled a role as the voices of calm and reason in contrasts to those who were disordered or unreasonable. However, they were correspondingly portrayed as limited and restricted by their material realities, and as therefore being particularly open to serious risks whenever they partook in tasks and obligations.

Sweden was narrated as a protagonist across all issue narratives, but not necessary as the one that could, nor was meant to, bring each crisis moment to its conclusion. Instead Sweden and its associated friends had another task: to accept obligations, fulfil commitments, and act responsibly, but without

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[585] Ljunglund, L. FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 50f, translated.
[586] Engberg, A. SC 26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 22, translated.
[587] Anderson, I. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 80, translated.

overcommitting within a space that put them at greater risk. Sweden was thus constructed as a main character, first and foremost, in relation to it's the core spatial settings (i.e. Sweden and the Nordic sphere). Its placement in Geneva was, albeit supplying the issue narratives with portrayals of Sweden as being responsible and well-behaved in that context, not as central because Sweden was also portrayed as restricted, even exposed, within it.

Self-interested powers and an ambiguous institution

The foreign policy narrative also encompassed characters who were constructed as dominant powers, namely the European great powers, and, albeit to a lesser extent, Japan (who only emerged as a main character in the Manchuria issue narrative). These were not the heroes of the stories told, nor were they cast as the main villains, but they were narrated in all issue narratives as the ones determining how each crisis moment would be handled. They were generally portrayed as driven by self-interest, not because doing so was morally wrong, but because reality provided them with greater means to act towards those interests.[588]

In the Corfu issue narrative, for instance, Britain/England and France were portrayed as self-serving. French solidarity with Italy and the reserved protests from the British were told as great powers pursuing their own agendas and choosing secret diplomacy in service of their own interests.[589] The centraily of these characters were emphasised in an editorial which held:

> This is especially apparent in England and France. While the latter power could be expected to give Italy its support for very weighty motives, which has indeed happened to a significant extent, the concern for the existence and prestige of the Versailles peace as well as the concern for an unending Italian power struggle in the Mediterranean provide motives in the opposite direction. And while England, for various reasons and not least strategic interests of great and long-standing importance, is extremely badly affected by the occupation of Corfu, on the other hand, it views with satisfaction precisely such a development as France views with displeasure.[590]

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[588] At the same time, the relational portrayals between the great powers and the (Northern European) small states notably never cast the latter as self-interested or ruthless in their own pursuits.

[589] Britain was likewise understood as using the League to pursue its own imperial and economic (especially oil) interests in the Mosul issue narrative, and all European great powers were portrayed as showing solidarity with a fellow great power in the Manchuria issue narrative.

[590] Editorial, 8 Sep. 1923 "För att skydda Korfu" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 6, translated.

The portrayals of them as self-serving became especially accentuated in the particular Abyssinia, in which they were told as appeasing Italy at the expense of the legal order and the League. An additional editorial suggested:

> The curtain had not yet risen on the Abyssinian tragedy in Geneva, the drama constituted by the League Council meeting of April 20. Since then, it has become impossible to conceal that the League's two leading powers, England and France, divided by mutual disagreement, are resigning themselves to the prospect of a League member soon extinguishing the freedom and integrity of another member through a war of aggression, in flagrant violation of the League and the established legal order, a freedom and integrity that the League itself was meant to guarantee.[591]

However, since they were understood as the characters ultimately tasked with responding to the crisis moments, the narrative also recognised the enforcement of the Covenant as a unique burden being placed upon them. It described other states as having "freeloaded" on their military and economic strengths, and, as a parliamentarian, in contrast, held: "perhaps one should not be so harsh in judgment, as is often the case, against the powers that sit in the Council." He suggested that them "naming a power an aggressor" would set "the sanctions machinery in motion" and described their restraint as "sound."[592]

While Britain and France were subsequently stressed as important characters across all issue narratives, Italy was more readily cast as an antagonist. In the Corfu issue narrative, Italy's actions were connected to the ones of Austria-Hungary before the war, and it was portrayed as a violator and "brutal opportunist" that had "wasted human lives.[593] The Abyssinia narrative then emphasised the bombing of the Swedish Red Cross ambulance, and images from the invasion was used the paint a frightening picture of Italy's modern warfare. In a parliamentary speech, Italy, alongside the League's "betrayal" was portrayed as embodying the promised resurgence of pre-war realities (or their continued existence):

> The situation is now such that the war of aggression, which the League of Nations has practically unanimously declared to be in conflict with the aggressor's obligations under the League, continues with unabated force and the attacked state is threatened with annihilation. The hope that the League of Nations would be able to protect the attacked in obvious cases of violation of law has been betrayed.[594]

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[591] Editorial, 26 Apr. 1936 "Sorgespelet i Genève" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[592] Engberg, SC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 22, p. 18, translated.
[593] Editorial, 8 Sep. 1923 "För att skydda Korfu" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 6, translated.
[594] Bagge, G. FC 25 Apr. 1936 No. 27, p. 40, translated.

In the Manchuria issue narrative, Japan was not portrayed as antagonistically. It was, on the one hand, narrated as representing order in the "Far East". Japan was often portrayed as the better of two alternatives; it was considered more orderly in comparison to a portrayed disorder in China. This was especially connected to Japan's portrayal as a protection against the spread of Bolshevism, which the issue narrative constructed as a future threat (see below). Japanese actions were thus partly described as understandable, as was done in an editorial in the following way:

> The decision taken by the League, cannot escape that it concurrently encourages a systemic incitement of nationalist sentiments [in China]. […] Japan taking matters into its own hands at the start of the conflict, deciding with force rather than seeking its right in the League, has contributed to putting an undeserved shadow over Japanese rights […] the risks following the critique of Japan's actions, mirrors new dangers for calm and security in the future.[595]

However, the issue narrative correspondingly portrayed Japan as an aggressor who had acted against the Covenant's provisions. Japan was, however, rarely portrayed in the other issue narratives, and was largely detached from the core spatial setting.

There was subsequently a difference in the portrayals of the four major Council powers. Britain and France were not portrayed as aggressive, temperamental, or unpredictable. Even if they were narrated as self-serving states, they were often portrayed as sensible in pursuing their own interests. Narrations of the so-called Hoare-Laval plan provide a good example, because, it was narrated as both proof of their duplicity and disloyalty to the League, and as being a fair and reasonable consideration. As a parliamentarian held:

> There is one case where it could possibly be said that we should perhaps have acted differently […] and that is when Sweden made its declaration concerning the Laval-Hoare proposal for a settlement. It seems to me quite natural that such a proposal, even if it were to be realised, which I do not at all consider excluded, could not come from the League of Nations, and then Sweden's declaration meant an assertion of our and the other non-great power states' right and interest to say clearly and firmly and coldly that the League of Nations cannot put forward such a proposal here.[596]

Narrators often emphasised that the leading European powers could, and sometimes even should, seek alternative paths beyond what was offered via the League. However, while Britain was portrayed as admirable for attempting

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[595] Editorial, 19 Mar. 1932 "Japans oro" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[596] Reuterskiöld, C.A. FC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 2, translated.

to manage a balance between legal order and facts on the ground, France was more often portrayed as cynical when doing so:

> The French policy, which from the beginning used the League as a tool to give France's allies and satellite states subsidies in the form of political assistance, the English policy, which has constantly deplored these tendencies, but has never seriously reacted against them, the condescension or outright fear-mongering, which has been instigated by the representatives of other powers, in the face of the demoralising forces – all this has combined to produce what has now happened. The warning should be strong enough.[597]

The portrayals of the original permanent members of the Council were also closely connected to portrayals of the League as its own character.[598] However, while the dominant powers were portrayed through their strength and influence, the League was narrated as weak, restricted, and subjugated. Morever, it was rarely narrated through *acts* of its own. Instead, it emerged more as a setting (see above), where it was constructed as a "theatre", a "stage", and a "chess board", making its own agency limited since it remained an institutional setting under the control and games of the Versailles powers. An editorial described the League in this way:

> On a chessboard, beautiful to behold, has the Greek-Italian conflict been played out in Geneva. And the old rules of the game have proven unshaken, although it has been played out on the exceedingly glorious chessboard, which after *Ragnarök* was found, by high divine powers laid down on the *Iðavöllr* of the new legal order. If speech is silver and silence is gold, then certainly every other turn on the chessboard is the silver of the ruling great powers' proclamation and every other the gold of Covenant's silence.[599]

When nonetheless being narrated as its own character, it was paradoxically portrayed as an important aspiration and a weak institution. On the one hand, the League was a noble creation that had unfortunately been placed under the foot of the powerful. On the other, the League was also a dangerous creation, especially since its sanctions system was told as blurring the line between law and war. The League thus embodied honourable ideals, but it had allowed for

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[597] Editorial, 4 Feb. 1932 "Fiasko – för vem?" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[598] The constructions of the European great powers were often strengthened in the portrayals of them in the past tense (see emplotment). They were commonly referred to as the Versailles powers, or as the Allied powers, who had shaped the world after the war. By drawing extensively on the past, all issue narratives constructed these characters as a collective that dominated the post-war order of Europe and beyond. However, these portrayals did not cast them as neither good-doers nor anti-heros. Their establishment of the Geneva order was not portrayed as an altruistic move, rather it was seen as an additional way from them to consolidate their standing.
[599] Editorial, 10 Sep. 1924 "Spelets bästa docka" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 5, translated.

an ambiguity between sworn oaths and the reality of international politics. Two parliamentarians described this in corresponding ways:

> […] the lack of concord between, on the one hand, solemn proclamations and formal obligations and, on the other hand, the bare realities […] often create an atmosphere or a situation in which interests quite other than those of justice and peace have been able to assert themselves.[600]

> The promise of a brighter future, which the creation of the League of Nations, according to many, was intended to bestow on the peoples, has become increasingly fleeting in the years that have passed. A significant weakness in the Covenant of this League, which was pointed out in our country already during the discussion of Sweden's entry into the League, was the lack of clarity in its provisions regarding the obligations that rest on the members of the League. Time has not brought any correction in this regard.[601]

This portrayed impotence and ambiguity of the League was not neutral, but was narrated as serving the interests of its leading European powers. Even if the institution was constructed as subjugated, especially via the Council, the issue narratives still described the League itself as contributing to more uncertainty. Moreover, the League membership had placed Sweden in the Geneva setting, and it therefore created a specific risk for the vulnerable small state (see emplotment). Although the League character was portrayed as weak and frail, it still encompassed a threat to a Sweden that now found itself bound to an institution incapable of providing the protection it had promised.

Finally, another character who also fell within the self-interested power portrayals was Türkiye. While this character was not told as dominating, it was also not portrayed as an helpless victim like, for instance, Greece or Ethiopia often were, even if was portrayed as weaker than Britian.[602] Still, the Mosul issue narrative portrayed both Britain and Türkiye as self-serving, where the latter was narrated as threatening military action, and as an ally of Soviet Russia. It was also marked as a potential future threat to European stability in a parliamentary speech:

> Not even the strong winning party in the Mosul case dares to believe. that the consequences are risk-free. We have seen a treaty being concluded between Russia and Türkiye, which in any case means a principled opposition to Geneva. We are witnessing at the moment a lively activity in the laying of major political mines and countermines

[600] Bagge, G. FC 26 Apr. 1936 No. 27, p. 40, translated. Speech given in relation to an interpellation to Foreign Minister Sandler on Sweden's position in the League.
[601] Trygger, E. FC 10 Jan. 1936 No. 1, p. 1, translated.
[602] Editorial, 17 Sep. 1925 "Mosul" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.

> down there in Europe's troubled corners in the Balkans. Let us hope that this will have a happy outcome, but hardly anyone dares to claim that this will happen with certainty.[603]

Türkiye was thus provided with some agency, but cast as less influential in the institutional European setting. It was also, in the end, portrayed as unable to face-off against the European great power's interest in the region, and did not reoccur as a character in the other issue narratives.

Unstable (non-)victims and their accompanied threats

The foreign policy narrative also encompassed a number of additional characters. This included the portrayed victims, Greece and Ethiopia, in the Corfu and Abyssinia issue narratives respectively. These characters were marked as, not only vulnerable and exposed smaller states, but were portrayed as distinctly powerless. They were also portrayed as unstable or disordered. These characters had little agency in the narratives, and instead served as warnings because Sweden, as another vulnerable and exposed small stated, risked a similar fate. However, Sweden was also differentiated from them as it remained ordered, stable, and peaceful.

In the Corfu narrative, Greece was portrayed as the victim of both Italian aggressions and the deliberation between great powers occurring over its head. Italy's actions played a major role in defining its presence in the narrative, and Greece became instrumental in the sense that it was not always portrayed as a political agent, and more so as either a warning for Sweden or evidence of the core temporal setting of the narrative. Greece was often described as the "wronged state" who had followed the path set up by the Geneva order, and then suffered the consequences. Greece as a character often filled the function of revealing the limits of the international institution in helping smaller states against greater adversaries. As a parliamentarian held:

> If Sweden, at this very moment, were to be subjected to something that could be regarded as an attack by a foreign power, could we rely on the support and assistance that are stipulated in the Covenant of the League of Nations? No, plainly we could not, no more than Greece could. In that case, it was the old secret diplomacy that, behind the scenes, took charge of the matter and settled it. It was not the League of Nations. [604]

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[603] Ljunglund, L. FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 50, translated.
[604] Lindman, A. SC 12 Jan. 1924 No. 3, p. 28, translated.

An addition to this Greece was also told as partially complicit because of its own disorder and unrest, marking it as different from Sweden despite their shared position as small states. This was described in an editorial:

> It would be unthinkable in a country with a stable social order and effective state authority. But it has not been unthinkable in Greece, and to that extent a shadow of complicity in what happened falls upon the whole of Greece. The soil was fertilised by the wild faithlessness in the name of demos, which left a horrible mark on the last episode in the history of Greece, and which in the eyes of Europe made the rulers and the ruled co-responsible for the obvious bloodguilt.[605]

In the Abyssinia issue narrative, Abyssinia/Ethiopia emerged as another victim who had been betrayed both by Italy's imperial ambitions and by the European great powers who showed more solidary with one of their own.[606] Ethiopia was portrayed through the duality of it acting with self-respect and as being, in the end, powerless against a much stronger Italy. When the present encompassed descriptions of Ethiopia fighting back against its adversary, it was, as this citation reveals, portrayed as showing "dignity":

> […] the case of Abyssinia constitutes an unusually bitter lesson even for those peace-loving peoples who have refused to see reality as it is and insist on promoting disarmament as the best peace policy for those states that want to live in harmony with the rest of the world. Abyssinia has not challenged any enemy with weapons, but on the other hand it has already shown that it does not want to surrender its integrity in the face of force. The country intends to fight as long as it has the strength to defend itself, which has also proved to be the only possibility of obtaining assistance from elsewhere.[607]

Sweden was also narrated as having a "more personal connection to Abyssinia than to any other exotic land".[608] Following the bombing of the Swedish Red Cross ambulance, a narrator held that "the fate threatening Abyssinia affects the entire Swedish people deeply,"[609] However, after Italy's occupation and the surrender of Addis Ababa, portrayals of Ethiopia as "helpless", "militarily incapable", and as internally "disunited" and "unstable" increased. The issue narrative begun constructing Ethiopia as incapable:

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[605] Editorial, 2 Sep. 1923 "En prövostund" Svenska Dagbladet, p. 5, translated.
[606] The European great powers were here narrated as guided by their own interests in keeping Europe stable as well as in securing their own imperial ambitions in the region.
[607] Press release, 1935. "En bitter läxa" in RA, Centerpartiets huvudarkiv, del 1. B5: Bondeförbundets pressmeddelanden.
[608] Editorial, 26 Apr. 1936 "Sorgespelet i Genève" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[609] Ibid. This was often also connected to the work of Swedish missionaries in Ethiopia.

> The peace of Europe cannot be secured by words and treaties. It must be secured by force. [...] As a guarantor of peace and justice, an unarmed member of the League becomes as useless as a Negro republic in Africa ever was.[610]

What it additionally emphasises is that Ethiopia was portrayed as helpless because it was unable to defend itself against Italy's military might, illustrating how Ethiopia (as well as Greece) served as warning signs that were correspondingly used to construct a specific programme for Sweden (see below).

While Greece and Abyssinia had been constructed as victims, China was less so portrayed as a victim in the Manchuria issue narrative. It was rarely referred as belonging to a group of small states, and was predominantly depicted through narrations of its "chaotic" and "disordered" conditions.[611] Accompanying these portrayals were the depiction of China – or Asia more broadly – as encompassing a growth of communism and the presence of Soviet Russia. This foregin policy narrative constructed the latter as a dominant threat, and by associating China, as well as Japanese actions, to Soviet Russia that danger was allowed to operate in the background of the issue narrative. A parliamentarian described this threat in connection to the crisis moment:

> […] to this is added the great Japanese expansion in the Far East with all that this entails. We are already seeing how it extends its disturbing effects to Europe via the Soviet countries and have witnessed how the old reinsurance system has thereby been put into operation in a worrying way again.[612]

The portrayals of China were thus accompanied by the presence of associated characters in the foreign policy narrative. While China, as well as Greece and Abyssinia, had been marked by their weakness, they were not only illustrative warnings, but represented a spreading instability.[613] As mentioned, the issue narratives mostly narrated these characters as passive subjects enduring the actions of more powerful characters. However, in connection to such depictions, they also constructed more diffuse ideological characters that were connected to more threatening state actors. In the East, a threat of communism

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[610] Editorial, 17 Feb. 1936 "Vår förlorade neutralitet" *Göteborgs handels- och* sjöfartstidning, p. 17, translated.
[611] Article, 31 Jan. 1932 "Kina förklarar Japan krig" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 3f; Editorial, 9 Nov. 1931 "Den stora prövningen" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[612] Bagge, G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 1f, translated.
[613] Neither Greece, China, nor Ethiopia were given much agency on their own in the issue narratives, instead they were portrayed mostly as warnings, whether in terms of being small states or in their associations to bigger threats in the future.

was narrated as originating from China, but more so from Russia. As another parliamentarian likewise suggested:

> As for the direct dangers, regardless of whether they are linked to neutrality or to incidents like the Corfu affair, it is quite remarkable to observe that, precisely in quarters where the existence of a Russian threat was previously flatly denied, the alleged disappearance of that threat is now considered a factor of utmost importance. Yes, the Russian threat has certainly not vanished.[614]

Here Russia was drawn upon in the Corfu issue narrative where the fate of Greece illustrated why Sweden needed to remain vigilant of the 'Russian threat'. In addition to the East, a threat of fascism was narrated as coming from both Italy and Germany in the South.[615] Although it was far less emphasised as a direct threat, the issue narratives also constructed risks associated with imperialism (including British and French imperial ambitions). The Mosul issue narrative, for instance, involved descriptions of imperial interests continuously risking future clashes between imperial states.

All issue narratives incorporated these overarching threats looming over Europe through the portrayal of antagonistic ideologies and their connection to both specific state characters and spatial settings. These portrayals contributed to the core spatial and temporal settings centred around an unstable world likely to witness future confrontations. The portrayals of powerless victims and the fragile institution in Geneva had confirmed that small states could not rely on the League for protection. At the same time, the formers' distinct disorder also portrayed them as early warnings. The accompanying ideological characterisations then projected this instability forward in time, and connected the crisis moments to more (for Sweden) threatening adversaries.

Portraying Sweden

In the traditional-realist foreign policy narrative, Sweden was characterised as a protagonist and thus encompassed explicit self-portrayals of Sweden and Swedish state representatives both in- and outside of Geneva. First, the narrative constructed a set of Swedish **traits**. Sweden was, above all, portrayed as

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[614] Hammarskjöd, H. FK 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 64, translated.

[615] The threat of Nazism in Germany was occasionally told in parallel with narrations of the Abyssinia crisis. A common way of understanding this was to place part of the blame for German revisionism on the Versailles powers, which was a continuation of the criticism that had been directed towards the Treaty of Versailles and the League's exclusion of the defeated powers already during the accession debates in 1920.

rational, restrained, and modest. It was a state that kept a clear head when others were steered by their hunger for power or volatile temper, and Sweden was correspondingly portrayed as peaceful, orderly, stable, and modest. A parliamentarian linked Sweden's traits to its past as proof of them:

> In fact, because of our antecedents and our long peaceful history, we have less need than most other peoples to document our peace-loving nature. […] another reason for our long peace, namely that it is not so easy to come into conflict with someone who is modest.[616]

The narrative also consistently portrayed Sweden as principled. It was a nation that acted properly and fulfilled its commitments. As another parliamentarian held:

> I wonder if Sweden was not, in fact, assigned the task it received precisely because our country enjoys a high reputation for its strong sense of justice. [...] given Sweden's strong sense of justice, there was a hope that their just cause would, from the Swedish rapporteur and the Swedish representative in his capacity as a judge, be met with some appreciation. […] [but] if the question […] is to be transformed exclusively into a matter of expediency, with the law having no say in the matter, then I believe this could prove very dangerous for small states. [617]

Sweden was thus portrayed with the traits of being both a nation with a "strong sense of justice" and a small state for whom there were certain dangers associated with taking on commitments. Sweden's traits still gave it a standing above the powerless because it encompassed the combination of being a rational and stable country, as being and behaving peacefully, and as being a reliable and honourable League member.

Second, from these traits followed a set of Swedish **roles**. Sweden was frequently portrayed as a committed member of the League and a participant that took its obligations seriously and sought, to the best of its abilities, to preserve the new institution. This was further described in a parliamentary speech:

> I would therefore like to say that I find no reasonable grounds for criticism of the Foreign Minister regarding his actions in this matter. He has done nothing other than what Sweden, as an honourable nation, is bound to do, namely fulfil its obligations.[618]

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[616] Hammarskjöld, H. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 63, translated.
[617] Ljunglund, FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 89f, translated. See also: Hamrin, F. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 14.
[618] Björck, E. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 20, translated.

Sweden was thus given the role of a nation that contributed to stability with its measured judgement and peaceful tradition. Yet, Sweden was not assigned the role of contributor in the sense that it was an actor tasked with handling international issues. Sweden's role was contrarily to uphold stability by actively participating *only* when it had to, and refraining from meddling in various affairs when it was not called to do so by its sworn commitments, because there was "no use in taking to streets and city squares and shout about what one believes to be right and, in this case, have neither sufficient knowledge nor interest."[619] Even if Sweden had the duty to do what could *reasonably be done*, Sweden was not to presume any leading roles. More importantly, its tradition of being neutral made it a character able to recognise its own position and act in accordance with it. All of the above traits and roles were markedly often bound up with portrayals of Sweden's historic role as a neutral nation.[620] Sweden was thus not only positioned as belonging to a bloc of (ex-)neutral states, it was also actively tied to a Swedish way of *being* in the world.

Finally, the foreign policy narrative correspondingly constructed a set of (non-)**responsibilities** for Sweden. On the one side, Sweden was told as obliged to fulfil commitments and be a trustworthy member of the League:

> Yet, if we can contribute effectively to the preservation of peace in the world, it is our duty both to take risks and to make sacrifices. We must bear in mind, however, that the League of Nations has not obtained the adherence and strength which were hoped for when it was established. Our risks have thereby been considerably increased, and we must not forget this.[621]

On the other side, as the quote also points to, these duties were commonly associated with increased risks, and Sweden had a responsibility to neither place a naïve faith in the international organisation nor overreach its engagements therein. It was *not* Sweden's responsibility to drive a resolution of the crisis moments because this was beyond both its means and interests. As a parliamentarian held:

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[619] Lindman, A. Protocol 3 Mar. 1932. RA, FPC, A1: *Protokoll, huvudserie*. See also: Bagge, FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 2.

[620] As will be further discussed in the emplotment and programme section, the foreign policy narrative encompassed an interesting tension where Sweden was often positioned and portrayed as an (ex-)neutral nation, but there was contestation over the meaning of its neutrality *policy* and whether such a policy was compatible with the League or if it had been abandoned following the League membership. Narrations emphasising the latter nonetheless held on to Sweden's unique position as an ex-neutral and the portrayal of its neutral tradition and role.

[621] Skoglund, M. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 11, translated.

> I would advocate that we exercise caution and thus avoid any temptation to seek to assume any kind of leadership role. […] In this struggle of interests, we must be careful not to overreach, for to our nation's detriment, we could easily become ensnared by one pole of power or the other. […] The fact that we missed this opportunity is, however, no reason for us to abandon the League out of hand, least of all during its current severe crisis. On the contrary, we must for the time being remain in the League and continue to fulfil the obligations incumbent upon us under the Covenant.[622]

Sweden thus had a passive non-responsibility as a League member, and restraining itself was narrated as a form of responsible conduct.[623] Sweden's active responsibility was, instead, towards its own household. This was told as both an external obligation and a duty towards the nation itself. Another parliamentarian clarified this duty:

> In the eyes of the outside world, the matter surely stands such as if Sweden fails to fulfil its obligation to defend its distinct position in the world, a position established by numerous peace and border treaties, and instead betrays it, then the task of administering this territory must be taken away from a people that does not better understand its duty. [...] The question is by no means whether we have the right to do one thing or another on our own initiative, rather the issue concerns our obligation to defend our established position within the community of nations governed by international law.[624]

An associated responsibility for Sweden was thus the safe-guarding of its neutral position and role. Sweden did not merely follow (or no longer follow) a *neutrality policy*, but it had a *neutral duty*. As the conservative party held in a propaganda pamphlet, that responsibility had not changed with Sweden's League membership:

> For a major war in Europe inevitably affects Sweden, regardless of our nation's proven love of peace [...] Despite our membership in the League of Nations, our obligation of neutrality remains largely unchanged, now just as it was then. [...] A war […] would thus, now as in the past, be a matter of great gravity for neutral Sweden, and it would be foolish to believe that the belligerents would be satisfied with a neutrality maintained merely for the sake of appearances.[625]

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[622] Trygger, E. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 36f, translated.
[623] It as notably also along these lines that the paternal figures could be internally differentiated between those embodying proper restraint, and those overcommitting beyond the household's own resources and welfares.
[624] Forssell, C. SC 24 Feb. 1932 No. 17, p. 48f, translated.
[625] Allmänna Valmansförbundet 1924:23f, translated, in: RA, Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF, Trycksamlingen. As mentioned, whether Sweden still followed a neutrality policy was contested (see programme).

Sweden's neutral obligation was thus connected to its responsibilities both at home and abroad because, on the one side, the narrative emphasised a mutually reinforcing link between Sweden's neutral role and duty, and its own national defence capability. On the other, being neutral and being self-reliant also strengthened Sweden's responsibility to remain a reliable and consitent member of the League and in international life more generally.

These self-portrayals were further solidified by a series of relational other-portrayals. Sweden was, first of all, associated with the Nordic and (ex-)neutral small states. The narrative setting had bound Sweden to this position, and this was further strengthened in the portrayals of Sweden's neighbours as sharing its own core attributes of being materially weak and vulnerable, but as also embodying internal stability and external dutifulness. They were also frequently narrated as collectively having a historic neutral role and duty:

> {…] there could, of course, be no question of Norway announcing its withdrawal from the League of Nations at this juncture, for […] such a move would be interpreted as a demonstration in favour of, on the one hand, a great power standing outside the League, Germany, and, on the other, a great power currently the subject of the League's special attention, namely Italy. We cannot do that, […] for Norway, like Sweden, has pursued a policy of neutrality.[626]

Sweden was, in contrast, differentiated from the leading European great powers. While Britain and France were portrayed as calculated and self-interested characters who used the League to consolidate their own standing, Sweden was relationally portrayed as a principled and selfless nation. The great powers also possessed the material means and political influence to lead the way, whereas Sweden lacked the same power and was forced to adapt rather than command. The contrast between them lay, however, not just in their capacities, but also in their character. The powerful were narrated as driven by ambition and as often taking advantage of their positions, whereas Sweden and the Nordic/(ex-)neutral small states were driven by obligation and reason.

Sweden was also differentiated from the League itself. Sweden was portrayed as stable where the League was frail, as fulfilling its obligations where the League could not live up to its own promises, and as knowing its own limitations while the League embodied a dangerous ambiguity and a falsely proclaimed capacity as protector. Sweden was also different from the narrated victims even if they were portrayed as vulnerable small states like Sweden, and in that likeness were able to function as warnings of a similar fate befalling

[626] Björck, E. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 40, translated.

Sweden (see emplotment). Yet, the victims were often told as branded by disorder and instability, and, against this, Sweden could be told as remaining an ordered, stable, and peaceful character. While the shared vulnerability made the cautioning of the narrative legible, the difference in order and rationality subsequently made it possible for Sweden to avoid a similar outcome.

Sweden was, finally, also told as fundamentally different from the non-victimised and/or antagonistic characters who were especially disordered, violent, and unreliable. In relations to them, and especially so Italy and China, also loomed the future dangers of communism and fascism. Along with the characters that these ideological others were associated with, their mutual chaos or aggression set them apart from Sweden's stability and peacefulness. Where these characters embodied volatility (whether as great power aggressors, as anarchic and lawless countries, or as antagonistic ideologies more broadly), Sweden embodied a steady and ordered alternative.

6.3 Emplotments and programmes

This section turns to traditional-realist foreign policy narrative's **emplotment** and the connecting of events into particular stories with pasts, presents, and futures. Across all issue narratives, the past was constructed as the reappearance or continuation of conflicts and rivalries, alongside a weaker thread of past treaty negotiations and settlements. The present was emplotted as a false peace where each crisis moment exposed the League's subordination to power politics and closed around its eventual defeat. The future was constructed as the returning of the cycle to instability with war potentially looming over Europe. This section explores the narrative's construction of past, present, and future events, before illustrating how the emplotment explained the need for a specific Swedish **programme**. The selection and ordering of key events connected Sweden to a specific set of reasons, objectives, and actions that ultimately worked to narrate *why* Sweden could not fully rely on Geneva and had to act with a responsible foresight, *what* it had to achieve in order to safeguard its own survival, and *how* it was to conduct itself through a balance between international reliability and national self-reliance.

Past conflicts and illusions

First of all, all issue narratives drew on a remembrance of events leading up to the world war, and, as the temporal setting also illustrated, understood this past as demonstrative of the inherent instability of the external world. An editorial recalled the war in relation to the Corfu crisis moment, and held:

> While the character of the ultimatum threat and the occupation of Corfu thus acquired this blood-red outline, the situation in general meant the confrontation of Europe with the most perfect parallel to the events of 1914 – precisely those events whose repetition has been declared unthinkable and impossible.[627]

This specific quote connected the Corfu crisis to the beginning of the world war, and similar memories were often reproduced to narrate the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments. However, the issue narratives additionally constructed a past around the immediate post-war order, and described this as dominated by the victorious great powers:

> […] it was because it was not a general league of nations, because it was so closely linked to the Treaty of Versailles, and because those who joined the League were thereby also standing for the status quo in this respect, that membership in the League in reality meant an abandonment of the neutrality that had thus far been the guiding principle of our policy. [...] However, we have not been able to share the […] belief in the League's excellence or hide from the fact that in many cases it has almost constituted a protective disguise for the games of the victorious great powers.[628]

With the remembering of the start of the world war and the eventual peace treaty, the issue narratives recalled the early promises of the League, but this was narrated as a time that had cast the world into an illusion. They suggested that this past was false or deceptive because, in reality, it was still the power and interest of individual state characters that ruled above international legal norms and institutions. A parliamentarian further recalled warnings against a Swedish League membership in 1920:

> These reasons were put forward in vain. The Riksdag decided that Sweden should enter the League of Nations. […] we should try to make clear to ourselves what may have been the real cause of the so-called hereditary weakness that has hindered the development of the League in a beneficial direction, this with all due recognition of the numerous bright pages in the history of the League.[629]

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[627] Editorial, 7 Sep. 1923 "Ruhr och Korfu" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 6, translated.
[628] Lindman, A. 4 May 1925. "Militär avrustning och – moralisk", translated, in: RA, Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF, Trycksamlingen No. 297.
[629] Trygger, E. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 35, translated.

Despite narrating that the League had also had its "bright pages", the issue narratives selected and described past League matters that had not landed favourably, and connected them to the current ones. This included, for instance, the Åland Island dispute, the Vilna dispute, and the Ruhr occupation, all told as instances where the League either ruled unfairly, failed to mediate, or simply did not respond. In later issue narratives, the Corfu crisis also became another past example of a "false peace" without any justice for smaller states:

> This we cannot accept, given how weak the League of Nations still is, and how dependent it has shown itself to be on certain great power interests – not only in the Corfu affair, but also in the Vilna conflict and in the adjudication of our own Åland question. [630]

These past League (non-)matters were narrated as showing that the new legal order was applied unevenly. The League had involved itself in the Åland Island dispute, and Sweden had dutifully accepted its unfavourable ruling, but the same rules of the game were not applied for the great powers.

In addition to this overarching past, each issue narrative also constructed specific pasts in relation to Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia respectively. On the one hand, they connected the conflictual settings directly to the post-war period. The Mosul issue narrative, for instance, emphasised a past where Mosul had been left unresolved by the Allies after their victory. This was described in an editorial:

> At the bottom of the pot, poisoning the whole affair, lay a good portion of the most developed hypocrisy of Entente policy, the indignation that was so extraordinarily burning during the war over the atrocities committed by the Turks against Armenia, allegedly at the instigation of the Germans. […] but it was hastily removed from the program when victory was won and the victorious powers were about to begin distributing the fruits of victory.[631]

As is hown here, this past again centred on the dominance of the victorious powers. The Manchuria issue narrative instead accentuated Japan's long-standing interests in Manchuria alongside descriptions of the rights it had previously obtained in the region following a series of treaties:

> Japan's treaty rights date from the end of the Russo-Japanese war in 1905. By the Treaty of Portsmouth of that year, Japan took over from Russia the lease of the southern part of

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[630] Lindman, A. 1924. "Yttre trygghet och inre styrka: Tal i valrörelsen 1924 av Arvid Lindman", translated, in: RA, Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF, Trycksamlingen, No. 264b.
[631] Editorial, 17 Sep. 1925 "Mosul" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.

> the Liaotung Peninsula, the so-called Kwantung Province, and the railway built by Russia between Port Arthur and Changchun south of Kharbin. These two concessions, which still constitute the cornerstones of Japanese interests in Manchuria, have since been supplemented and expanded by a series of treaties with China […].[632]

The Corfu and Abyssinia issue narratives did not, to the same extent, construct the crisis moments as matters of continued negotiations or past treaties, but, on the other hand, each issue narrative also constructed the crisis moments as continuations of instability and violence. These constructions were often related to the prolongation of the clashing interests, including the territorial claims, of the great powers. The Corfu issue narrative emphasised Italy's past territorial ambitions and strategic interests in the Mediterranean (also by connecting it to the Fiume dispute), and its resentment over not not getting colonies after the war as a core reason behind the crisis moment.[633] The Mosul issue narrative likewise plotted a past around the territory as strategically and economically important with the historic competition over oil as central, and an editorial suggested:

> The battle for Mosul has clearly demonstrated the extent to which securing oil supplies is now at the forefront of great power politics. Some information about this competition for oil, which began even before the war, is therefore likely to be of interest.[634]

The Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives similarly constructed Japan's past economic ambitions and population motives, as well as Italy's past strategic and imperial interests as key for understanding their present actions. A statement to the FPC in relation to another crisis moment likewise suggested:

> At the time of the acquisition of the Japanese interests in Manchuria, the leading circles in Japan seemed not to have been alien to the idea that Japan would find in this still unexploited area the solution to its most important problem, the ever-growing population surplus. With an area equivalent to Germany and France combined, a relatively small population, and exceptionally fertile soil, Manchuria seemed to constitute a first-rate colonisation project.[635]

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[632] Statement to the Foreign Policy Council, 1932. RA, FPC, Ö1, p. 99, translated.
[633] See, for example: Article, 6 Sep. 1923 "Rompressen konstaterar omslag i Frankrikes politik mot Italien: Korfuepisoden kanske början till en ny ordning kring Medelhavet" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 11.
[634] Sehlberg, "Stormakterns tävlan om oljan" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* 15 September 1925:1. The article goes on to detail the historical competition over oil in the region.
[635] Statement to the Foreign Policy Council, 1932. RA, FPC, Ö1, p. 100, translated.

All issue narratives thus constructed specific pasts as, first and foremost, continuations of conflicts and rivalries. It marked each crisis moments as more than matters of legal processes, and rather cast them as the latest recurrence of power politics. Despite plotting two interconnected pasts – a thinner thread of past negotiations and treaties, alongside a more persistent one of clashing power interests – the issue narratives all subordinated the former to the latter.

Symptoms of a diseased world

The foreign policy narrative selected and constructed present events the nonetheless marked each crisis moments as precisely that – crises. Even if they were not told as unexpected given the core temporal setting of the narrative, the present(s) were still narrated as acute situations:

> We must not overlook the fact that this acute situation is only an outbreak of a chronic disease in the world. […] we are in a continuing state of war after the world war. This state will certainly continue for a long time to come, in Europe it is above all due to the unfortunate effects of the Treaty of Versailles and the constant unrest that these entail.[636]

All issue narratives emphasised the present events as a challenge for the institution created in Geneva. In the Corfu issue narrative, the crisis was narrated as an institutional struggle between the Council and the Conference of Ambassadors. It thus constructed a present around Italy undermining the League and the small states' resisting a transfer to the Conference, and in that struggle especially highlighted how great power solidarity operated behind the scene. This was described in an article in *Svenska Dagbladet*:

> In its attitude toward Italy, France proclaims its alliance solidarity, even when that solidarity degenerates into brutal violence. The leading French press declares that the prestige of the Italians is a matter of national concern. In the French discussion there is no interest in the legal aspects of the conflict – nothing except that Mussolini's prestige must not be shaken. That prestige has fused with the person of the dictator himself.[637]

The Mosul issue narrative similarly revolved around present events in, or in connected to, the League. However, each event was narrated as a strain on a fragile institution. For Manchuria, events in the Council and the Assembly

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[636] Bagge, G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 1, translated.
[637] Article, 14 Sep. 1923 "Fiumesituationen farlig: Rykten om förestående allmänt krig på Balkan", *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 13, translated.

were selected, but they were told with a sense of irony in which delays represented the former's complicity, and futile attempts to get a response characterised the latter.[638] An emphasis on events in Geneva was also found in the Abyssinia issue narrative which, again, constructed them as proof of the Council as stalling and the instruments of the institution as proving useless:

> […] the sanctions system in its present form has proven, even in particularly favourable cases, to be of little benefit to so-called collective security, and that it entails terrible risks for world peace in general and for small states in particular, if it were to be made effective. The conclusion that can also be drawn from these events is that a great power cannot in all probability be prevented by economic sanctions alone from undertaking and carrying out an attack against a smaller state. Sanctions are only effective against smaller states, and the application of Article 16 is generally very risky.[639]

All issue narratives thus regarded the present as concluding with the League's eventual defeat against the special interests of the great powers. For Corfu, the League had to capitulate the issue for the benefit of the Conference; for Mosul the outcome was reached in a way that exposed the League's subservience to British interests; Manchuria represented another defeat for the international institution following Japan's exit; and Abyssinia marked the fiasco of economic sanctions as a viable tool for collective security. In relation to the latter, a parliamentarian held:

> It is a very strange but nevertheless accepted proposition of international law that a power can take any military measures without war. As long as that power does not call it war and as long as the oppressed does not declare war, then it is not war, and in this way one can see an entire province occupied because the occupier has no interest in declaring war and the occupied does not dare to declare war. But such a peace is not worth much. Such a peace is a Corfu peace, which one cannot be satisfied with.[640]

The selection and ordering of present events in Geneva also placed Sweden in them, and all issue narratives emphasised Sweden's corresponding attendances and performances. As mentioned, this was both narrated as strengthening its prestige as a reliable member and as eroding its historic neutral role:

> I am not at all making any demand that Sweden should evade fulfilling the obligations that our country can be considered to have assumed by becoming a member of the

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[638] The latter was also constructed as irresponsible moves, also by Swedish delegates, while refraining from placing Japan on the pillory was as a sound choice by Europe's leading power.
[639] Bagge, G. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 13f, translated.
[640] Hammarsköjd, H. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 64, translated. See also: Press release, 1935. "En bitter läxa" in RA, Centerpartiets huvudarkiv, del 1. B5: Bondeförbundets pressmeddelanden.

> League of Nations. I have only wished to indicate that Sweden's foreign policy has now come outside the archipelago of the old neutrality and that it is now sailing on larger waters, which place greater demands on the seaworthiness of the ship. I also wish in this context to express the wish that the course should not be set further away from the well-known landmarks of the old neutrality than is absolutely necessary.[641]

On the other side, these Geneva- and Sweden-centred events were also overshadowed by additional ones, especially so the military actions on the ground of each conflictual setting and the steps taken by the (European) great powers beyond what they did in the League. The former included descriptions of the mobilisation of troops, including around Mosul, as well as of the military activities taking place on Corfu, in Manchuria, and in Ethiopia. These events illustrated what could happen to a vulnerable state if attacked by a great adversary. The latter conversely included descriptions of the negotiations, appeasement attempts, and strategic moves made by the great powers, and these events illustrated who, in practice, shaped the path forward. The combination of images of military activities on site, with images of a passive League and self-serving great powers, were also reproduced:

> A week later, Abyssinia's military collapse and the Emperor's flight followed, Addis Ababa was occupied by the Italians and Mussolini's second "adunata" with the proclamation of the annexation of Abyssinia and Victor Emmanuel's Ethiopian title of Emperor. [...] on that Olympus opposite Mont Blanc, where the statesmen of the League meet, little is felt of the darkness and the anxiety down in the valleys. [...] The reasons for this wait-and-see attitude are in plain sight. The leading great powers, England and France, want it that way, and even if the vital interests of the smaller states were in any way threatened by this tactic, it would in any case exceed their ability to change it.[642]

The Mosul issue narrative however, more so than the other ones, allowed for Geneva to remain the centre of these talks and negotiations, and in the Manchuria issue narrative the Council was similarly a reoccurring setting where the Versailles powers could deploy delaying tactics and confirm their solidarity towards each other rather than towards the new legal order.

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[641] Westman, K.G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 36, translated. See also: Editorial, 17 Feb. 1926 "Vår förlorade neutralitet" *Göteborgs handels- och sjöfartstidning*, p. 17, translated.
[642] Editorial, 27 May 1936 "Utan illusioner" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated. See also: Artberg, 26 Nov. 1931 "Japansk annexion sannolik" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 1, translated.

Instability and war on the horizon

Since the core temporal setting constructed time as cyclical, it also suggested a future returning to instability and war. The present order established in Geneva was constructed as providing a temporary and deceptive relief for Europe, but the crisis moments illustrated the cyclical temporality. The construction of the future in all issue narratives therefore involved depictions of the past as foreshadowing what awaited. The narrative therefore constructed a future that appeared as pre-written, or at least one where threats of instability and war still loomed large over Europe and Sweden. The issue narratives thus encompassed a number of futures that all confirmed this cycle of time.

First, the issue narratives constructed a more immediate future in relation to each crisis moments and to the League. This was a future that would expose the League as an institution that was, however noble an idea, still limited in reality. In the Corfu issue narrative, the conclusion of the matter in the Conference proved that the League would be unable to ensure a just and peaceful outcome whenever a permanent member of the Council was involved:

> Not least the experiences of the last year have taught us that the small states have little to expect of effective help from the League if their interests are approached too closely by a great power. It cannot occur to us to present the Corfu episode as some milestone in the development of the League, as a busy propaganda is now trying to do.[643]

The Mosul issue narrative similarly illustrated that the outcome of any League process would always serve a great power party. The Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives also showed that the League was ineffective in enforcing its Covenant even when a great power was named the aggressor. As a parliamentarian suggested:

> Although this has been a case which is exceptionally favourable for the intervention of the League of Nations – where there can be no doubt as to who the aggressor is, where this aggressor has by his conduct turned world opinion against him in an exceptional manner, and where obviously vital interests of the great power are intertwined with the cause of the attacked state – despite all this, the League of Nations has not succeeded in preventing a war of conquest against a small power which is a member of the League by means of so-called collective security. Even in this, […] a flagrant war of conquest against a small member state has not been prevented.[644]

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[643] Editorial, 12 Feb. 1924 ”Fredsgaranti eller krigsrisk” *Göteborgs handels- och sjöfartstidning*, p. 8, translated.
[644] Bagge, G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 3 translated.

As is illustrated by this quote, the biggest take away for the future was that Sweden would not be able to count on the League for protection.

Second, the issue narratives constructed a future in relation to the conflictual settings that served as dual warnings. On the one hand, the Corfu issue narrative showed a future in which a similar fate could befall Sweden, and the Mosul issue narrative pointed to corresponding danger of gambling with the integrity of Sweden's neutral role. All issue narratives thus constructed a future in which Sweden had become more exposed following its involvements in the crisis moments, as well as a future in which Sweden, as another vulnerable small state, would be unable to fend off a more powerful adversary:

> Militarily we are comparable to Abyssinia, which country last year was confronted with the realities of war. The Italian bombardment […] in the Abyssinian regions could be repeated in our country by another power.[645]

On the other hand, they further illustrated a future where local instabilities and hostilities would spread. The Manchuria crisis involved a future danger coming from the spread of communism in Asia, and the Abyssinia crisis encompassed threats deriving from fascism and imperialism. The latter had also involved a European great power with expansionist ambitions, and its actions had directly created instability in Europe.[646] This issue narrative also connected Sweden more closely to the projection of future events since it had participated in the sanctions regime, and therefore put its neutral role on the line. This was described during a parliamentary session:

> Of particular concern to us are the dangers to which our country may be exposed in certain cases by military conflicts in our vicinity because of its membership. The policy of neutrality which our people wish to observe is in reality greatly hindered. The development of weapons during the ongoing rearmament of the great powers has also increased our risk of being drawn into military conflicts […].[647]

Finally, all issue narratives emphasised an explicit future for Europe and Sweden. This encompassed the weakening of confidence in the order established in Geneva, and a relapse into hostilities that could lead to another great war:

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[645] Von Seth, T. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 13, translated.
[646] This was also associated with developments in Germany, and described as one of many symptoms of the world heading towards potential catastrophe.
[647] Bagge, G. FC 25 Apr. 1936 No. 27, p. 40, translated.

> We ourselves have felt the brutality of warfare in a way that has deeply disturbed our entire people. A mood now prevails throughout the world that lets us sense the possibility of a new period of war, perhaps even more dreadful than the world war. We can only hope that all good forces will unite to avert such a disaster, but it would be criminally negligent not to see the grim reality as it is and to act accordingly.[648]

This grim future was especially stressed in the issue narratives told in the 1930s. Here the crisis moments were also connected to a broader trajectory for Europe that included events closer to home.[649] This was the uncertain and unstable future that Sweden would have to prepare for.

Connecting Sweden

The emplotment of the traditional-realist foreign policy narrative selected and ordered past, present, and future events into a main trajectory that ran through all issue narratives. This emplotment, together with the construction of settings and the portrayals of main characters, laid the groundwork for a specific Swedish programme. First of all, the **reasons** behind the narrative's programme for Sweden followed directly from this. Since the present confirmed that the legal order proclaimed in Geneva was partial, or even deceptive, it reasoned that Sweden could not fully count on international institutions and international law to protect it. The League membership had still placed Sweden in Geneva and thereby bound the vulnerable small state to a fragile and ambiguous institution which risked making Sweden more exposed:

> […] moral progress often entails risks, and it is certain that newly assumed moral obligations entail more serious demands than those that existed before they were assumed. […] If democracy does not want to play the blind man, it must, however, see that the world still contains contradictions and rivalries, which in their fierceness recall unbridled natural forces. [650]

A related reason for Sweden's programme was connected to the narrated erosion of Sweden's neutral standing. Although narrators differed on whether Sweden's participation in the League had abolished or only damaged Sweden's neutral position and role, all issue narratives emphasised how Sweden's

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[648] Bagge, G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 1, translated.
[649] For example, the economic depression, Germany's withdrawal from the League in 1933, and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936.
[650] Ljunglund, L. FK 18 Jan. 1926, p. 49, translated. See also: Bagge, FC 25 Apr. 1936 No. 27, p. 40.

traditional policy could no longer offer the same protection. This was reproduced by two parliamentarians ten years apart:

> It certainly does not escape my notice that our membership in the League of Nations, although commendable from a purely moral point of view, nevertheless places certain limitations on our neutrality from a political point of view.[651]

> The old neutrality has been pushed aside. […] Sweden can therefore no longer, in the same sense, affirm the principle that was proclaimed during the world war as the guiding rule of our foreign policy in those famous words: *Our policy is Swedish, and nothing but Swedish.*[652]

At the same time, the issue narratives still constructed the League as an honourable ideal, and a controlled and limited presence therein was not necessarily harmful. Here Sweden's own self-portrayals became reasons for why Sweden should nonetheless follow through on its commitments to the League:

> Swedish foreign policy leadership might face the choice of either taking unreasonable risks for a cause our people do not deem worth them, risks that might even endanger the kingdom's very existence, or having Sweden branded as a state that fails to honour its obligations. A nation that values its honour cannot expose itself to such a situation.[653]

The **objectives** of Sweden's programme were correspondingly two-fold. The primary objective was to, above all, preserve Sweden's own peace, independence, and existence. As a parliamentarian stated:

> Under such circumstances, and as remote as a secure international order still seems, it seems to me that it becomes a compelling duty for a people who love peace and independence to look after their own house […] to provide our country with the greatest possible measure of external freedom and internal strength, that is what I still believe should be the goal of our political concerns and efforts.[654]

Yet, the foreign policy narrative did not dispute a secondary objective revolving around seeking to both improve the League and fulfil commitments to it. The main aim here was for Sweden to reaffirm its reputation as a reliable and steadfast nation, but not when doing so put its primary objective on the line:

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[651] Ibid.
[652] Westman, K.G. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 36, translated.
[653] Bagge, G. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 16, translated. See also: Lindman, A. SC 17 Jan. 1924 No. 3, p. 28.
[654] Lindman, A. SC 17 Jan. 1924 No. 3, p. 29, translated.

> [...] when the vital interests of the kingdom, yes, perhaps its existence, are at stake, it must be an unconditional duty for everyone to do their part to the greatest extent possible so that our people may appear as one man [...] We can still make our own the constitution of the great nations, which reads: "The existence of the fatherland is what should come before everything else. On that path, but only on that, can we serve humanity."[655]

However, this secondary aim was narrated as a way to contribute to, not only international stability, but national cohesion, something that was told as vital for the primary objective. It was, in other words, a subordinate objective that Sweden was presently pursuing, but one that could – if coming in conflict with the primary one – easily be abandoned. But "in the meantime, the League may well lead a more modest existence." and "to simply abolish the League" would be to do more violence than necessary."[656]

Finally, the programme's **actions** thereby included a number of explicit *non*-actions, namely to *avoid* acts that were constructed as overreaching its own limitations as a small state, as well as overcommitting to an institution that would not be able to make up for the exposure such a move implied. Sweden was, for example, *not* to name or call out other states as aggressors or violators of international law, and *not* to seek to lead, to push for, or take specific action unilaterally.[657] Sweden should still participate in Geneva, but it was not to stand out as neither a fierce leader nor as a harsh critic. This included remaining steadfast in times of crisis, and to not suddenly demand a withdrawal:

> But it is a particularly ill-chosen time to now demand our withdrawal from the League, to put our membership under discussion at all. The crisis, which is now acute, must first be resolved in one way or another. […] But pending this situation, I think the discussion here at home should be conducted with somewhat greater restraint and without unnecessary consequences.[658]

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[655] Trygger, E. FC 23 May 1924 No. 39, p. 58, translated. See also: Lindman, A. 4 May 1925. "Militär avrustning och – moralisk", translated, in: RA, Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF, Trycksamlingen No. 297.
[656] Trygger, E. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 36f, translated.
[657] See, especially: Protocols from the Foreign Policy Council sessions on 24 Nov. 1925, 3 Mar. 1932, and 6 Mar. 1933 in RA, FPC, A1: *Protokoll, huvudserie*.
[658] Anderson, I. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 80, translated.

In the 1930s, however, the issue narratives constructed actions that included Sweden reconsidering some of its sworn commitments.[659] Instead a parliamentarian noted that "the group of former neutral powers" could "extert considerable influence" by stating a "certain reform as a condition for these powers' continued membership in the League."[660] In the latter issue narratives, increasing cooperation within the Nordic enclave was emphasised instead, and it was narrated as encompassing a finer balance between keeping a distance to an unstable outside while seeking security with a select few likeminded friends:

> For the Nordic countries, this implies an unmistakable indication that, for the future, we must rely solely on ourselves. Each on our own, but preferably together! [...] It would be a crime against the people of Sweden and the future of the Nordic region if, at this moment of world-historical significance, the call of the times was left unheeded [...].[661]

More importantly, all issue narratives, first and foremost, underscored actions to be taken within the confines of Sweden's own home such as rebuilding Sweden's national defence since it nedded "defence forces to fultull, if necessary, the duties of a neutral state."[662] Stronger defence was commonly narrated as necessary because Sweden had become more visible through Geneva and external instabilities demanded it, but also because protecting itself was a dominant objective and responsibility. A final core action was thus to (regardless of how Sweden's current neutral standing was narrated vis-à-vis the League membership) reaffirm its neutrality policy:

> Let us regain our neutrality. At the very least, it was nothing to be ashamed of. Instead the question may soon arise whether it is an honour for humanity to maintain such an institution of crisis-time morality in high-level politics as the current League.[663]

This was notably told both as critical for its primary objective, and for regaining an honourable part of Swedish identity.

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[659] This was predominantly related to the sanctions article since binding Sweden to the implementation of either economic or military sanctions were told as making it particularly difficult to ensure its distancing from ongoing and future conflicts, and thus nearly impossible to ensure that its traditional neutral position could be upheld in case of renewed wars.
[660] Hammarskjöld, H. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, 45f, translated. He referred to a reform or removal of the sanctions article.
[661] Editorial, 8 May 1936 "Norden och Genève" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated. See also: Björck, E. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 40, translated.
[662] Lindman, A. 6 May 1926. "För folket och genom folket" *En klart borgerlig politik: Tal under valåret 1926 av Konteramiral Arvid Lindman*, translated, in: RA, Moderata samlingspartiets arkiv I, AVF, Trycksamlingen, No. 327. See also: Ljunglund, L. FC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 51f.
[663] Editorial, 5 Sep. 1923, *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* in Tingsten 1944:84.

6.4 A traditional-realist foreign policy narrative

This chapter has traced a second foreign policy narrative as it was reproduced across the four Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia issue narratives. The narrative analysis illustrated how the spatial and temporal settings positioned Sweden as a vulnerable but rational small state set apart in a stable Nordic region, how the characters provided Sweden with the portrayal of a reliable but constrained observer in a world governed by the powerful, and how the emplotment connected a recurring past of conflicts, a present that demonstrated the subordination of law to power, and a future returning to instability, into a story that required a Swedish programme of self-reliance and reliability.

First, this foreign policy narrative was reproduced in a **Corfu** issue narrative which described Italy's attack on Greece as an early demonstration that power, not law, still decided the fates of smaller states. The bombing of the island and the deaths of civilians illustrated what could befall a weak state confronting a more powerful adversary, while the resolution of the matter in the Conference showed the League's inability to act when a great power was involved. The case of Corfu was thus emplotted, not as a milestone in the League's development, but as a warning and as proof that a small state like Sweden could expect little effective help from Geneva.

Second, the foreign policy narrative was further reproduced in a **Mosul** issue narrative which constructed the dispute between Britain and Türkiye as another lesson of the subservience of legal procedure to great power interests. The League's mediation was foregrounded, but when a decision was reached it was told as exposing how the organisation's legal processes would ultimately serve the more powerful party. The case also became a story about the cost of overcommitment as Sweden's involvement in the dispute was narrated as a gamble with the integrity of its traditional neutral position and role, and here the dispute illustrated the dangers of entangling a vulnerable small state with uncertain international crisis moments.

Third, the foreign policy was also reproduced in a **Manchuria** issue narrative which described Japanese aggression in the "Far East" as another defeat for an institution that was limited in what it could do. The League's procedures in Geneva were constructed in parallel with the violence on site, and the eventual naming of Japan as the aggressor and its withdrawal from the organisation demonstrated that the League Covenant could not be enforced even against an identified aggressor. The case also carried a dual warning: that instability could spread from Asia to Europe, and that Sweden's presence in Geneva was

gradually eroding the legitimacy of its historic neutral role while drawing it towards both greater responsibility and greater risk.

Finally, the foreign policy was reproduced in an **Abyssinia** issue narrative which constructed Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, and above all the failure of economic sanctions, as the ultimate evidence that collective security could not protect a small member state. Sanctions were narrated requiring great power muscle to operate at all. Here the early talks in the Council and the later Hoare-Laval plan confirmed that the leading powers would continue to settle such matters among themselves. Since Sweden had participated in the sanctions, the case also tied it more closely to a future of renewed European conflicts, at the same time as the present had now fully illuminated that a war of conquest against a League member could not be prevented.

In sum, these issue narratives were a part of a traditional-realist foreign policy narrative in which an international system marked by power and competition, and a peace in Europe that was temporary and partial, formed the basis for Swedish foreign policy. Each case emphasised institutional procedure in Geneva, but constructed them as proof of the League's inability to deliver peaceful and just closures. Each present therefore illustrated the institution's defeat against a reality where the special interests of the powerful still governed. Across all issue narratives, a recurring past of conflict and rivalry, a present exposing the subordination of legal order, and a future of renewed instability were connected into a single trajectory that naturalised present and coming threats. From this, the narrative derived a programme of self-reliance and caution since Sweden could not place its faith in the institution in Geneva.

The foreign policy narrative also positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in relation to all four crisis moments. Sweden was positioned as belonging to the materially inferior small states; to the (ex-)neutral states; and to a Nordic enclave different from the rest of Europe. Sweden was portrayed as principled, peaceful, but limited; provided the role of a constrained but reliable League member, and that of an (ex-)neutral state accustomed to observing and adapting; and given a primary responsibility towards its own survival, whereas a secondary one lay in its external trustworthiness. Sweden was also defined relationally through its likeness to Nordic and neutral small states, and in its differentiation from self-interested powers, fragile institutions, as well as powerless and disordered (non-)victims. Sweden was thus connected, not to the fate of the Geneva order, but to its own partial detachment from it, so that the only intelligible course of action appeared in wait-and-see-approaches, in the safeguarding of a to return to neutrality, and in self-reliance above all else

7 The Critic and Accomplice of Imperialism

> We certainly have no cause for concern,
> for the League of Nations.
> For if it simply sits meek and still,
> no great power is likely to do it ill will.[664]

This chapter explores two interrelated foreign policy narratives as they were reproduced across the four crisis moments. The chapter proceeds through the narrative elements of settings, characters, and emplotments, and illustrates how each contributed to the construction of the identity concepts positions, self- and other-portrayals, and programmes. These foreign policy narratives were narrated in the stories told by social democratic, as well as by socialist and communist narrative agents. The first narrative can be categorised as a *socialist-reformist* narrative and the second as a *Marxist-revolutionary* narrative. The settings of both focused on how specific locations connected to a capitalist system and an imperial geography, but diverged in whether temporality was told as (potential) progression or stagnation. They shared an understanding of the imperial great powers as the main antagonists, but diverged in whether the League itself was portrayed as such. The narratives also differed in the portrayals of main protagonists (i.e. between the small nations or their working-class peoples), and held a number of different secondary characters ranging from victimised nations to the Soviet Union as the true league of nations. Their emplotments still selected events that formed around a similar past in which capitalism and imperialism meant a constant state of war, but then contrasted in whether their present(s) and future(s) were seen as challenging these systems or not. The chapter demonstrates how each foreign policy narrative positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in a way that made it either the anti-thesis to imperialist power or a complicit agent of the same.

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[664] FC 26 May 1936 No 36, p. 38, translated. Satirically cited by Ture Nerman, original wording: "Vi äga förvisso alls ingen grund till oro för Nationernas förbund. Ty sitter det bara helt spakt och stilla, så gör nog ingen stormakt det illa."

7.1 Settings and positions

The socialist-reformist and Marxist-revolutionary narratives constructed a global **spatial setting** marked by capitalism and imperialism within which more specific locations were positioned in accordance to their degree of implication in, or difference from, that system. A difference between the two foreign policy narratives was found in the constructions of Geneva and Sweden as spatial spaces vis-à-vis this overarching frame. They also constructed divergent **temporal settings** as the socialist-reformist narrative described time as potential progression where a gradual reform of the core spatial setting was possible, whereas the Marxist-revolutionary narrative contrarily constructed temporality as stagnation through the persistence of bourgeoisie dominance. This section explores how the two foreign policy narratives constructed settings that also worked to **position** Sweden within them. The socialist-reformist narrative positioned Sweden as a nation partially set apart against the capitalist and imperialist system. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, on the other hand, positioned Sweden as a nation fully belonging to an antagonistic capitalist bloc. Sweden was thus placed in relation to a capitalist and imperialist group of states, while its additional categorisations as a small, neutral, European, Nordic, and "white" nation gained their hierarchal meanings mostly by how they were narrated in relation to the former positioning.

An imperial geography

These foreign policy narratives shared a core spatial setting of a world dominated by capitalism and imperialism. Although the issue narratives also formed around more specific locations, the main setting was global in scale. Both the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives thus began from the premise of a world governed and driven by the capitalist and imperialist great powers. It depicted a global setting where smaller nations and peoples were trapped in a political and economic system, and one in which the working-class and the colonised peoples remained exploited. This system was constructed as the root cause of war, and the core spatial setting was told as an "economic anarchy, [a] capitalist economic system, of which both imperialism's peaceful policy and its war [were] only consequential phenomena."[665]

Both foreign policy narratives connected the crisis moments to colonial struggles, or, as an article in *Arbetaren* narrated: "colonial policy is one branch

[665] Nerman, T. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 107, translated.

of capitalist competition. [...] Just like the struggle for colonies, the competition to capture markets for coal, oil, and iron has also sparked warlike conflicts."[666] This further meant that both narratives constructed a world divided by empires and colonies, and between "white" and "coloured races". A parliamentarian held that the deep-seated causes of the crises could be found in:

> […] the national and racial disputes, which still exist. They are all the more imminent now, since in our time the races are coming into contact with each other more than ever before because of the great inventions. This concerns the contradictions between the white race, represented by Europe and its daughter countries, and the yellow race, represented by Asia, and the black race, which has its home in Africa. The red race, the Indians, are extinct or are merging with the other population, if they do not still live in a state of complete savagery, as in South America.[667]

In addition to narrating a divide between imperial and colonised nations, and between races, the Marxist-revolutionary narrative organised it into a capitalist bloc, with the League as its main instrument, and the Soviet Union which was correspondingly told as the true league of nations. A parliamentarian, for instance, held:

> […] all these events show us […] that for imperialism the League, America, the leaders of the Second International, and the bourgeoisie of various countries are grouped, but against imperialism stand the colonies, the Soviet Union, the Communist International, and the workers who do not follow the leaders of the Second International.[668]

Within this core spatial setting, both foreign policy narratives still described Geneva as a central space, but it was in the depictions of this setting that they most notably diverged. The socialist-reformist narrative constructed Geneva as a context in which, on the one hand, the great powers were able to pursue their own imperial ambitions, but, on the other, this setting was also open to transformation:

> One can transform the League from a league of governments to a league of peoples and from an essentially European league to a world league. It cannot be done in one fell swoop. […] [One] can[not] talk about the revolution in one fell swoop, but one must mix patience with determination.[669]

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[666] Article, 27 Sep. 1923 "Den lurande krigsfaran diskuteras" *Arbetaren*, p. 5, translated.
[667] Lindhagen, C. FC 19 Jan. 1932 No. 4, p. 36, translated. Carl Lindhagen notably changed party affiliation between liberal, social democratic, and socialist parties four times, but at the time of narration he was a member of the Social Democratic Worker's Party.
[668] Herou, J.V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 39, translated.
[669] Lindhagen, C. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 113, translated.

Although Geneva was narrated as a context where imperial interests dominated, it was still one in which these interests could be defied.

In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, however, Geneva was not only a space dominated by imperial great powers, it was more so a place that was on its own driven by capitalism and imperialism. The core spatial setting permeated this space entirely, and it was narrated as an ongoing "pacifist swindle".[670] All issue narratives constructed Geneva, and the League context, as an arena where capitalist and imperialist interest were allowed to assert themselves under the disguise of a legal order. A speech in the parliemant suggested:

> When the League was created at the time as a Tower of Babel of world reaction, its main task was to guarantee the so-called order that had arisen after the world war, that is the eternal rule of the victorious states over the defeated states, as well as the permanent rule of the victorious colonial powers over the colonial peoples and, finally, in this context, the capitalist continent's effort to take revenge on the socialist system that had triumphed in over one-sixth of the earth. […] it could not be in the interests of peace that the guns of the League of Nations were directed against these defeated states, against the freedom struggle of the colonial peoples, and against the Soviet Union.[671]

Geneva and the League context thus represented the world's capitalist bloc which was set against an alternative bloc compromised of the deated states, the socialist states, and the colonised peoples.

In close association to Geneva both foreign policy narratives also delineated the great powers as spatial settings (as capitals, nations, or empires). Here they less so diverged as they similarly constructed these spaces as the main sources of imperial dominance. For example, a parliamentarian argued that "the Swedish Foreign Ministry is nothing more than a secretariat for the Foreign Ministry in London in the same way as the secretariats in England's colonies."[672] These great power settings were also often tied to the conflict areas themselves. Commenting on the events in Manchuria, an editorial held that "where the war it now being fought, the interests of the greatest imperialist states – the United States, Japan, England, and France – are clashing with each other."[673] As the section below will further illustrate, the great powers were correspondingly the main antagonists in both foreign policy narratives, but when accentuating their capitals or national boundaries as sources of imperial power, they also provided these characters with agency. A parliamentarian

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[670] See, for example: Editorial, 18 Feb. 1932. "En reträtt och en ny manöver" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.
[671] Hagberg, H. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 35f, translated.
[672] Flyg, N. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 44, translated.
[673] Editorial, 26 Sep. 1931. "Kriget i Fjärran Östern" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.

said that "it is now also obvious that the small and weak states do not have to count on any collective security through membership in the League, but that they are only pawns in the game of the great powers."[674] In other words, these settings determined the course of events, whereas other spaces, and the characters associated with them, were narrated as "pawns" of that dominance.

The two foreign policy narratives also shared similar constructions of Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia as spatial spaces. These settings were, in contrast to the settings of the great powers, told as symptoms of capitalist and imperial structures. These spaces, and the characters associated with them, rarely contained relevance beyond what they meant in relation to the core spatial setting. They were still constructed with a lot of detail, and especially so through narrations of the violence taking place there. Consider, for example, the following quote:

> While the machine guns are rattling and the aerial bombs are raining down over the Chinese district of Shanghai, Japan's representative in Geneva explains with the most condescending smile that the country is taking the League to task. The mass murder of the poor civilian population has only been done for the purpose of protecting the Japanese, i.e. to force the Chinese people to lift the blockade against Japanese goods. With knowledge of the diplomatic subtlety, however, one can fear that the latest desperate step taken by China may worsen the country's position in the eyes of the great powers.[675]

Here northern China is depicted as a space enduring the rattling of machine guns and the raining of bombs while the civilian population is mass murdered for the sake of Japanese economic interest. Geneva is further narrated as a space where diplomacy is used to hide the capitalist and imperialist interests of the antagonist, while the victim only takes "desperate steps" and is at the League's mercy. Although the locations of each crisis were narrated, neither foreign policy narrative described them as contained places. They were rather told as existing within a continuous imperial geography where each distinct location was connected to the capitalist and imperialist system.

Finally, Sweden also emerged as another spatial setting depicted in both foreign policy narratives. It was, in contrast to the crisis areas, narrated as a somewhat more self-contained place. However, the construction of Sweden as a specific context differed. The socialist-reformist narrative notably more so than the Marxist-revolutionary one presented Sweden as well as the Nordics as contexts partially separable from the core spatial setting. An editorial in *Arbetet* held that:

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[674] Flyg, N. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 25f, translated.
[675] Editorial, 2 Feb. 1932. "Branden i öster" *Arbetet*, p. 9, translated.

> […] the Nordic countries occupy a special position […] The Nordic countries, for their part, have already experienced this development through the cooperation between different social classes under social democratic state leadership […] What is required is that the Nordic representatives […] use all their influence on continued development in this direction.[676]

Sweden and the Nordics were, in this quote, narrated as entities, not detached from, but also not fully implicated by the core spatial setting. As the section on characters will discuss further, this spatial relation allowed Sweden to observe an outside (whether the entire system or the more specific Geneva setting) and thus also to critique and attempt to reform it from the side-line.

The latter narrative, in contrast, did not emphasise a seperable Nordic setting to the same extent, nor did it locate Sweden as partially set apart from the overarching imperial geography. One parliamentarian, for instance, said:

> Because of the existence of the League – because of Sweden's membership in this organisation – because of the fact that England in this conflict has skilfully understood how to mobilise the League for its interests – the Italian-English conflict is not merely a serious, tragic spectacle that Sweden has to watch as a spectator. On the contrary, it is a conflict in which our country is already a party, under the leadership of one of the two antagonistic great powers.[677]

In this quote, Sweden was not narrated as a separate space. It was fully caught up *within* a system dominated by the imperial powers. Sweden was notably not positioned as an imperial power itself in neither foreign policy narrative, but the Marxist-revolutionary one constructed Sweden as connected to, even as complicit, with this category of states. Sweden as a distinct setting thus became, because of its League membership, placed within the antagonistically portrayed capitalist and imperialist bloc of the world.

Moving forward or remaining stuck

While the foreign policy narratives shared a core spatial setting, they did not share a similar construction of dominant temporal settings and were narrated through different temporalities. The socialist-reformist narrative understood time through progression. While the past was narrated as a constant state of new conflicts and never-ending exploitation, it understood the present and the

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[676] Backlund, S. 22 Nov. 1935. "Nationernas förbund ryggraden i brittiska världsrikets politik" *Arbetet*, p. 7, translated.
[677] Flyg, N. Interpellation, SC 13 Jan. 1936 No. 2, p. 4, translated.

future as offering opportunities for reforming the core global setting. A parliamentarian narrated this passage of time as a move from jugle, to civilisation, with the potential of reaching the promised land of culture:

> Human history is divided into three epochs, the jungle, civilisation and culture. To eat and to be eaten is the law of the jungle. During civilisation, conscience seeks to civilise the animal within us. Beyond that, culture approaches, a glory as yet unattained. We now live in the epoch of civilisation with occasional relapses into the jungle and occasional voyages of discovery to the promised land of culture. The world war was such a relapse. The rampage around Abyssinia is another example for today.[678]

The narrative thus offered a path for how capitalist and imperialist structures could be defied, challenged, and changed, also through Geneva. Both progression towards culture or a relapse to the law of the jungle remained possible.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, on the other hand, was shaped by an overarching temporality of stagnation and the construction of one continous crisis for the working-class. Nothing had changed in the post-war period and the League was only a capitalist and imperialist structure presented in a new form. As was narrated in a parliamentary motion:

> The policy of the League of Nations is the direct fruit of the violent peaces of Versailles and Saint-Germain, these brutal departures from all that is called humanity and humanism. With this, even the utopia of a capitalist "reconstruction work" has crumbled to nothing. […] it is undeniable that the present League of Nations has not actually taken or even been able to take a single measure that did not directly counteract and make impossible any kind of such "recovery". Seldom has the "tragedy of history" appeared to us in such a penetrating light as in this respect. Rarely, if ever, has capitalist social anarchy so mercilessly revealed its own innermost essence, its hopelessly self-contradictory and self-dissolving inner forces.[679]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative thus shared an understanding of the past as branded by the social and economic "anarchy" that capitalism entailed, but the suggestion that the League implied an attempt to "reconstruct" international life was rejected. The understanding of time constructed in this narrative instead encompassed a sense of entrapment. An editorial in the syndicalist press narrated that "as long as the capitalist form of society, which is based on plunder and loot within the country and abroad, exists, there is no prospect of this relationship being fundamentally changed."[680]

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[678] Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 413, p. 3, translated.
[679] Winberg, C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 4, translated. See also: Spångberg Motion SC 1924 No. 136.
[680] Editorial, 31 Aug. 1935 "Sanktioner mot Italien" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated.

This difference between the foreign policy narrative was further strengthened by their understanding of democratic and social reforms, or the lack thereof. The socialist-reformist narrative narrated the overarching system as being challenged via the emergence of democratic societies, and especially so the rise of the working-class therein. An editorial in *Ny Tid* narrated the "parliamentary elements" of the League and "the debate on these things [as] already mean[ing] progress compared to the mere rattling of weapons."[681] The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in contrast, described democratic changes as concealing the continued dominance of capitalism and imperialism. This was narrated in an editorial as a "myth" of a "heroic crusade" propagated by the victorious power, camouflaging their "egoistic" and "predatory" motives:

> For, as is well known, the war […] was a burden the Western powers voluntarily assumed in order to decisively crush German militarism – the only kind that existed – and to make the world safe for democracy and justice. It was a modern crusade, and naturally, it had to conclude with the same ceremonies as the crusades of old – campaigns formally undertaken to rescue the holy sepulchre but which simultaneously served various predatory ends. As for the war's characterisation as a crusade of democracy and justice against barbarism, it is by now well-known and acknowledged that this was a myth. Like their predecessors, the crusaders of the modern era proved unable to resist opportunities for economic gain amidst their selfless sacrifices for democracy and justice; these opportunities were exploited in a manner that has seriously tarnished the crusaders' reputation as the chosen knights and defenders of right.[682]

So-called democracy had not meant any change in terms of overthrowing the ruling class, but rather made the elites' oppression more concealed.

Although the socialist-reformist narrative did not narrate the League as creating a democratic society of states, it nonetheless described it as opening up possibilities in which the relation between peoples could be developed towards universality. What distinguished this narrative from a similar emphasis in the progressive-reformist narrative (see chapter 5) was that the League was *not* told as representing a world community. One narrator held that "the international legal order is still largely a fantasy. […] The peace victory's League

[681] Editorial in *Ny Tid*, cited 2 Feb. 1932 in *Arbetet*, p. 2, translated.
[682] Severin, 5 Sep. 1923. "Internationell anda och organisation" *Arbetaren*, p. 3, translated.

builds its zeal ultimately on violence."[683] The temporal frame of the crisis moments was nonetheless told as critical precisely because they represented opportunities for moving it *towards* a true peace organisation.[684]

Finally, the socialist-reformist narration of time as progression also travelled into the crisis settings.[685] Consider, for example, the following quote: "It is said: China is the most faithful member of the League. It is organising its new state with experts from Geneva. [...] Now this state development is being disrupted by a member of the League: Japan."[686] Here a Chinese setting is narrated as undergoing progression with Europe's assistance. At a national congress in 1932, a social democratic party member held that the colonised peoples were on "different stages of development" and "colonial peoples, who have not yet reached a stage of development, socialism demands effective protection against oppression and exploitation, and the systematic education of these peoples towards independence."[687] The temporal setting thus also involved the construction of spatial settings in various stages of progress.

Positioning Sweden

Following these constructions of spatial and temporal settings, both the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives positioned Sweden within a set of **hierarchal categories**. Swedish identity was told as belonging to a capitalist group of states, to a European and "white" space, as well as to a collective of more distinct neutral and Nordic small states. Although these positions were largely shared across them, each hierarchal categorisation was told in ways that sometimes diverged between the foreign policy narratives. The same position, in other words, carried different meanings, marking Sweden within the former narrative as a state set apart from imperial dominance, while Sweden in the latter one became a nation caught up in it.

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[683] Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 1, p. 1, translated.
[684] Here the Marxist-revolutionary narrative constructed the opposite because the League only consolidated the dominance of imperial power, and the crisis moment were not marked as momentous, nor as distinct crises, but as parts of one never-ending crisis.
[685] Here the Marxist-revolutionary narrative's emphasis on time as stagnation did not differ between temporalities across different spatial settings. Instead both the European working-class and the colonised peoples were locked in the same system from which only revolution could lead to change.
[686] Backlund, S. 12 Nov. 1932. "Japan i blockad?" *Arbetet*, p. 8, translated.
[687] Åkerberg, H. Protocol National Congress of the Social Democratic Worker's Party 1932, p. 348f in ARAB [Swedish Labour Movement's Archives and Library], SAP [Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti], A 1: Kongressprotokoll med bilagor.

One of the more pronounced of these divergences concerned Sweden's positioning within a capitalist bloc of states. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative positioned Sweden firmly as belonging to a group defined by its opposition to the Soviet Union and the working-class. To be counted among this group was to share in their political and economic dominance, but also in their inferior moral standing. As was narrated in one editorial, this meant that Sweden was "involved in the policy of the People's League [and] made a plaything in the predatory policy of the imperialist powers."[688] The socialist-reformist narrative, by contrast, placed far less emphasis on this categorisation, and it seldom located Sweden firmly among the imperialist and capitalist group of states.

Additional positions, produced within both foreign policy narratives, was Sweden as a European and "white" state, albeit here the meaning attached to these positions still differed between them. For the socialist-reformist narrative Sweden's geographical and cultural position in Europe was narrated as Sweden belonging to more advanced and more progressed societies. This position was *not*, however, a source of Sweden's moral superiority because the narrative also presented it as collectively complicit in the subjugation of the colonised peoples. Belonging to this position was subsequently to have "blood on ones' hands".[689] The Marxist-revolutionary narrative instead connected Sweden's (Western) European belonging primarily to the capitalist bloc, and this position was filled with a similar condemnatory meaning as it was placed as standing against both colonised peoples and socialist states.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative instead emphasised the Swedish *working-class* and its belonging to a global, collective working-class position. Yet, even if Sweden (as a nation) was narrated as morally inferior for belonging to a capitalist and imperialist bloc, this narrative still encompassed a separation between the European working-class and the non-European working-class. Consider, for example, the following quote:

> It is no exaggeration to describe the French military incursion into the unarmed and peace-seeking Rhineland as an act of vandalism […] the wild Negro troops of the French massacred German workers en masse and murdered 13 of them. […] The shooting of the defenceless and fleeing people took place without any previous warning. Although the indignation not only in the US, but also in the other Entente states, especially England, was extremely great, the League of Nations did not lift a finger.[690]

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[688] Editorial, 31 Aug. 1935 "Sanktioner mot Italien" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated.
[689] Lindhagen, C. Protocol National Congress of the Social Democratic Worker's Party March 1932, p. 353f, ARAB, SAP, A1.
[690] Winberg, C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 12, translated.

Although this narration mentions the French occupation, it was related to the parallel Italian occupation of Corfu. The quote is alluding to the so-called "Black Horror on the Rhine" and the racist campaign accusing colonial soldiers of committing crimes against the "white" population.[691] The denunciation of the great powers' actions thus encompassed hierarchal consequences in the implied unthinkability that this would be allowed in a European and "white" space. Even while condemning colonial violence, this narrative thus reproduced a racial ordering as well.

The moral inferiority that Sweden gained through these positions were, however, redeemed by some of its additional ones. In the socialist-reformist narrative, the Nordics or Scandinavia was narrated as a space within Europe that was distinct for sharing a collective "humanitarian calling".[692] Sweden was thus separated from an immoral Europe by correspondingly being narrated as belonging to a group of states whose hands were clean of imperial oppression. As a motion submitted to the social democratic national congress held:

> Sweden – just as Norway and Denmark – belongs indisputably to the countries, who are being called. […] its reprieve from national entanglements of importance, its ancient freedom that everyone respects, its uninterrupted peace since 1815 are telling facts.[693]

Here Sweden was positioned amongst nations who were somewhat free of imperial collusions, and, as will be further discussed below, this was linked to Scandinavian social democracy specifically.

Another redemption could be found in Sweden's position as a small state, something that was constructed as the very basis for its detachment from the imperial system. During a parliamentary debate, Sweden's position as small, and therefore being able to speak truth to power, was narrated as follows:

> What is our calling in foreign policy? Is it to follow the great powers into the cold? They will, if they feel like it, sell every small state, when necessary, in order to be able to agree on their mutual annexation interests. […] Small states must acquire their own calling and bring to the world the significance of the power of truth and expose the situation.

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[691] For more on this, see: Wigger, I. 2017. *The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Intersections of Race, Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany.* Loughborough: Palgrave Macmillan.
[692] Motion, National Congress of the Social Democratic Worker's Party March 1932 No. 25, p. 241 ARAB, SAP, A1.
[693] Ibid.

> Cautiously, of course, and gradually at first, but in any case, they must be seized by such an intention. Circumstances call for the Nordic countries to take the lead.[694]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in contrast, refused this construction even if it also positioned Sweden as a small state. While Sweden did not command a core spatial setting dominated by imperial powers, it remained morally inferior by its participation in the League, regardless of size or lack of power.

Something that the Marxist-revolutionary narrative instead described as redeeming for Sweden was its positioning as a neutral nation. However, in a motion submitted to the *Riksdag* it was maintained that "Sweden is no longer a neutral country but is instead aligned with the bloc of states led by England."[695] A neutral position was, in both narratives, constructed as an extension of Sweden's (previous) refusal to partake in imperial wars (i.e. both narrated it as pardoning Sweden from a past imperial entanglement), but here the Marxist-revolutionary narrative regarded the neutral position as lost because the League membership had made Sweden an accomplice in an imperialst organisation and a part of a capitalist bloc.

7.2 Characters and portrayals

The socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives further included a set of main **characters**. The protagonists of the former narrative were the Scandinavian/Nordic small states, and especially their social democratic parties, as pioneers of a socialist peace vision. The latter narrative instead focused on the Swedish working-class as the one who alone could deliver peace. The antagonists, on the other hand, were shared across the foreign policy narratives: the imperialist great powers who acted via an antagonistic Council. A difference could be found in whether the narratives held these villains apart from the League or whether they regarded the entire organisation as a tool for their imperialist ambitions. The narrative was also populated by additional characters, including the victimised nations, the Soviet Union, and a set of domestic others. This section explores the portrayals of these characters, and concludes with how they contributed to the **self- and other-portrayals** of Sweden. In the socialist-reformist narrative, Sweden was portrayed as peaceful and anti-militaristic, and provided the roles of peace promoter and internal

[694] Lindhagen, C. FC 10 Apr. 1935 No. 24, p. 13f, translated.
[695] Flyg *et al*, Motion "om avslag å Kungl. Maj:ts förslag om anslag för gäldande av Sveriges andel i kostnaderna för Nationernas förbund" SC 1936 No. 307, p. 8f, translated.

critic. Its responsibility was to oppose and reform the dominant system. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative instead portrayed Sweden as a complicit and weak state, but as containing a working-class that was peace-loving. The Swedish nation was given the role of a non-participant, but also an oppositional/revolutionary role. Its main duty was to refuse co-responsibility, but in the Abyssinia issue narrative a secondary duty was found in anti-fascist opposition. These portrayals where also reproduced relationally by associated others (e.g. the Nordic small states or the Soviet Union), a set of differentiated but not antagonistic others (e.g. the victimised nations or the colonised peoples), and as standing in stark contrast to the imperial great powers.

Pioneers of socialist peace and the (Swedish) working-class

The two foreign policy narratives constructed Sweden, or rather a part of Sweden, as the main protagonist, but did so quite differently. On the one side, Sweden was narrated as critiquing imperial power and seeking a peaceful outcome to the crisis moments. On the other, Sweden as a state was narrated as enabling the imperialist motives underlying these crises. In the socialist-reformist narrative, Sweden was portrayed as a pioneer – as itself being an instrument – for advancing a socialist peace vision built on, above all, disarmament. In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, the (Swedish) working-class was made the hero, and told as the protagonist who could detach Sweden from its present entanglement with imperialism. Both foreign policy narratives notably constructed two versions of Sweden as either a state-character (including via its state representatives) or as a part of a (trans)national collective (e.g. the Swedish working-class, social democracy, or the labour movement).

For the socialist-reformist narrative, the main protagonist was nonetheless Sweden as a state-character. In the Corfu issue narrative, Sweden, including via portrayals of Hjalmar Branting, emerged as a significant lead. Sweden was narrated as opposing an aggressive and militaristic Italy, and as refusing to accept the complicity of the great powers in the Council. In the Mosul issue narrative, Sweden, including through narrations of Östen Undén, was likewise narrated as standing up to imperial interests when seeking a compromise resolution. Especially highlighted in these issue narratives was, however, Branting and Undén as being both Swedish and social democratic representatives. Consider, for example, the following quote from an editorial in *Arbetet*:

> Social democracy can be proud to see what an influence it has had in this crisis. Everywhere the socialist parties have spoken out forcefully in favour of referring the conflict to an international authority and have condemned Mussolini's conduct. […] In any event,

> it is the spirit of socialism that has emerged victorious here, and we are proud to note that one of our own, our party friend Branting, has shown himself in the League of Nations to be the right man to express the will of the working-class.[696]

This emphasis on social democratic Swedes was found in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narrative as well, albeit Sweden was more so narrated as acting alongside the Scandinavian/Nordic states. These protagonists were narrated as "courageously" working to transform the League, and here the narrative emphasised their efforts in pushing towards international disarmament.[697] This narration of both the link between the crises and disarmament, as well as of a Swedish/Scandinavian mission in this regard, can be found in an editorial which held:

> […] what Japan is now doing in Manchuria means, if it is not stopped, that militarism will triumph across the board. There will be no disarmament conference […] unless Japan's military is chased home. […] The rallying cry of the International to fight against imperialism in Japan has a historical significance […] This call from the International is addressed in a very special way to the Scandinavian working-class.[698]

However, alongside these narrations were the portrayal of some Scandinavians as failing to live up to the task. Another editorial in *Arbetet* maintained that the Norwegian Council member had poorly represented the Scandinavian collective by not standing up to Japanese aggressions in Manchuria:

> The defeat of the League of Nations this time has the good thing in it, that the Lord's chosen people can no longer sit on their high horses. I am speaking, so everyone understands, of the small peace-loving Scandinavian peoples, who through their representative in the Council, Greenland Minister Braaland, have managed to embarrass themselves more than any others in this affair. Ex-Excellency Löfgren's praise of Japan at a later stage did not improve matters – even if it was done in the interest of defending the League. Löfgren could just as easily have started to sing the praises of the bandits in Manchuria […].[699]

As the latter part of this quote further points to, the narrative also included portrayals of non-social democratic Swedes as failing to take decisive stances against the main antagonists.

These condemning narrations fully dominated in the Marxist-revolutionary narrative. In portrayals of Sweden as a state-character, it was rather told as

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[696] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.
[697] Vougt, A. 1 Feb. 1932. "Japan, Kina och konferensen" *Arbetet,* p. 4, translated.
[698] Backlund, S. 14 Nov. 1931 "Skarva skaftet" *Arbetet*, p. 8, translated.
[699] Backlund, S. 19 Jan. 1932 "Antillerna" *Arbetet,* p. 3, translated.

having made itself a co-conspirator to the great powers' imperial ambitions: by accepting a referral to the Conference with regards to Corfu and by actively participating in an outcome favouring an imperial power in the Mosul crisis. As one parliamentarian narrated during the latter crisis moment:

> […] a pastor during the time of Charles XII used the following as the opening line of his sermon: "Woe to the country whose king is a child." I believe that […] one could say: "Woe to the generation whose leading figures have so little contact with reality", as has been particularly evident here.[700]

The narrator referred to Sweden's involvement in the crisis, and held that its representatives were blind to a reality where those able to be "most assertive have their interests taken into account, completely regardless of […] the legal question."[701]

In the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives, Sweden was likewise implicated as a member of an international organisation that only served the comforts of the antagonists. In the former one, Sweden was, for example, accused of exporting arms to the imperial power:

> The war which Japan has now organised is directed not only against China but also against the Soviet Union, against the country where the working-class has taken power and where it has carried out a transformation of the relations of production. [...] Today the League of Nations does not intervene against Japan, but individual members of the League – and I believe also Sweden – intervene in favour of Japan by supplying war material. The armaments industry in a number of capitalist countries is now booming.[702]

As narrated here, Sweden was set up against, not only China as the victim, but also the portrayed working-class country of the Soviet Union. Capitalist Sweden was thereby made an antagonist in this issue narrative, and its own armaments industry was told as benefitting from the war.[703] The Abyssinia issue narratives were complicated, however, as Sweden was both told as partaking in warlike measures through the sanctions and as taking an oppositional stance against fascism. This tension is further discussed in section 7.3.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative thus underscored the working-class as the main protagonist of each issue narrative, and portrayals of Sweden as a nation were often connected to this collective character. The narrated Swedish

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[700] Winberg, C. FC 24 Mar. 1926 No. 22, p. 26, translated.
[701] Ibid.
[702] Hagberg, H. SC 1 Mar. 1933 No. 17, p. 15f, translated.
[703] According to historian Ingemar Ottosson, the parliamentarian was wrong, instead Swedish arms were sold to China. See Ottosson 2021:48.

we in all the issue narratives was the workers. Although the (Swedish) working-class did not drive the crisis moments forward, they emerged as the ones being, in the end, exposed or victimised by them, while also being narrated as the sole solution. A parliamentarian held:

> […] since the League is primarily a collection of capitalist states, it can never be an effective mean of preventing war. The only guarantee that the struggle against war will be carried out effectively is that the international working-class rises against the warmongers on a united front in unified actions.[704]

At the same time, the (Swedish) working-class was narrated as subjugated. Another parliamentarian asked "what exactly is the League? […] what are its effects on the workers and peasants, the oppressed peoples? […] [it is] a cooperation which will entail further oppression of the proletariat in Europe and among the colonial peoples."[705] The narrative thus emphasised how its main protagonist had been "placed under the boot", but it was not without agency or power. A propaganda poster from the Central Organisation for Swedish workers held:

> […]the working-class is still the only social class whose interests are decidedly hostile to any warlike clash between peoples. […] The working-class is consequently the only power that can be counted on to actively combat war. The working-class has the organisational power to prevent war if it only has the will to do so.[706]

Finally, the Marxist-revolutionary narrative also accentuated the international working-class, even within state characters that were told as the main antagonists (e.g. Italian workers versus Mussolini's regime). The main protagonist of the narrative was consequently not kept within the borders of Sweden, but expanded beyond territorial boundaries. Consider, for example, the following quote from an editorial in *Arbetaren*:

> Should the Swedish working-class simply submit to the decisions of the capitalist governments in such cases? [...] Our sympathies are undoubtedly on the side of China [...] It cannot be a task of the Swedish working-class, or the working-class of any other country, to sacrifice life and blood for the retention of the Chinese proletariat under Chinese state and capitalism […] On the other hand, if a war of aggression had been waged by a

[704] Hagberg, H. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 40, translated.
[705] Herou, J.V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 37, translated.
[706] Propaganda from the Central Organisation for Swedish Workers, 1 Aug. 1932. "Kämpa mot kriget! Störta kapitalismen!" in *Arbetaren*, p. 4, translated.

> capitalist Japan against a socialist China, then conditions would have been different for the international working-class.[707]

Here the Swedish working-class is connected to an international working-class, with sympathies extended to the Chinese proletariat. However, it also encompassed the divide between capitalist and socialist states, with support from the working-class only given to the latter. As has been discussed above, the Marxist-revolutionary narrative also encompassed narrations creating a hierarchal order been the European/"white" working-class, and the non-European/non-"white" working-class, even if sympathy was frequently given to the "rights of the coloured peoples" and "patriotic race biology" condemned.[708]

The imperialist great powers and the League as their tool

The two foreign policy narratives had some of their more distinct similarities in who the main antagonists were and how they were portrayed. Both of them cast capitalism and imperialism as, not only encompassing the core spatial setting, but as being direct threats on their own. Especially for the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, were Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia understood as parts of a continuous crisis originating from capitalism, rather than as discrete crises. This meant that capitalism and/or imperialism was more than a setting, it was the primary threat to both a socialist peace vision and the liberation of the working-class. In connection to this narration of a main threat, however, the foreign policy narratives emphasised the capitalist and imperialist great powers as distinct state antagonists.

In the Corfu and Abyssinia issue narratives, for both foreign policy narratives, Italy was constructed as the primary state antagonist. For the Corfu case, Italy was told as driven by imperial conquest and militarism, and, through portrayals of Mussolini, it was narrated as "authoritarian", "arrogant", and a "fascist adventurer".[709] For Abyssinia, Italy was portrayed as "barbaric" and as an "imperialist thief", but also as "over-extended".[710] A parliamentarian, for

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[707] Editorial, 26 Feb. 1932 "Skall Sverige sända trupper till Kina?" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated (cursive in original text).
[708] Nerman, T. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 43ff.
[709] See, for example: Severin, F. 5 Sep. 1923. "Internationell anda och organisation" *Arbetaren,* p. 3; Winberg, C. SC 12 Mar. 1924 No. 19, p. 23ff.
[710] See, for example: Vougt, A. 18 Jul. 1935. "Om Folkförbundet?" *Arbetet,* p. 4; Editorial, 5 Nov. 1935 "Italien i hopplöst läge" *Arbetet,* p. 4; Speech by Harberg, H. 10 Sep. 1935. "Till kamp mot kriget!" in *Norrskensflamman,* p. 3; Editorial, 5 Oct. 1935. "Abessinien och kolonialpolitiken" *Norrskensflamman,* p. 3; Nerman, T. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 37f. The latter

example, held that "We have had the Corfu adventure […] and now the Abyssinia adventure. […] Abyssinia will probably be divided and Italy's 'need' for colonies will be satisfied."[711]

In the Manchuria issue narratives of both foreign policy narratives, Japan was narrated as the main state antagonist. It was consistently portrayed through a vocabulary centred around militarism and imperial aggression. Japan was portrayed as "terrorising the Far East" and as acting "inhuman", and was labelled as the "Prussia of Asia" whose military clique had seized control to wage their "masked war" and "plunder" of China.[712] A press release from the social democratic party held that "the Japanese imperialists' extreme plans become all the clearer, and the League has proven itself powerless in raising obstacles against them."[713]

The Japanese delegation's statements in Geneva were additionally told as "evasions" and a direct "challenge towards world opinion", albeit these portrayals of Japan within the League setting were mostly told in the socialist-reformist narrative.[714] The Marxist-revolutionary narrative contrarily stressed the front of Japan alongside the European great powers, and, as narrated in an editorial in *Norrskensflamman*, it was told as truly targeting the Soviet Union:

> Japanese imperialism in the Far East seems to have been given a free hand for the time being against China and against the Soviet Union. For Japan's advance is not directed only against China [...] but instead it was necessary to make an advance against the Soviet-Chinese railway [...] Now the troops of imperialist Japan are marching against the Soviet Union. Is it their intention to begin the struggle of capitalism against Bolshevism, which every political adventurer in all capitalist countries has dreamed of for years?[715]

Japan was thus connected, in this foreign policy narrative, to Britain and France who were narrated as comparable villains who only intervened when it served their own interests. Another editorial held:

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portrayals were either connected to narrations of Italy as morally frail or as over-extended due to the sanctions.

[711] Ström, F. 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 48, translated.

[712] See, for example: Backlund, S. 14 Nov. 1931 "Skarva skaftet" *Arbetet*, p. 8; Editorial, 31 Mar. 1932 "Kampen mot kriget" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3; Editorial, 28 May 1932 "Det hotande kriget" *Arbetaren*, p. 3.

[713] Press statement, Feb. 1933 "Till arbetare i hela världen!" ARAB, SAP, B 6: Pressmeddelanden från partiets informationsbyrå (PIA).

[714] See: Vougt, A. 1 Feb. 1932. "Japan, Kina och konferensen" *Arbetet*, p. 4; Editorial, 2 Feb. 1932 "Branden i öster" *Arbetet*, p. 9; Article, 22 Feb. 1932 "Politisk urladdning" *Arbetet*, p. 9.

[715] Editorial, 7 Oct. 1931. "Den gamla världen störtar samman…" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.

> […] suddenly the great powers found this imperative command to intervene […] The billions and the profits were in danger. Now England suddenly remembered the Covenant.[716] France was even accused of being "behind Japan's attack on China.[717]

In the socialist-reformist narrative, Japan was not connected to specific European states, but, as one editor narrated: "behind the Japanese attack on Shanghai one can trace the real enemies […] a conscious militaristic clique that more or less has its equivalent in all countries."[718]

Britain and France were also made key antagonists alongside Italy in the issue narratives on the Abyssinia crisis. An editorial in *Arbetaren* stated:

> Abyssinia will ultimately, through the League's participation, be transformed into a colony for the exploitation of European capitalism […] Is there not a collusion between France and Italy? Yes, is it not possible that even England has given its tacit approval to such a direction of events?[719]

Although these portrayals were the most prevalent in the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, portrayals of Britain and France in the socialist-reformist narrative also constructed them as complicit characters in all issue narrative, especially when portrayed as failing to back the League for their own gains.[720]

At the same time, the latter narrative did not as harshly portray Britain, or even British imperialism, as it did in the narrations of Italian or Japanese imperialist aggressions. Consider, for example, how another editorial in *Arbetet* instead constructed the need for "organic development" and held that "parts of the [British] empire, without rebellion, have […] freed themselves in a completely organic way. […] where England has recently been extremely active in implementing decisions made by the League on social reforms."[721] Although Britain was frequently portrayed as an imperial power, the narrative also described how it allowed for social reforms that moved the colonies toward future possibilities for self-determination (especially via the British Labour Party).

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[716] Editorial, 8 Feb. 1932. "Makt och stormaktspolitik" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated.
[717] Kilbom, K. SC 26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 29, translated.
[718] Vougt, A. 1 Feb. 1932. "Japan, Kina och konferensen" *Arbetet,* p. 4, translated.
[719] Editorial, 7 Oct. 1935 "Fortsatt folkförbundshumburg" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated.
[720] See, for example: Lindhagen, C. FC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 5.
[721] Backlund, S. 22 Nov. 1935. "Nationernas förbund ryggraden i brittiska världsrikets politik" *Arbetet,* p. 7, translated. See also: Backlund, S. 8 May 1936. "Ett genombrott" *Arbetet,* p. 9. This narration of the British "organically" moving, for example, India towards "full emancipation" emphasised the British Labour Party's centrality in moving social reforms in the colonies forward.

A clear exception to this was, however, found in the Mosul issue narrative where Britain was narrated as misusing the League for its selfish imperialist motives.[722] An editorial, for instance, maintained that the British orchestrated both the Council's work and events on the ground in Mosul to further their own colonial interests:

> […] there have been hardly any attempts to present the Council's decision in the Mosul conflict as a legal solution. [...] However, a new legal motive has been introduced into the conflict in recent days. The old stories of Turkish abuses against Christians have resurfaced [...] But the Council knows well that for years the English have used their skilled stage managers [...] to arrange clashes between Turks and Christians at regular intervals and precisely on occasions when there has been a need to create an opinion against the Turks.[723]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative likewise portrayed Britain as having an "appetite for oil", as clinging to its trade route to India, and as exposing the "English capitalism's old familiar robber's face".[724] A parliamentarian narrated the whole ordeal as "imperialism fighting over oil and coal", and stated that:

> Mosul was Turkish, purely Turkish territory, but there were rich oil sources there, and England wanted these. England got them by annexing Mosul to Iraq […] England is stronger than Turkey [...] these, gentlemen, are fairly simple rules of law. If Turkey does not bow down, then Turkey is the aggressor, and the plunderer of Turkish territory receives help from all the powers affiliated to the League of Nations.[725]

This narrative was, once again, far more critical of British imperialism compared to the socialist-reformist one. The two foreign policy narratives shared more antagonistic portrayals of France however, as well as of the great powers when portrayed as a collective.[726] Here they also cast the Council as an explicit antagonist, portraying it as ultimately representing great power interests. Yet,

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[722] See, for example: Article, 17 Dec. 1925 "Chamberlain söker att i rådet försköna innebörden av beslutet om gränsdelningen i Mosul" *Arbetet*, p. 1; Editorial, 21 Dec. 1925 "En dunkel punkt" *Arbetet*, p. 3.
[723] Editorial, 17 Dec. 1925 "Prestigepolitik" *Arbetet*, p. 3, translated.
[724] Editorial, 13 Aug. 1925 "Franska och engelska imperialismens bekymmer" *Arbetaren*, p. 4. See also: Editorial, 9 Sep. 1925 "Nationernas förbund just nu och arbetarklassen" *Arbetaren*, p. 3; Editorial, 1 Dec. 1925 "Arbetareklassen och Locarno II" *Arbetaren*, p. 4; Editorial, 28 Dec. 1925 "Jordäganderättens problem" *Arbetaren*, p. 3.
[725] Herou, V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 38, translated.
[726] Portrayals of France included connecting the crisis moments to, for instance, France's occupation of Ruhr or its colonial rule (e.g. in the Mosul issue narratives references were made to how the French and Spanish beat down the ongoing rebellion in Morocoo). See, for example: Campaign article, 28 Sep. 1925 "Förankra partiet hos massorna!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 5.

they diverged on whether the Council was a separate character from the League or not. On the one side, the socialist-reformist narrative constructed the Council as acting separately from, and even antagonistically towards, the League.[727] It nonetheless included a tension here since the narrative protagonists sometimes acted within the Council, but, as was narrated in an editorial on the Mosul crisis, their work therein remained hampered:

> […] we do not for a moment underestimate the difficulties Mr. Undén in the Council had to struggle against in his effort to reach a more just solution. Unfortunately, the representatives of the small powers in the large Council are not so slightly handicapped. The new diplomacy is the same as the old one except that economic and political interests never cease to cast their shadows into the negotiating room where the cause of justice is raised.[728]

The Council and its great powers were subsequently narrated as the main enemy of a socialist peace, but the narrative did not villainise the League. Even if the League was portrayed as an "imperfect, malnourished wartime child", it was still narrated as offering a potential path towards that vision.[729] But, as a parliamentarian argued, "peace cannot be secured as long as we do not have a socialist world economy and a league of socialist states."[730]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in contrast, made no difference between the Council and the League. The organisation was, throughout all issue narratives, portrayed as the great powers' "dictatorship" or "interest organisation", and as therefore representing a "crude tool of the Entente imperialism" while remaining a "dead foetus", an "undisguised parody", or an "institution for pseudo-pacifist deception of the people".[731] As will be further addressed in the next section, the Abyssinia issue narrative encompassed narrations of the League as having some instrumental advantages in the fight against fascism, but as a character it broadly remained a "humbug" and a "imperialist structure" that only created new wars and sustained oppression.[732]

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[727] See, for example: Vougt, A. 1 Feb. 1932. "Japan, Kina och konferensen" *Arbetet*, p. 4; Backlund, S. 12 Nov. 1932. "Japan i blockad?" *Arbetet*, p. 8.
[728] Editorial, 21 Dec. 1925. "En dunkel punkt" *Arbetet*, p. 3, translated.
[729] Lindhagen, C. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 113, translated.
[730] Ström, F. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 106f, translated. See also: Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen" *Arbetet*, p. 1.
[731] See: Winberg, C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 3; Editorial, 7 Oct. 1931. "Den gamla världen störtar samman…" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3; Editorial, 26 Nov. 1931 "Endast sovjetväldet kan rädda Kina!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3.
[732] See: Nerman, T. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 43ff; Flyg, N. SC 4 Mar. 1936 No. 14, p. 25.

Victims, internal threats, and the true league of nations

In addition to the main protagonists and antagonists, both foreign policy narratives constructed a number of additional characters. First of all, these additional portrayals included the victims: Greece, China, Türkiye, and Abyssinia. These characters were primarily cast as victims enduring imperial and capitalist violence, but were simultaneously told as standing up against the same. They were consequently another similarity between the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, but the former of the two more so emphasised them as victimised *nations*, while the latter rather stressed the violence towards the working-class peoples in them.

In the Corfu issue narratives, Greece was told as the evident victim of both Italian aggressions on the island and of the great powers' oppressions within the context of the Council and the Conference. It was, for example, told as having to "bow to violence" because of the League's "uselessness" as "a guardian of justice and guarantor of peace".[733] Greece was thus predominantly defined by the acts of Italy and the League. As an editorial in *Arbetet* narrated: "[Mussolini] is effectively telling these small Balkan states to remember that he, Mussolini, rules a first-rate power – one to which it is wise to submit in advance, for he has the might to crush these insignificant entities!"[734]

In the Manchuria issue narratives, China emerged as another victim of Japanese imperialism and the complicity of the European great powers. However, the Marxist-revolutionary narrative also cast part of China as the "lackey of imperialism" and as a "traitorous" ruling class. This was narrated in an editorial in *Norrskensflamman* which held that "the imperialists of the European countries already take it for granted that Japan will remain in Manchuria. Kuomintang will once again have to play the role of imperialist agent."[735] A later editorial further told that "Chiang Kai-shek will blindly obey imperialist orders. [...] Even at this stage it is clear what a traitorous role the Kuomintang plays."[736] Instead, it was the "Chinese Soviets" or the Chinese masses that were portrayed as both the victims and the carriers of China's liberation.

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[733] Winberg,C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 16ff, translated. See also: Spångberg Motion SC 1924 No. 136.
[734] Jensen, 6 Sep. 1923 "Begår folkförbundet självmord?" *Arbetaren*, p. 4, translated.
[735] Editorial, 26 Nov. 1931 "Endast sovjetväldet kan rädda Kina!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.
[736] Editorial, 11 Dec. 1931 "Kampen för Kinas delning" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated. See also: Editorial, 30 Jul. 1932 "Krossa imperialismens interventionsplaner!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3. The Kuomintang was the ruling party on mainland China at the time, and Chiang Kai-shek was the head of the National Government of the Republic of China, and was on the opposing side of the Chinese communists in the Chinese Civil War. See: Zeng, J. 2025. "KMT-

In the Abyssinia issue narratives, Ethiopia was cast as a victim of Italy's quest to restore a Roman Empire, and it was narrated as betrayed by the League in the socialist-reformist narrative. This narrative portrayed Ethiopia as having appealed to the organisation, but as nonetheless becoming "nothing but a pawn" in imperial competitions since the League would never allow a "small, and moreover, coloured" state to triumph over the "white great power".[737] The Marxist-revolutionary narrative predominantly portrayed the Abyssinian people as the ally of the Italian proletariats' struggle against fascism, and narrated its "coloured masses" as suffering under imperial violence.[738] However, also in these issue narratives was Ethiopia mostly defined by the acts of the antagonists. As a parliamentarian narrated:

> I feel it as a duty of conscience to be able to pronounce it here – without any sympathy for the rulers of Abyssinia – as a self-evident right, that Abyssinia as an attacked state will receive its full victory and every single Italian will be thrown out of the country. […] Mussolini will fall on his band of robbers and […] the Italian people will rise up in mutiny and revolution. Fascism and Nazism have historically only one great task; and we are beginning to see it now: to weld the peoples together for new wars. Therefore, these movements are a criminal evil, a barbarity, which must be fought, but it is not fought by other imperialist states, […] but only by the Italian working-class and the international working-class.[739]

Here Ethiopia is only portrayed as an "attacked state", and albeit sympathy is given to the plight of its people (not its rulers), agency to fight back against fascism is given to the Italian and international working-class, not Ethiopia.

There were, however, a few exceptions to this narrated in a fraction of specific texts reproducing the socialist-reformist narrative during the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments. In these stories, China and Ethiopia were given future agency as narrators foresaw the "rise of the coloured peoples".[740] Consider, for example, the following words spoken in the *Riksdag:*

> Now, it is true, the white race has succeeded in destroying Abyssinia, the only colored kingdom in Africa, independent for 3,000 years. The Abyssinians will of course one day become free again. Now that Italy is giving them schools of instruction and technical

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CPC Competition on Chinese National Identity Building: An Analysis of Contents and Discourses of Central Daily News, Xinhua Daily and Liberation Daily Editorials During Chinese Civil War" *Sage Open* 15(2).

[737] Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 1, p. 6f; Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 413, p. 3.

[738] Flyg, N. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 26f, translated.

[739] Nerman, T. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 43ff.

[740] Motion, National Congress of the Social Democratic Worker's Party March 1932 No. 28, p. 246, ARAB, SAP, A1.

> training and, as has been said in the press, is training a native army, in time the Abyssinians will also throw off Italian domination, unless freedom is voluntarily restored to the now defeated. This is how it always happens in history.[741]

These stories portrayed the "coloured races" as having the capacity to turn against their "white rulers" and therefore an "organic development" where their freedom was gradually restored was necessary to avoid future race wars.

In addition to these more clearly characterised victims, Türkiye emerged as something in-between a victim and an adversary in the Mosul issue narratives. The socialist-reformist narrative cast this character as obstructing its vision for the League by not submitting, and held that "Türkiye's refusal to accept the arbitration award concealed a threat of armed resistance."[742]At the same time, it cast Türkiye as the victim because of how British imperial interests had been allowed to steer and deligitimise the process of the League.[743] The Marxist-revolutionary narrative similarly portrayed Türkiye mainly as Britain's counterpart and an object of its imperial strategy.

All these narrated victims were subsequently mostly told as acted *upon* – as suffering under the narration of capitalist and imperialist violence. For the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, it was not the nations or their rules that were victims, but the masses or the working-class in them.[744] Still, narrations rarely provided local populations with portrayals beyond being fought *over*. Even as they were told a part of a coming revolution, they were never speaking subjects. Moreover, in the Corfu issue narrative, for example, France's conduct in the Saar was paralleled with Italy's treatment towards Greece, and it was told as the creation of "a slave colony […] an African colony in the middle of Europe".[745] This illustrates that the narrative found its main foe in capitalism and its main victim (and protagonist) in the European working-class. The liberation of the colonies was important but secondary, and racial differentiations were used to drive home the point of the horrible treatment of "white" workers.

The victimised nation-characters were also cast as threats to its own working-class, and, in the Manchuria issue narrative, as adversaries of Soviet China

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[741] Lindhagen, C. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 18, translated.
[742] Editorial, 21 Dec. 1925 "En dunkel punkt" *Arbetet,* p. 3, translated.
[743] See, for example: Article, 10 Dec. 1925 "Ministerrådet i Angora förklarar skiljedom oantagbar" *Arbetet*, p. 1; Editorial, 17 Dec. 1925 "Prestigepolitik" *Arbetet,* p. 3.
[744] In several instances the governments and rulers of each victimised nation, from the central Chinese government to the Emperor of Abyssinia (notably less so Athens), were also antagonistically portrayed as they were told as exploiting their own workers.
[745] Winberg, C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 14, translated.

and, by extension, the Soviet Union. The latter character was often portrayed as a champion standing in opposition to oppression, and a parliamentarian held that during one of the crisis moments:

> […] the Soviet Union demonstrated a fundamentally different policy from the capitalist states in the League of Nations. It has not been content with interpreting legal clauses, but has demanded equal rights for Abyssinia. When the great powers sought to dismember Abyssinia, it has stood up for the demand for Abyssinian state independence. It has demanded effective sanctions. It is therefore no exaggeration, when I say, that with the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations, international law and peace have gained a powerful representative in it.[746]

While the Soviet Union was given a central role in the Abyssinia issue narrative, it was often distanced from the conflicts in the other issue narratives. Yet, here its non-participation marked it as the preferable alternative to the imperial institution in Geneva. The Soviet Union did not play a key role in the socialist-reformist narrative, but, as was narrated in an editorial in *Arbetet*: "Two names shine in our memory: Lenin in the East, Wilson in the West. The dynamite of their thoughts blew up the world of empire […] Replacing the organisation of empire, replacing the right of power."[747] The Soviet Union was thus not constructed as an antagonistic other, but as part of potential progression.

Finally, in addition to the construction of main antagonists, both foreign policy narratives also constructed additional domestic antagonists. One such character was the socialist-reformist narrative's narration of a "militaristic club" which was portrayed as advocating war and the export of arms, and thus threatening a socialist vision of peace and disarmament, also in Sweden.[748] An editorial in *Arbetet*, for instance, narrated the Manchuria crisis moment as connected to Swedish militarism and fascism:

> Don't you know that the militarist junta that is now ravaging northern China is a gang related to our own Östermalm-fascists who came over from Tokyo under protests from the civilian government. […] There is a current in the West that meets these Japanese war dreams. That current comes from those who hate peace and who now hope in their hearts that Manchuria will become the grave of the League and pacifism. [...] How do you think it would go if our Swedish people reacted to our own fascist drums [...] The Munck corps is exactly the same kind of people as those who are now threatening the peace and order of the world from Tokyo.[749]

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[746] Hagberg, H. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 35f, translated.
[747] Backlund, S. 8 May 1936. "Ett genombrott" *Arbetet*, p. 9, translated.
[748] See, for example: Vougt, A. 1 Feb. 1932. "Japan, Kina och konferensen" *Arbetet*, p. 4.
[749] Backlund, S. 14 Nov. 1931 "Skarva skaftet" *Arbetet*, p. 8, translated. The editor connected events in Manchuria to recent events in Sweden around the so-called "Munck corps" which was

However, the socialist-reformist additionally cast Swedish communists as threatening others, and described socialist revolutionaries in Sweden as anti-democratic.[750] The Marxist-revolutionary narrative correspondingly portrayed social democracy as a "socialist fascism" that had made socialism so permeated by "bourgeoisie violence" that it had become "inhumane".[751] In other words, even if these two foreign policy narratives shared a core spatial setting and portrayed the main antagonists similarly, narrators often portrayed each other as domestic enemies to either a socialist peace or the working-class revolution.

Portraying Sweden

The socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives reproduced Sweden as a main character across all issue narratives. A shared move involved the construction of separate versions of Sweden as a national character, but also as being represented by a particular set of social democratic representatives, as well as containing more specific collectives with ties beyond the nation's own borders. Regarding Swedish **traits**, the socialist-reformist narrative endowed Sweden with traits like "courageous", "humanitarian", and "peaceful".[752] It was especially portrayed as being anti-militaristic and anti-imperialistic. These traits were exercised also within the setting of the League, where the Swedish representatives (particularly the social democratic ones) were portrayed as acting "honourably" when seeking to better the organisation.[753] Yet, Sweden was also told as a character that was "surrendering" to the antagonists, and "the Swedish representatives in Geneva have there smoked peace pipes in the best sense together with the two great, leading powers."[754]

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a secret military group in Sweden which was founded to protect Sweden against domestic threats, predominantly left-wing radicals. See: Lodenius, A. 2020. "Framväxten av högerextremismen i Sverige" in Ranstorp, M. – Ahlin, F. (eds.) *Från Nordiska motståndsrörelsen till alternativhögern: En studie om den svenska radikalnationalistiska miljön.* Stockholm: Swedish Defence University.

[750] See, for example: Editorial, 23 Sep. 1931 "Bolsjevikerna och världskrisen" *Arbetet*, p. 4;

[751] See, for example: Winberg, C. FC 12 Mar. 1924 No. 19, p. 24ff; Herou, V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 39; Hagberg, H. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 40; Nerman T. FC 1 Apr. 1936 No. 21, p. 44f; Flyg, N. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 22.

[752] See, for example: Lindhagen, C. Motion "angående vissa ändringar i akten om nationernas förbund", FC 1924 No. 146, p. 1ff; Editorial in *Ny Tid*, cited 2 Feb. 1932 in *Arbetet*, p. 2.

[753] See: Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under den internationella krisen" *Arbetet*, p. 1.

[754] Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 413, p. 6f, translated. The positive traits of Sweden as peaceful and anti-militaristic were consequently accompanied by negative portrayals, but these narrations also marked this as an un-Swedish way of being in the world.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative provided Sweden, as a state character, with almost the reversed traits. Sweden was portrayed through its "complicity" and "weakness", and it was especially characterised by its accommodation of imperial power.[755] One parliamentarian, for example, narrated Sweden's actions during the Abyssinia crisis moment as follows:

> So those gentlemen met in Paris, and what proposal was it that was then put on the table? Yes, a proposal for the division of Abyssinia. Mussolini was asked why he did not want to take such and such a piece, such and such a province […] This was done on behalf of the League of Nations. […] There was no reservation from Sweden, no protest, no invocation of the statutes.[756]

Sweden was thus told as co-responsible and delusional, and its leaders were portrayed as "utopians who are as benevolent and pure-hearted as they are alienated from reality."[757] The honourable and courageous traits were, however, still given to the Swedish working-class. This meant that, much like the socialist-reformist narrative also constructed Swedish representatives as sometimes acting against fundamental Swedish ways of being, the Swedish people did not share traits with its corrupted or delusional elites.

The social-reformist narrative furthermore constructed a set of Swedish **roles**. The main role for Sweden was to be a promoter of socialist peace, and, especially so, international disarmament. This implied a secondary role as a spokesperson for this vision within the context of the League specifically, as well as to be the one who would convert the League's more deplorable sides towards an organisation that could further the narrative's peace vision.[758] Sweden was, alongside the Scandinavian/Nordic states and other social democratic governments, thus narrated as playing the role of internal critic and reformist.[759] As a parliamentarian narrated, "the small states, and especially the Nordic states, must come together for a constructive peace plan, including the transformation of the League into ideas and organisation."[760]

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[755] See, for example: Editorial, 26 Feb. 1932 "Skall Sverige sända trupper till Kina?" *Arbetaren,* p. 3; Nerman, T. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 43ff; Hagberg, H. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 39.
[756] Flyg, N. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 55f, translated.
[757] Winberg, C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 18, translated.
[758] Lindhagen, C. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 113; Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 413, p. 12ff.
[759] Backlund, S. 18 Sep. 1935. "Internationalens förnyelse" *Arbetet,* p. 12 Backlund, 22 Backlund, 22 Nov. 1935. "Nationernas förbund ryggraden i brittiska världsrikets politik" *Arbetet,* p. 7.
[760] Lindhagen, C. FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 17, translated.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative assigned Sweden with only one worthy role: the non-participant. Sweden's suggested peace-role was removed from the nation entirely, and relocated to the working-class whose main instrument to achieve peace was class action. Another parliamentarian held that:

> We cannot hope for any serious international action by the capitalist states, which themselves have interests in wars and armaments, phenomena which are completely intertwined with the life of these states, precisely because of this the only possibility lies in international class action. […] the working masses of all countries in a broad sense are the only great factors of peace.[761]

However, the Abyssinia issue narrative upset this non-participatory or revolutionary role, causing contestation within the narrative. Some narrators re-cast Sweden with a supporting role, whereas others still claimed that the only relevant part Sweden could play within the context of the League was to remove itself from it entirely by reassuming its role as a neutral state again.

In relation to these roles, Sweden was also portrayed with a set of **responsibilities**. The socialist-reformist narrative provided Sweden with a dual duty in both sustaining the League and reforming it, and within this, the Swedish people was especially tasked with the responsibility of putting pressure on their representatives in Geneva.[762] Therein Sweden's tasks included, beyond calls for international disarmament, for instance, a Swedish/Nordic mission of contributing to "balance, cooperation, and justice" between the "coloured and white races".[763] Sweden was also narrated as having a responsibility in ensuring that the League would eventually become a true peace organisation by, for example, stripping it of its coercive articles. Sweden subsequently did *not* have an obligation to participate in the "violent methods of sanctions", but instead had a duty to refuse any acts that would "provoke new wars, would aggravate a threatening conflict and would make disarmament impossible."[764]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative gave more weight to Sweden's *non*-responsibilities. Its membership in the League was told as providing Sweden with harmful war-obligations that bound Sweden to an "attack front" aimed at both the Soviet Union and the colonised peoples.[765] Against this, the narrative constructed a negative responsibility, namely to discharge Sweden of any co-

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[761] Nerman, T. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 110, translated.
[762] See, for example: Backlund, S. 4 Dec. 1931. "Spansk mänsklighet och japansk omänsklighet" *Arbetet*, p. 8.
[763] Lindhagen, C. FC 27 Feb. 1935 No. 12, p. 9, translated.
[764] Ström, F. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 106, translated. See also: Lindhagen, FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 112: Lindhagen, 28 Apr. 1936 No. 27, p. 44.
[765] See,: Herou, V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 39; Hagberg, H. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 35f.

conspiracy. As one parliamentarian narrated, "the question is simply that it is now time for us today to understand our duty to withdraw from this league, this band of robbers […] this organisation of great power interests."[766] The Swedish working-class, on the other hand, had "the duty to wage revolutionary struggle against the governments of various imperialist states."[767] As mentioned, the Abyssinia crisis fractured this as divergent narrations emerged with some turning towards a new responsibility to participate in the League's and the Soviet Union's joint struggle against fascism.[768]

These traits, roles, and (non-)responsibilities were also strengthened in the relational portrayals of Sweden's others. Sweden was either distinguished from, or damagingly linked to, the antagonistic others (including domestic ones). As Italy, Japan, Britain, France and the Council were portrayed through vocabularies of imperial aggression, militarism, and great power collusion, the socialist-reformist narrative cast Sweden as the main challenger of the same. Sweden's peacefulness, anti-militarism, honour, and courage thus gained further meaning by standing in stark contrast to these antagonistic others. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative told the reverse tale. Since Sweden was placed in association with the antagonistic imperial and capitalist bloc, Sweden gained its more undesirable qualities through this linking.

Sweden was also, in the socialist-reformist narrative, associated with the Scandinavian/Nordic small states who were portrayed as sharing Sweden's own traits, roles, and responsibilities. However, the issue narratives also encompassed portrayals of these states as betraying their key roles and responsibilities, much like non-social democratic Swedish representatives sometimes were. The main association was thereby found more so in Nordic social democracy than in a Nordic state-collective *per s*e. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative rather associated the Swedish working-class with its counterparts in other nations (an emphasis was not made on a Nordic working-class), as well as with the Soviet Union. Sweden's *present* identity was in that way linked to the wrong side of the working-class' constitutive other when its own elites were connected to the antagonists. However, Sweden's *true* or *future* identity could be returned to if Sweden instead chose to distance itself from that bloc.

Finally, the socialist-reformist narrative also constructed Sweden in relation to different, but not antagonistic, others in the portrayals of the victimised nations and peoples. Although European small state victimhood was used to

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[766] Flyg, N. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 60f, translated.
[767] Kilbom, K. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 53, translated.
[768] See: Kilbom, K. SC 8 May 1936 No. 31, p. 11f; Hagberg, H. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 38f.

draw associations to colonised victimhood, Sweden was made different by being a nation that was portrayed as a protagonist vis-à-vis nations that were less active characters across the issue narratives. Difference was additionally told in the construction of, for example, Sweden as a European or "white" nation, and although this was narrated as making Sweden partially guilty in oppression, the narrations still provided Sweden with more agency. Here the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, as discussed above, also included racialised differentiations between "white" workers as victims of capitalism and the coloured peoples as victims of imperialism, and an ordering was made between them.

7.3 Emplotments and programmes

This section turns to the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives' **emplotment** and the connecting of events into pasts, presents, and futures. Across the two foreign policy narratives, the past was narrated as a constant state of war rooted in capitalism and imperialism. The present(s) were told as a sequence of trails that ended in the League's defeat, or as a growing body of evidence that confirmed the League as already void. The future(s) were constructed between reform and revolution; between a socialist peace that might still be achieved with or without the League, or the eventual collapse of a capitalist institution and the revolution of the working-class. This section further explores how these emplotments also connected to certain **programmes** for Sweden. In the socialist-reformist narrative, because capitalism and imperialism produced war and armament, and any humanitarian state carried an obligation to resist (reasons), Sweden was to pursue a "socialist peace vision" and reform the League into an instrument for that vision (objectives), by participating in the League's transformation, including by critiquing any misuses (actions). In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, because the same order generated oppression and Sweden was made complicit in it (reasons), Sweden was to seek the definitive end of capitalism and imperialism (objectives), by withdrawing from the League and returning to neutrality, while the Swedish masses were called to revolution (actions). However, these actions were told with some tensions after the Soviet Union's League entry in 1934.

The past as a constant state of war

In both foreign policy narratives, the most dominant past was 1914 and the world war. In a world dominated by capitalism and imperialism, the world war was told as having been inevitable. The foreign policy narratives thus understood the core spatial setting as being in a state of more or less constant conflict, taking the form of both imperial competitions between great powers, as well as in the never-ending violence committed against the colonised and the workers. A propaganda poster published in *Arbetaren* held that:

> When we look back at the time since the outbreak of the world war, the war that was to end all wars, the war that was to guarantee martyred humanity permanent peace, it must be stated that the world is further from this goal than ever. [...] The economic conflicts of interest, which lie as the essential driving force behind all wars, are becoming more acute every day. This economic madness is a manifestation of an economic egoism and antagonism that is menacingly ominous and a storm warning of coming unrest between nations, which instead of solidarity and cooperation still want war capitalism to lead the way to destruction. Since the outbreak of the war in 1914 there has not been a moment of peace. There has always been war in some part of the world.[769]

In the socialist-reformist narrative, however, the past was also described through the founding of the League.[770] It was presented as a past in which "great expectations" were birthed, and one that presented a potential path away from what had been. A public speech transcribed in *Arbetet* emphasised "the parallel between today's situation and the dark weeks of 1914", but held that "we now have a crystallisation point for the world's peace efforts, namely the League […] This makes the moment more hopeful now than then."[771] At the same time, that past was constructed as hijacked by interests other than those of peace. A parliamentarian described it as follows:

> The world war of 1914–1918 marked a new Deluge. It represented such a setback for civilisation – and such an indictment of the competence of the white great powers – that the latter, if only out of self-preservation, could not avoid seeking a lasting way to prevent a recurrence. […] The victorious powers therefore resolved to establish a League of Nations. […] For the first time, a mobilisation of all humanity appeared on a political

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[769] Propaganda from the Central Organisation for Swedish Workers, 1 Aug. 1932. "Kämpa mot kriget! Störta kapitalismen!" in *Arbetaren*, p. 4, translated.
[770] Several specific text also constructed a subplot around Scandinavia's and/or social democracy's peace efforts before and during the world war. See, for example: Lindhagen, C. Protocol National Congress of the Social Democratic Worker's Party March 1932, p. 351, ARAB, SAP, A1; Lindhagen, FC 1936, Motion No. 413, p. 12ff.
[771] Speech by Lindström, 26 Sep. 1935 "Samling kring fredens upphöjda sak" *Arbetet*, p. 5, translated.

> agenda. […] However, the goodwill underlying the invitation was not entirely pure. For the war had concluded with a "victor's peace." As is usually the case, such a peace could not be far-sighted, just, or forgiving. The root causes of the catastrophe remained unaddressed. […] Thus, the use of force was not abolished; alongside traditional warfare, a new form had emerged: a league war.[772]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative also constructed a dominant past around the weaving of the Covenant into the victors' treaty. The victorious powers had built an instrument for their continued dominance, and, as was narrated in a parliamentary motion, "every day [the League] appears more and more clearly as the crude tool of the Entente imperialism that triumphed through the violent peace treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain."[773] From this past, the narrative selected events used to illustrate that it had constituted a dishonest promise to begin with. 1914 and the false peace of Versailles was thus deployed as a baseline for how past and present crisis moments could be understood as a recurring pattern. Consider, for example, the following narration:

> I will not dwell on such a detail as, for example, the Åland question [...] despite all statements about what could really be considered supporting factual reasons, not to mention the beautiful phrases about justice and righteousness […] I will instead dwell for a moment on an episode that is also quite significant, the so-called Vilna question. [...] One must admit that an institution that has so thoroughly failed in the smaller matters […] is already spiritually and physically dead. And if it still walks and takes up some place in this world, it is only as a living corpse. […] I would also like to say a few words finally about another affair, which, so to speak, put the finishing touch when it comes to proving the impotence of the League of Nations to be able to do anything at all, and that is the so-called Corfu question.[774]

Here a long catalogue of betrayals made by the League is emphasised, marking the organisation as "spiritually dead" and a "living corpse" for not even managing "smaller matters" such as the Åland and Vilna questions fairly.

The two foreign policy narratives moreover constructed more specific pasts in relation to the crisis moments. A slight difference between how they used these pasts could, however, be found in the socialist-reformist narrative's emphasis on the antagonists' individual histories, and the Marxist-revolutionary narrative's emphasis on plotting a systemic past of continuous crisis. The former narrative, by drawing on the rise of fascism in Italy, the integral militarism in Japanese society, or the imperial history of Britain, used the past to portray

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[772] Lindhagen, C. FC 1936, Motion No. 1, p. 6f, translated.
[773] Winberg, C. Motion "om Sveriges utträde ur Nationernas förbund m.m.", FC 1924 No. 51, p. 3, translated. See also: Spångberg A. Motion SC 1924 No. 136.
[774] Winberg, C. SC 12 Mar. 1924 No. 19, p. 23ff, translated.

these characters as the ultimate villains.[775] Consider, for example, the following narration of Japan's past:

> Japan made its first attempt in this direction in 1895 when it defeated China but was deprived of the fruits of victory through European intervention. A decade later, the attack was renewed against Russia, which had invaded Manchuria. [...] The old Manchurian people were dying out and the dynasty did not allow Chinese to move in. It preferred to keep the subjugated race somewhat at a distance. But in 1911 the empire fell. Thus began a violent exodus of people into the old "hereditary lands" that had been hermetically sealed for centuries. [...] China supplied labor. Japan supplied capital. [...] As long as the Chinese were content to be workers, the Japanese capitalists had nothing to worry about. But the day came when the Chinese also wanted to become capitalists. [...] The militarists of Tokyo know this more than well. That is why they pay tribute to the League of Nations, fart their bombs and march: Tam, tam, tam, tam, tam.[776]

Here Japan is narrated as having a longstanding imperial interest in Manchuria. This was still often connected to a broader past of militarism and imperialism in the world. Another editorial narrated that after Japan had established itself in Mongolia and Manchuria, it would "sweep over Russia and the world – just like Genghis Khan and Timur. Crazy dreams in Tokyo of host domination! Yes, just as crazy as the Kaiser of Germany during the war."[777]

Such a connection between the antagonist's actions and the detailing of an overarching violent past was similarly emphasised in the Marxist-revolutionary narrative. A motion submitted to the *Riksdag* held that "following the pattern of earlier predatory campaigns waged by itself and other imperialist powers against colonial peoples, Italy launched an attack on Abyssinia."[778] The Abyssinia crisis moment was thus explained, on the one hand, via the biography of Italian fascism where its war against Abyssinia was told as the eventual result of the internal crisis of fascist Italian capitalism, and, on the other hand, via the sequences of past competitions between Italy and rival imperial powers. Along these lines, in 1936 a parliamentarian said that after the Versailles treaty, "Germany's colonies were divided between England, France and Belgium, Italy was left without them. It is then to be assumed that this country was given a free hand to engage in certain robberies."[779]

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[775] See, for example: Jensen, 6 Sep. 1923 "Begår folkförbundet självmord?" *Arbetaren*, p. 4;
[776] Backlund, S. 12 Nov. 1932. "Japan i blockad?" *Arbetet*, p. 8, translated.
[777] Backlund, S. 14 Nov. 1931 "Skarva skaftet" *Arbetet*, p. 8, translated.
[778] Flyg *et al*, FC 1936, Motion No. 307, p. 7f, translated.
[779] Ström, F. 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 48, translated.

The presents as potential or continuation

The socialist-reformist narrative initially described the crises as critical moments on the path towards creating world peace. In the Corfu issue narrative, the present was narrated as a serious test to the League's authority as it was the first time an imperial great power would be judged for its imperialist actions. One narrator held that the "League must not be a disarmed moral force. For because it is so, Mussolini has […] imagined that he could defy it with impunity. It becomes the duty of the peoples to enhance the League."[780] The Mosul crisis moment was likewise narrated as unique moment when the League would be the mediator of a dispute involving a mandate power, and narrators emphasised how it risked giving the League's leading powers a "free mandate to uphold peace at the expense of law."[781]

The narratives told in relation to Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments were, in turn, told as truly putting the League to the test as two imperial powers now sought to engage in imperial conquests. An editorial in *Arbetet* narrated that "should the League fail at this moment? Then it is dead. […] now is precisely the moment to strengthen it."[782] These issue narratives moreover revolved around the risk of the League turning to the use of sanctions, a danger narrated by a parliamentarian as "only lead[ing] to new world wars and armed alliances between different states."[783]

In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, the crisis moments were not told as surprising. The narrative described the presents, not as tests that the League might pass, but as demonstrations that would strip it of its mask. The selected present events were narrated as evidence of the indictment that "the system of competing states based on capitalist economy necessarily leads to new armaments and new wars, […] [and that] security and peace are chimeras in the world of capitalism".[784] Corfu was told as Mussolini seeking "the sole domination of Italian capital at the Adriatic Sea", and Mosul was but as another "capitalist affairs" in the "great Asian fight" over colonial territories.[785] Manchuria was further constructed as an example of "yellow imperialism", and

[780] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under internationella krisen" *Arbetet,* p. 1, translated.
[781] Editorial, 21 Dec. 1925. "En dunkel punkt" *Arbetet,* p. 3, translated.
[782] Backlund, S. 14 Nov. 1931 "Skarva skaftet" *Arbetet,* p. 8, translated.
[783] Lindhagen, C. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 112, translated.
[784] Nerman, T. FC 10 Jun. 1936 No. 41, p. 58.
[785] Rosenberg, 18 Sep. 1923 "Perspektiven för Mussolonis äventyr i Grekland" *Norrskensflamman,* p. 5; Herou, V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 38ff.

Abyssinia was narrated as a "fascist thieving war."[786] All in all, these crisis moments were told as the inevitable consequence of capitalism.

However, for the latter issue narrative on Abyssinia, the present became somewhat more complicated by tensions in narrations of League sanctions. A parliamentarian presented the League's action with regards to the crisis as now being in the interest of the working-class:

> We cannot but find it pleasing that the League of Nations, in these very actions against the peace-breaker Italy, is forced to resort to such methods, boycott and blockade methods, as have always been recommended by the workers' movement. […] with the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations, international law and peace have gained a powerful representative in it. […] we also note that today in this current conflict the League of Nations has not constituted an obstacle to the workers' own actions but, on the contrary, has enabled the workers to carry them out.[787]

On the other side, the crisis was correspondingly narrated as Sweden's own elites deluding its masses into believing that it was "solidaristic" to participate in such "acts of war."[788] Another parliamentarian thus held that the sanctions merely tied "Sweden behind the war chariot of one of the largest and perhaps most impudent imperialist powers at the present time."[789]

After same time, the issue narratives described the present as constituting either a great betrayal or evidence of the League's imperialist motives. Here the socialist-reformist narrative also described the crisis moment as ultimately leading to a defeat. In the Corfu crisis, the League "committed suicide" by allowing the referral to the Conference, and delivered a "death blow to the idea of perpetual peace within the framework of capitalist society."[790] Mosul further demonstrated that "when the interests of capital are at stake – then paper is an extremely fragile material."[791] The Manchuria crisis was likewise narrated as "the Council […] sitting and negotiating, [while] the news came

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[786] Flyg, N. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 55f; Hagberg, H. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 39ff.
[787] Hagberg, H. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 35f, translated.
[788] Editorial, 22 Oct. 1935. "Sanktionsmekanismen fruktansvärd" *Arbetaren*, p. 3. See also: Editorial, 31 Aug. 1935 "Sanktioner mot Italien" *Arbetaren,* p. 3; Editorial, 16 Nov. 1935. "Upprustning en konsekvens av sanktionspolitiken" *Arbetaren,* p. 3.
[789] Flyg, N. SC 18 Jan. 1936 No. 4, p. 60f, translated.
[790] Jensen, 6 Sep. 1923 "Begår folkförbundet självmord?" *Arbetaren*, p. 4. See also: Article, 27 Sep. 1923 "Den lurande krigsfaran diskuteras" *Arbetaren*, p. 5.
[791] Text to satirical image, 18 Sep. 1925. "Fördämningen mot kriget" *Arbetaren*, p. 6;

that Japanese aircraft had bombed one Chinese city after another."[792] The Abyssinia crisis finally emerged as a full "disgrace under the sponsorship of the League."[793]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative described the conclusions as proving their stories right. Since the League had already been narrated as an antagonist, the present was not told as a defeat for the institution, because it had done exactly what it had been created to do, namely exist as "a tool in the hands of imperialism for the purpose of oppressing other peoples."[794] The League had beenrevealed as a *passive* tool allowing the imperial great powers' to pursue their own aims in the case of Corfu and Manchuria, while functioning as an *active* instrument directly serving imperialist ends in the Mosul and Abyssinia crisis moments. For the latter case, the Soviet Union was narrated as having employed sanctions against Italy "fully and loyally", but the imperial powers of Europe had chosen their own economic interests over success against fascism:

> Experience has revealed the greatest baseness of the great powers who have been at the head of the League of Nations' action and who only wanted to exploit it for the service of their own selfish interests. The Franco-British plan to dismember Abyssinia and hand over its people to become the sacrificial lambs of Italian fascism fortunately failed […] Since the League of Nations is primarily a collection of capitalist states, it can never be an effective means of preventing war. The only guarantee that the struggle against war will be carried out effectively is that the international working-class rises against the warmongers on a united front in unified actions.[795]

Futures between reform and revolution

In the socialist-reformist narrative, the narrated defeats of the League did not include constructions of a future in which reform had to be abandoned. In the former two issue narratives, the telling of the League's failure to hold a great power accountable, and of it eventually having to give way for imperial interests in Mosul, meant that it had not yet become the organisation promised.

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[792] Backlund, S. 4 Dec. 1931. "Spansk mänsklighet och japansk omänsklighet" *Arbetet*, p. 8, translated.
[793] Vought, A. 18 Jul. 1935. "Om Folkförbundet?" *Arbetet*, p. 4; Lindhagen, FC 26 May 1936 No. 36, p. 18.
[794] Editorial, 26 Sep. 1931. "Kriget i Fjärran Östern" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.
[795] Hagberg, H. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 40, translated. Previous research has argued that the Soviet Union, despite pushing for economic sanctions, complied with sanctions on specific commodities, but kept the over-all trade at pre-sanctions levels, including oil sales, see Tillett, L. R. 1956. "The Soviet Role in League sanctions against Italy, 1935-6" *American Slavic and East European Review* 15(1).

What the future entailed was thus additional labours from, one the one side, the Scandinavian/Nordic nations and, on the other side, increased cooperation within labour and workers' movements. Efforts from Sweden's social democratic representatives had shown that a transformation of the League was possible, but only "when the working-class becomes strong enough to decide on the governments' choice of delegates […] will [it] become the great light on the path of the people."[796]

However, in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives the future became less tied to the need to reform the League specifically since the present was increasingly told as exposing irredeemable flaws. While it was (generally) still Sweden's duty to remain a member and seek to remake it, the League begun disappearing as the core context through which a socialist peace vision was most likely to be achieved. In the Manchuria issue narrative, the League's inability to stop Japan was narrated as having shown that its mechanisms for peace did not function meaningfully, while the Abyssinia issue narrative had demonstrated that its coercive mechanisms only cleared the path for wider war. An alternative was narrated by a parliamentarian in 1932:

> The existence or non-existence of the League of Nations is a question of the utmost importance, and its position at present is so critical that I think we should all agree that if nothing can be done to strengthen its authority among the great, broad masses of the people in all the states, it would in reality, even if it formally came into existence, would cease to function as an effective organ for the organisation of peace. […] I cannot see anything other than that the only way forward is to try to attach to this League such peace organs and peace organisations which have real power and a real will to secure peace, and within which organs and organisations there are no such conflicts of interest that paralyse the entire peace organisation. Then one may ask: what are some such organisations that exist that are of real significance, of international significance with a firm and strong position? And then one must answer that the workers' organisations are these real peace factors.[797]

Labour organisations and workers' movements thus emerged as the ones carrying the narrative towards a socialist peace – with or without the League.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in contrast, never regarded the reform of an already corrupt organisation as a viable path to peace. It had already projected the League's discrediting forward in time because it was always meant to secure imperial interests. The future predicted was therefore one in which the institution would defeat itself. As was narrated in an editorial in

[796] Renaudel, P. 29 Sep. 1923. "Under internationella krisen" *Arbetet*, p. 1, translated.
[797] Ström, F. FC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 18, p. 106f, translated.

September 1923: "It follows with inescapable logic that the very pinnacle of this pyramid of rhetoric – the League – should also come crashing down amidst the debris."[798] In the Mosul issue narrative, one future revolved around imminent imperial war between powers seeking to secure resources in the region, while another likewise described how the "spirit of unity of the international proletariat" would lead to a revolt against the institution.[799]

In the Manchuria issue narrative, the present events were told as a prelude for a new world war "more devastating than the world war of 1914-1918", but also a war that was likely to ignite a world-wide revolution.[800] The future was thereby fractured between "imperialist slaughter or class wars" with the new wars "unleash[ing] the dormant forces of world revolution."[801] The narrative told in relation to Abyssinia similarly constructed the likely threat of an imperial world war, and a parliamentarian narrated that:

> It is even more difficult for us, who never believed in the League of Nations for a moment and who were so sadly proven right by it, the organisation that dampened the revolutionary anger of the masses in the years after the world war […] The armament fever is spreading like a plague across the world. In Germany, war fever is already at 98.8 degrees, in Italy over 100. In a tragic way, the view of socialism […] has been confirmed: the dissolution of capitalism in imperialist wars has already occurred, and I am absolutely certain that within a fairly short time we will have the new great war.[802]

Many narrators described the League sanctions as being what would unleash this war, while some combined the masses' revolution with the tool of sanctions as a way to respond to fascist imperialism. When the latter narrations ceased telling of sanctions as a viable tool for the working-class (and the blame for this was allocated to the antagonists), they also returned to a future underscoring the need for the working-classes "Secure peace by overthrowing capitalism! Intensify the struggle against capitalism and war!"[803]

Finally, a key difference can briefly be noted here. The socialist-reformist narrative presented a future in which the working-class gained more influence over national governments and thereby also the League. However, this would

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[798] Severin, 5 Sep. 1923. "Internationell anda och organisation" *Arbetaren*, p. 3, translated.
[799] Campaign article, 28 Sep. 1925 "Förankra partiet hos massorna!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 5; Herou, V. SC 18 Jan. 1926 No. 3, p. 38.
[800] Editorial, 1 Feb. 1932 "KRIG!!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.
[801] Ibid. See also: Editorial, 4 Oct. 1932 "Bränsle till nästa krig" *Arbetaren*, p. 4.
[802] Nerman, T. FC 1 Apr. 1936 No. 21, p. 42, translated.
[803] Propaganda from the Central Organisation for Swedish Workers, 1 Aug. 1932. "Kämpa mot kriget! Störta kapitalismen!" in *Arbetaren*, p. 4, translated.

be reached through democratic and social reform where the masses would assume political power in parliaments. In this future, the international organisation could be reshaped by socialist governments, and therefore become an advocate for all working-class peoples rather than an instrument of a capitalist elite. Only through the democratic rise to power of the working-class would the colonised peoples likewise be liberated.[804] For the Marxist-revolutionary narrative this was told as an unfeasible future because the working-class would never be truly liberated within capitalist structures. Choosing between democracy or dictatorship was narrated as a false dichotomy, partly because social democracy represented a socialism permeated by the interests of the ruling class in keeping the masses complacent.[805]

Connecting Sweden

The settings, characters, and emplotments of the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives finally also provided the basis for how they constructed specific programmes for Swedish identity. First, each narrative constructed a set of **reasons** that made their respective programmes necessary. For the socialist-reformist narrative, these reasons followed from a world in which capitalism and imperialism dominated, but one that was also becoming more open for change through democratic and social reform. This reality still implied that the small states faced a constant threat of aggressions from imperial great powers, while also placing the working-class and the colonised peoples under perpetual violence and oppression. Such reasons were, for instance, found in narrations of the Abyssinia crisis moment:

> Abyssinia is not only, and perhaps not even primarily, symbolic of the small state against the great power. Its struggle within the League of Nations symbolises the problem of races [...] Therefore, the victory of Abyssinia presupposes a breakthrough in Europe […] We have reached a stage in world politics where the internal class contradictions are becoming increasingly decisive for the development of the League of Nations. From these points of view there is no room for pessimism.[806]

Additional reasons were thus drawn from Sweden's own portrayal as a peaceful and humanitarian nation, which provided Sweden with the obligation to

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[804] See, for example: Backlund, S. 22 Nov. 1935. "Nationernas förbund ryggraden i brittiska världsrikets politik" *Arbetet,* p. 7.
[805] See, for example: Editorial, 26 Nov. 1931 "Endast sovjetväldet kan rädda Kina!" *Norrskensflamman,* p. 3; Nerman, T. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 43f.
[806] Backlund, S. 8 May 1936. "Ett genombrott" *Arbetet,* p. 9, translated.

act on behalf of world peace, disarmament, and the liberation of the oppressed. As another narrator held:

> Here too, it is only a question of evolution, but an evolution that is seriously sought. It is made possible and accelerated by the small states creating for themselves 'a task in history,' as Arthur Engberg once said was Sweden's calling in particular.[807]

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative grounded its programme on the same diagnosis of the capitalist and imperialist world order. However, here the dominant reasons for the programme was, in addition to the need to remove a harmful system in general, also found in Sweden's own complicity. While the narrative similarly constructed its reasons based on the destructive consequences it narrated from capitalism and imperialism as such, it regarded Sweden's League membership and its drift away from neutrality as making it implicated in structures that ultimately produced war. One parliamentarian held:

> […] one cannot escape the fact that membership in the League represents a great danger for the people. The peace work being carried out in Geneva means signals for new armaments, and new armaments mean preparations for new wars. […] one should not belong to […] a sham institution, and a "league of guns."[808]

Second, each foreign policy narrative also specified the **objectives**. For the socialist-reformist narrative, the primary objective was the creation of a more peaceful and just world, further clarified by a socialist vision for peace. This vision rested upon the abolishment of class struggles and proletarian solidarity, and especially emphasised international disarmament and self-determination for the colonies. It was held that "what the world needs for recovery from the years of bloodshed is peace and disarmament [and] it should be the task of social democracy to seek to achieve this. […] The small nations are in this case best suited to take the lead."[809] Notably, the League was not an objective *per se*, but rather an institution that figured as a means through which this vision might be realised (c.f. chapter 5). A secondary objective nonetheless emerged in reforming the League into an effective instrument for peace.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative set out objectives in a different order. Its immediate aim was to detach Sweden from capitalist and imperialist structures, and to thereby free the nation and its workers from the complicity and

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[807] Lindhagen, C. FC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66f, translated.
[808] Ström, F. 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 59, translated.
[809] Motion, National Congress of the Social Democratic Worker's Party June 1924 No. 1, p. 1, ARAB, SAP, A1.

oppression that this entailed. Beyond this objective the narrative constructed the ultimate aim as the termination of those same structures. A true peace meant an end to the violence towards, and subjugation of, the working-class, and this peace could only be achieved once the system that exploited it was replaced. As was narrated in an editorial in *Arbetaren:* "The interest of the working-class must be to liquidate capitalism, which is the reason for war, to fundamentally change the relationship between peoples, and to create a real basis for a real peace within and outside the country."[810]A secondary objective instead emerged via the Soviet Union, as one narrator held, "solidarity with the Soviet Union is solidarity with socialism. Solidarity with socialism is solidarity with the current interests of the workers and the future of humanity."[811]

Third, the foreign policy narratives also set out the **actions** through which Sweden was to advance towards these objectives. For the socialist-reformist narrative, these were, at first, mostly oriented towards the League. Sweden was to participate in its transformation and to critique any corruption. This was, for example, narrated as Sweden having to "prevent the export of munitions to belligerents", keep the League from being hampered by the "enemies of disarmament", and pushing for the "peoples of Asia and Africa [to be] liberated."[812] It also involved non-action with regards to sanctions. One narrator illustrated the dangers of the coercive articles of the Covenant as follows:

> What absurdities can such a system on crutches lead to! If, for example, French Indochina with its 26 million Chinese were to revolt and China, which belongs to the League of Nations, came to their aid, what would happen? Yes. China had violated the League of Nations by attacking its member France. Then Sweden is also guilty of sanctions against China. We will help to prevent the Chinese in Indochina from becoming free.[813]

As the issue narratives on Manchuria and Abyssinia were further told as exposing the institution's deeper flaws, the prescribed actions shifted somewhat. Without abandoning the duty of membership, the programme counselled Sweden to seek alternative paths towards its main objective. As discussed above, predominantly by via labour and workers' associations and collaborations.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative prescribed actions on two levels. For the nation, it urged withdrawal from the League and a return to neutrality. As

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[810] Editorial, 31 Aug. 1935 "Sanktioner mot Italien" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated.
[811] Editorial, 26 Nov. 1931 "Endast sovjetväldet kan rädda Kina!" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.
[812] Article, 27 Sep. 1923 "Den lurande krigsfaran diskuteras" *Arbetaren,* p. 5; Vougt, 1 Feb. 1932. "Japan, Kina och konferensen" *Arbetet,* p. 4; Lindhagen, FC 27 Feb. 1935 No. 12, p. 9.
[813] Lindhagen, C. 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 13, translated.

one parliamentarian emphasised: "The only sensible thing to do is to free ourselves from this risk of war by having the country notify its withdrawal and seek to maintain the policy of neutrality that has given us peace for the past quarter century."[814] A neutrality policy was often narrated as the only way to absolve imperialist complicity, and thus the slogan of the socialist party read "neutrality and peace: Sweden shall not interfere in the politics of the imperialist states."[815] As mentioned, the Abyssinia issue narrative divided this prescription as some narrators wanted the "states who have an interest in the preservation of peace to unite within the League."[816]

For the working-class, on the other hand, the main action was revolution; to overthrow capitalist governments and their imperialist League alike. They needed, first of all, to free themselves of the "deceivers" and see "the reformist apostles of 'organised capitalism', of peaceful 'ultra-imperialism' and of 'peaceful ingrowth'" for what they were: "gentlemen [who] lied to the working masses […] that it was reformism that protected the peoples from the 'bloody chaos of Bolshevism' and instead led to socialism on a 'bloodless and smooth road'"[817] The next step was class action, and the uniting of the working-class to "wage revolutionary struggle against the governments of various imperialist states […] to liquidate […] the entire capitalist system."[818]

7.4 A socialist-reformist and a Marxist-revolutionary narrative

This chapter has traced two related foreign policy narratives as they were reproduced across the four crisis moments. The narrative analysis illustrated how both narratives shared an overarching spatial setting of a world dominated by capitalism and imperialism, but diverged in their temporalities, in their portrayals of the League, in how this produced two contrasting images of Sweden as a nation, and in how the emplotment separated a shared past between a future of either reform or revolution. The chapter has illustrated

[814] Editorial, 13 Dec. 1935. "Ut ur rövarnas förbund!" *Arbetaren,* p. 3, translated.
[815] Kilbom, K. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 53, translated.
[816] Hagberg, H. 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 22, translated.
[817] Editorial, 7 Oct. 1931. "Den gamla världen störtar samman…" *Norrskensflamman*, p. 3, translated.
[818] Kilbom, K. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 53, translated.

how these foreign policy narratives thereby constructed Sweden as either the anti-thesis to imperialist power, or as a complicit agent of the same.

First, the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives were reproduced in two distinct **Corfu** issue narratives in which the former made Italy's attack on Greece the first occasion where a great power would be judged for its imperialist actions, and cast Branting as taking on the duty of pushing the League to rise up to that task. The latter narrated the same events as the opposite by narrating the League's paralysis, set alongside its silence on the parallel Ruhr occupation, as exposing the institution as an instrument of the powerful. Where the former emplotted an ending in disappointment for the League's progression towards becoming a peace organisation, the latter narrated the case as confirming the portrayal of it as an imperialist tool.

Second, the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives were reproduced in two **Mosul** issue narratives in which the former described the dispute between Britain and Türkiye as a unique moment where Sweden was initially told as given a key mission, and as thereby exemplifying that a gradual reform of the League was conceivable even if the organisation had to step aside to imperialist interests in the end. The latter instead understood Mosul as part of a greater fight over colonial territory where the proceedings in Geneva became a stage for imperialist politics, and where promises on paper counted for nothing against the interest of capital. Here the only future possible was imperial war over resources or the revolt of the international proletariat.

Third, the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives were reproduced in two **Manchuria** issue narratives in which the former described the crisis as a moment that would truly put the League to the test as an imperial power engaged in open conquest, and where the eventual failure to halt Japan showed that the institution's mechanisms and will for peace were deeply flawed. The latter narrated ongoing events predominantly as a symptom of capitalism's structural crisis where imperial wars were waged over markets, and Japan's actions further demonstrated an anti-Soviet front. Where the former still sought an, albeit more distanced, reform of the League, the latter regarded the future as one between imperialist massacre or the rise of the working-class

Finally, the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives were also reproduced in two **Abyssinia** issue narratives in which the former narrated Italy's invasion of Ethiopia as the League's gravest test yet, where both the failure and violence of the sanctions system showed that coercive

mechanisms only cleared the path for future wars. The way forward for a socialist peace vision was thus to seek collaboration between labour and workers' associations beyond Geneva. The latter then either described how the League's sanctions regime threatened to escalate the situation into a global war, or how it could now, following the Soviet Union's League membership, be used as a tool for anti-fascism. In the end, both versions placed the blame on the capitalist powers, and envisioned a future where it became required of the working-class to overthrow the corrupt elites –in and beyond Geneva.

The socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives also positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in contrasting ways. Both positioned Sweden as belonging to a group of small, European, and "white" states, but the former emphasised its Scandinavian/Nordic position and the latter its historical neutral position. What further divided them was whether these groups distanced or implicated Sweden in the capitalist and imperialist order. The former narrative portrayed Sweden as peaceful, honourable, and set apart from the system (at least partially), making it the agent of its own story as it was called to act, critique, and lead in a programme centred on transformation towards socialist peace, both within and beyond the League. The latter narrative portrayed Sweden as entirely compromised and complicit, and as unable to deliver any real change from within. It therefore connected Sweden to a programme of detachment where the nation and, above all, the Swedish working-class, was given a revolutionary task because the only intelligible path forward was to separate Sweden from capitalist and imperialist institutions.

8 The Witness to the Twilight of Europe

> They can give speeches in Geneva,
> but speeches do not stop the march of the armies.
> A new era is ringing in with the roar of cannons.
> European hegemony is over.
> The leadership of the white race is in peril.[819]

This chapter explores a foreign policy narrative reproduced across the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments.[820] The chapter proceeds through the narrative elements of settings, characters, and emplotments, and illustrates how each contributed to the construction of the identity concepts positions, self- and other-portrayals, and programmes. This foreign policy narrative was narrated in the stories told by a fraction of conservative, liberal, and social democratic narrators. It can be categorised as a *cultural-realist* narrative that constructed Europe as a culturally and racially superior space.[821] Europe was set against non-European spaces as "awakening" and advancing to contest "European hegemony" and "white supremacy".[822] The narrative portrayed European powers as protagonists who were powerful but had become negligent,

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[819] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10, translated.

[820] Specific texts reproducing this narrative were rarely found in the source material for the Corfu case, and were relatively sparse in relation to the Mosul case. While narrations of the Mosul crisis moment formed a specific issue narrative, it was marginal in the source material explored and did not relate to a foreign policy narrative centred on existential threats to Europe.

[821] Previous research has mentioned an "obscure minority" of "fascism-leaning" or "Nazism-leaning" politicians with "ultra-right interpretation[s]." See: Ottosson 1986:139; Ottosson 2021:35. The narrative analysis reveals, however, that a competition between races, and of a threat to European civilisation and the "white race", were broadly narrated. As discussed in Chapter 7, the socialist-reformist narrative also constructed "race wars" (*rasstrider*) as a future, but a difference can be found in the cultural-realist narrative's emphasis on this. The former narrative further constructed the liberation of the colonies as an "organic development" necessary to prevent such wars, whereas the latter narrative constructed either the "awakening" of the colonised peoples as a threat or continued imperialism as necessary "housekeeping".

[822] White supremacy (*vit supremati*) was an empirical terminology that resurfaced in the source material. See, for example: Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4; Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.

and described internal antagonists and external threats who challenged Europe's dominance. It further portrayed secondary characters who were mostly silent, yet were of vital importance since Sweden was one of them. The narrative begun with narrating Europe's past dominance and its beginning decline, and foresaw an escalated competition between races. The chapter illustrates how the foreign policy narrative also positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden in a way that marked it as a culturally superior but materially vulnerable nation trapped in a waning European order, which made it necessary for Sweden to reorient towards its Nordic sphere.

8.1 Settings and positions

The cultural-realist foreign policy narrative constructed a core **spatial setting** of Europe as the weakening "heart of civilisation" while narrating the non-European spaces – especially Asia – as its threatening counterpart. It further singled out the Nordics as a stable core of European civilisation, while the European great power capitals and Geneva were, albeit embodying European authority, told as spaces complicit in its decline. The foreign policy narrative additionally constructed layered **temporal settings** where an overarching temporality was cyclical as constructed around past civilisational competitions, but specified understandings of time still centred on progression versus regression. The former marked Europe's past, while the latter marked its present and future. A future developmental trajectory was instead given to non-European spatial spaces. This section dives deeper into how the foreign policy narrative constructed spatial and temporal settings that also worked to **position** Sweden within them. It predominantly positioned Sweden as European, "white", and distinctly Nordic. Although Swedish identity was told as belonging to a civilisation narrated through a hierarchal understanding of superiority, this superiority was told as fading. Sweden was thus further positioned as a small state with material weaknesses, and as previously having a position as a neutral state, but as presently being more exposed by its non-neutral position.

European civilisation and its antipode

The foreign policy narrative constructed Europe as the core spatial setting across the issue narratives. This setting was frequently narrated as economically, technologically, politically, and culturally superior. It was told as the centre of the "civilised world", as representing humanity's "most stable" and

"prosperous civilisation", and as still exercising its "dominance in Africa and Asia".[823] One editorial narrated that European superiority "reveals itself in our culture, that blossoms in our thinking […] Europe has created a great, a priceless culture."[824] This was furthermore a culture that Europe was told as having brought beyond its own shores where its "contribution […] to the educational history of the coloured people is extraordinarily great."[825] As will be further discussed below, this narrative thus involved narrations of colonialism as "great constructive work, in economic and political terms."[826]

At the same time, European civilisation was narrated as undergoing an "irreparable decline".[827] It was told as facing a "collapse", a "growing avalanche", and an "immediate catastrophe."[828] Alongside narrations of Europe as an endangered space were depictions of Europe as decaying because its leaders failed to "put its house in order."[829] Europe as a collective character (see section 8.2) was told as "preferring to sleep", suggesting that the core setting was being neglected.[830] The European space was additionally narrated as a context plagued by "insignificant intra-European disputes" and as having suffered from a "civil war of the whites."[831] This version of the European setting included images of it as a volatile "war volcano", meaning that while the main threat towards Europe was told as coming from an alternative setting, the core spatial setting was in itself also becoming a more dangerous place.[832]

The foreign policy narrative further involved two key spatial settings that were differentiated from Europe. First, Asia was frequently told as the antipode to Europe. This spatial setting was narrated as a "troubled" region full of "hordes" of people that moved across a vast continent and "washed up like waves" in Europe. An editorial in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* described Asia in the following way:

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[823] See, for example: Lundstedt, SC 26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 13; Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[824] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning,* p. 10, translated.
[825] Westman, 19 Apr. 1936 "Vita och färgade" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 13, translated.
[826] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f.
[827] Key, 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 9f.
[828] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 14f; Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 7f.
[829] Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[830] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning,* p. 10.
[831] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f; Editorial, 24 Jul 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[832] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 8f.

> There are certain regions in the ocean of peoples where the currents are more violent than elsewhere. The masses of water are sucked down into foaming eddies and are pushed up again to the surface by a force that sends them to make their way to distant shores. […] There, movements have arisen which have sent the conquering hordes down over the ancient cultural world of China, and whose swells over the Himalayas have tumbled down over the Indus, and rolled westward over the Ural mountain ranges. From the dawn of that history, whose scant light stems from the archaeological exploration of the eastern Mediterranean basin far into modern times, peoples pushed forward from inner Asia have washed up like waves on the shores of Europe. From this gray antiquity to the present day, the great royal idea runs through European policy to build bulwarks against the onrushing hordes of Asians.[833]

The foreign policy narrative further described this spatial setting as advancing to challenge Europe, especially Japan's progress meant that Europe now faced an "equal opponent."[834] These narrations often emphasised Asia as a threat to Europe's control over markets, but, in addition to Asia's strong economic "upswing", the narrative described this spatial space as encompassing a growth in nationalism and an "anti-European solidarity". This was, for example, narrated in an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* which maintained:

> […] the privileged position of the white race is becoming more and more circumscribed, […] the Japanese plans to launch a pan-Asian campaign are openly and officially emerging, a powerful incentive is being given here to every anti-European feeling that prevails or can be aroused in Africa and Asia.[835]

Asia was consequently also connected to Africa as another key spatial setting. However, Europe was here told to be less likely to "come into collision with powerful coloured peoples of high culture as in Asia."[836] Africa was often described as a colonial map, including details of the European powers' colonial territories, while locations that were not yet colonised were described as a "wilderness" and "practically unpopulated areas."[837] An editorial narrated Africa as a setting in the following way:

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[833] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10, translated.
[834] Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[835] Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated. See also: Correspondence, 26 Jul. 1933 "Stillahavsromantik" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 10.
[836] Key, 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 9f.
[837] Ibid.

> It is the season at which wandering nomadic tribes undertake one of their main migrations. In their increasing search of water, cattle, and women, a tribe belonging to Abyssinia has attacked one living in the French colony. A French colonial official has tried to broker peace with a small escort. The result: his death and the death of several natives. Such incidents are not unusual in themselves. In these regions, the tribes often clash. And the cause is always the same: the hunt for wells and women. […] No one can say anything other than that Italy has thereby gained support for its mill, i.e. has gained greatly increased strength in its assertion that Abyssinia is an uncivilised country.[838]

While the Abyssinia issue narrative, which this quote was a part of forming, condemned Italy's attack on Abyssinia, narrations still constructed Abyssinia, and Africa more broadly, in a way that marked this setting as distinctly other to its narration of Europe, often drawing on civilised/uncivilised distinctions.

In addition to constructing Europe as a core spatial setting, the foreign policy narrative also described more specific European locations. These spaces included the European great powers' and their capitals as the main contexts determining the fate of Europe. Here Geneva was also narrated as a distinct place, and it was told as an institutional context that the European great powers controlled. A parliamentarian, for instance, held that the League had "become a tool in the hands of certain dominant great powers and nothing else."[839] More critically, Geneva was narrated as an institutional setting in which "coloured peoples" had been given agency to challenge the "white race's leadership".[840]

Finally, the foreign narrative also constructed the Nordics as a spatial setting – a setting that Sweden was most commonly narrated as belonging to both geographically and culturally. A parliamentarian, for example, emphasised that "it is our geographical location on the Scandinavian peninsula and on the shores of the Baltic Sea that will be decisive […] We do not believe […] that we are called to be some kind of world conscience."[841] This Nordic setting was, in other words, actively narrated as separate from the Geneva setting, but it was not, however, set apart from a Europe under threat, and another parliamentarian narrated that "the Baltic Sea in our days does not form any greater distance, any greater obstacle to an enemy than a small insignificant stream in ancient times."[842] If Europe was narrated as a volatile volcano, then Sweden alongside the Nordics was told as an isolated island anxiously awaiting its eruption.

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[838] Editorial, 7 Feb. 1935 "Abessiniens bekymmer" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3, translated.
[839] Ossbahr, C. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 29f, translated.
[840] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[841] Meyerhöffer, A, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 65, translated.
[842] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 11, translated.

Decline and awakening

The foreign policy narrative thus constructed parallel temporal settings in relation to the different spatial settings: Europe was in decline, Asia was advancing, and the "coloured races" were "awakening".[843] Yet, an overarching cyclical temporality was narrated, and all spatial settings were told as shaped by the recurring competition playing out between different over time. The narrative's emphasis on Europe as its own civilisation vis-à-vis other civilisations thus placed Sweden in a larger collective involved in a historic rivalry over economic and political power. Here the narrative especially stressed the recurring competition between Europe and Asia. Consider, for example, the construction of time and history in this long but quite telling quote:

> The struggle surges back and forth. The Greeks repelled the Persian advance. The great Macedonian, the only European whom Asia counts among the world conquerors – the other two are Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk – pushed forward the defences eastward. The Roman Empire created external defences in the same way far into Asia […] they had repulsed an attempt to penetrate Europe over the Pillars of Hercules. Under the banner of Islam, Asia once again stormed Europe. Charles Martel had to begin the new Punic War, which Ferdinand and Isabella brought to an end. The Balkans succumbed to the Turkish advance. […] The capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the sacred place of Greek unity, is still in Turkish possession. […] The boom in shipping, among other things, marks the transition of the Middle Ages into the New Age. A new form of defence was permitted. The European peoples went conquering by sea to India and the Far East. Europe seized leadership in the world. They lost it through the world war.[844]

In this citation, a longstanding competition with Asia, as well as between Christianity and Islam, is narrated, and Europe is told as again and again having to defend its culture and freedom from the Asian threat.

Alongside this cyclical frame, the foreign policy narrative thus narrated the world as having been shaped by the "world domination of the white race […] and [its] full supremacy" in the past century.[845] This construction of the past will be discussed further in section 8.3, but the central aspect here is that the "civil war of the whites" and the establishment of the League through the

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[843] Westman, 19 Apr. 1936 "Vita och färgade" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 13, translated.
[844] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10, translated.
[845] Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.

Treaty of Versailles was narrated as a self-inflicted break from this dominance.[846] Both events, alongside the earlier Russo-Japanese war, were constructed as beckoning the start of the decline and potential collapse of Europe, the West, and the "white race". As an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* held:

> The warning is a sign to all Europe that the time is over when the supremacy of our continent over both hemispheres seemed to be part of the natural order […] Much of what we are witnessing these days seems more sensational […] However, it will one day appear as an episode of profound significance, one of those events which show that a new chapter in history is beginning. Europe is shaken far more than is thought. Will the warnings be strong enough to drive the European states to agreement before the chaos of Europe leaves the way open for the Asian offensive?[847]

This temporality of regression was thus narrated as a threat as it signalled the end of an epoch of European dominance.[848] Although Europe and European characters were still portrayed through a vocabulary of superiority (see section 8.2), the, in particular East Asian nations, were correspondingly told as "advancing" towards a position where they would soon be able to challenge the weakening Europe. As narrated in an editorial: "Japan's open proclamation of a front against European supremacy should hardly be needed to make it clear that, that era is irrevocably past when Europe at its own pleasure encroached on the rest of the world."[849]

Narrations of China and Abyssinia, as well as in the common reference to the "coloured races" more broadly, instead emphasised an "awakening". What was meant by this was directly addressed in another editorial:

> The process for which we use this rather vague, but nevertheless expressive expression: "awakening", essentially includes two things. On the one hand, the coloured peoples have begun to adopt Western knowledge and technology, and have also gradually come to experience all sorts of influences from Western ways of thinking, customs, forms of government, etc. And on the other hand, they have awakened to a national consciousness comparable to European nationalism, which is completely absent in some peoples, but in others (e.g. Japan, China, Türkiye) is linked to an old historical tradition. One might think that there is a contradiction between these two traits: one adopts Western culture but defends oneself against Western domination. But for the coloured people the combination is natural; one appropriates useful pieces of the white people's knowledge and skills to defend oneself against their superiority. The first stage of the history of awakening was thus a history of education.[850]

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[846] Editorial, 24 Jul 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[847] Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[848] Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[849] Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[850] Westman, 19 Apr. 1936 "Vita och färgade" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 13, translated.

This meant that while Asia could be constructed as a legitimate threat, other spatial spaces and the characters associated with them were not in a position to challenge Europe – yet. Important to also note is that narrations did not necessarily construct this "awakening" as a bad thing, but it was told as a potential future problem. The main point here is, however, that while Europe was narrated as declining, Asia and Africa developed in the other direction.

Positioning Sweden

First, Sweden's most dominant **hierarchal categorisation** in the foreign policy narrative was its position as European. This meant that Sweden was narrated as sharing the dominance that marked this part of the world.[851] Sweden thus belonged to the group of nations who, for instance, were narrated as being "world leaders" possessing a "more developed sense of legal order" or "effective state administration", and that occupied the centre rather than the periphery in the issue narratives.[852] At the same time, given the temporal framing of European decline, to be placed in this category was also to be facing the same threat, and Sweden was subsequently made partly inseparable from a narrated civilisational collapse.

Second, Sweden was told as belonging to the "white race". This position was not, however, explicitly stated, but the narrative frequently referred to and differentiated between the "white race" and the "coloured races", where narrator constructed the "we" as the former. This was, for example, shown in the following quote from an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet*:

> Our continent, which still believes itself to be the leader, should least of all be able to turn a blind eye to the fact that the most intellectually awake part of the Chinese population, which is leaving its mark […] in this time of awakening, proclaims the League of Nations as the decisive criterion of what modern Europe and the culture of the white race mean for the whole world.[853]

[851] Key, H. 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 9f.
[852] Editorial, 22 Feb. 1932 "Kinas väckelse" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; von Krusenstjerna – Sprengel, 8 Jul 1936 "Två svenskar ser på Genève och kejsaren" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3.
[853] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10.

Sweden is not overtly narrated as neither European nor "white" here, but by beginning with "our continent" Sweden's position is clarified. This was likewise narrated in another editorial which held that the "English, Germans and Scandinavian" were the "most natural to think of" when it was "required" of someone to "emerge and, on behalf of the white race, carry out the great colonisation plans, which alone can save a European culture from irreparable decline."[854] At the same time, this position was accompanied with anxiety as the "white race's leadership" was in danger.[855] For Sweden to be positioned as white therefore made it both superior and endangered in these narrations.

Third, the foreign policy narrative also positioned Sweden as belonging to the Nordics, and one narrator held that "it is our geographical location, our affinity with the other Nordic peoples, that makes it natural for us to start our politics there."[856] On the one hand, Sweden and the Nordics did not share the European great power's dominance and power, and these states were collectively narrated as unable to, and as not having any interesting in, steering world political events.[857] On the other hand, the Nordics was also narrated as a "peaceful" and "well-ordered" setting which marked it as different from a European setting becoming more turbulent.[858] Sweden was thus told as belonging to a narrower geographical and cultural space that embodied a stability that the rest of the continent was narrated as lacking. As the sections below will explore further, this also meant that Sweden could, at least partially, separate itself from, at least a Europe institutional setting, because, as a parliamentarian held, "the solidarity that exists between the Scandinavian countries rests on a firmer foundation than membership in the League of Nations."[859]

Finally, Sweden was also positioned as a small and ex-neutral state. The former was a position of powerlessness to shape events. As a parliamentarian asked: "What can our small, insignificant country do about such a thing? How can we influence world policy?"[860] The latter neutral position was narrated as lost, something that had made Sweden additionally exposed. Sweden was not, however, narrated as belonging to a *collective* of (ex-)neutral state acting together. A neutral position was rather a past position which Sweden was advised to seek out again (see section 8.3). Sweden's small state position was

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[854] Key, H. 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 9f.
[855] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[856] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 45f.
[857] See, for example: Meyerhöffer, A. Interpellation SC 5 Jun. 1936 No. 40, p. 2f.
[858] See, for example: Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 67; Lundstedt, SC 26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 9.
[859] Ossbahr, C. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 30f.
[860] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 13f, translated.

likewise constructed relationally against a historical self, as the narrative described a former position for Sweden as a regional great power once tasked with protecting Europe against the Asian threat. As an editorial narrated:

> Europe defends itself against attack, now it advances its positions and creates outposts for its defence. Sweden bears the burden of this task for centuries. It is then transferred to Prussia. And the most profound consequence of the world war is the repulsion of the Russians and the establishment of the barrier of the border states.[861]

This temporal differentiation provided the narrative with an added layer: Sweden was not only positioned as small and vulnerable while simultaneously belonging to a European category facing decline, but as having already descended from a more powerful and "proud" past ancestry, and as having given up the protection its neutral position later provided.[862]

8.2 Characters and portrayals

The cultural-realist narrative portrayed a set of **characters** who were defined by their place within or against the European civilisation. Its protagonist, made part antagonists, were Europe as a collective entity and its leading powers who were portrayed as both the bearers of the "white race's leadership" and the ones responsible for its weakening standing. Here the League, and Italy in the Abyssinia issue narrative, emerged as internal antagonists, told as threatening the European civilisation from within. However, the external antagonists were constructed predominantly in the rise of Asia and in the "awakening" of the "coloured races". The narrative was also populated by additional characters, including Sweden, the Nordics, and domestic antagonists.

This section further explores the portrayals of the foreign policy narrative's characters, and ends with how they contributed to the **self- and other-portrayals** of Swedish identity. Sweden, albeit not being a main character, was portrayed as a being a peaceful and ordered nation with a proud history, yet as also being vulnerable and defenceless, and as having been made delusional and idealistic by the domestic antagonists. The roles given to Sweden in this foreign policy narrative included being the neutral observer of international affairs, but a leader within the Nordic community. Its (non-)responsibilities

861 Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10, translated.
862 See, for example: V. Lundstedt, SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 18.

included the duty to distance itself from the League and avoid entanglements in distant conflict, while protecting its own survival. These portrayals were strengthened by the relational portrayals of Sweden's association to Europe and the Nordics, by the differentiation and association to the European great powers, as well as by being portrayed in opposition to the non-Europeans and the antagonistic European others (i.e. Italy and the League).

The European powers and their greatest error

Europe as a setting was constructed in parallel with narrations of its more specified *acts*, whether in "defending its culture", "conquering the world", or "proclaiming a legal order", produced it as its own character.[863] In close connection to portrayal of Europe as a collective character, were also the European great powers (mainly Britain and France) as main characters. They were narrated as the protagonists in the sense that they were the ones driving the issue narratives forward. Since Europe was narrated as tasked with world leadership, these characters correspondingly emerged as the foremost commanders it. They were the ones who had first "promoted the prosperity" following European colonialism, and the ones who had led Europe in "seizing leadership in the world."[864] That responsibility followed them into the present.

In the Manchuria issue narrative, Britain and France were, for example, narrated as being the ones who would determine Europe's response to the crisis in the "Far East". They were, sometimes, narrated as doing so wisely by putting a brake on any European action against Japan. A parliamentarian, for instance, held that such a demand on Britain meant that it "would risk bringing poverty and ruin upon its own people […] and contribute to the destruction of all Europe."[865] In the Abyssinia issue narrative, these characters were also portrayed as determining what course the whole of Europe would take, and as, occasionally, doing right by prioritising European stability and working to "relieve pressure" in the core spatial setting. As the same parliamentarian narrated three years later:

> no one knows better where the shoe pinches than the one who wears it. And a country like England realises very well that […] not even an absolutely concerted action on the

[863] Key, H. 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 9f; Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[864] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning,* p. 10; Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4
[865] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 14.

part of the League could with certainty have prevented a bloody war with incalculable consequences.[866]

However, the foreign policy narrative also described Europe's leading powers as acting in ways that rather exposed the core spatial setting further. In the Manchuria issue narrative, they were correspondingly portrayed as failing in protecting European standing and stability. The "démarche" against Japan, which Britain and France had allowed, was narrated as a "meaningless demonstration" and as a "violence" committed against "natural development" (i.e. colonisation).[867] In the Abyssinia issue narrative, Britain and France even more so emerged as protagonists betraying the European collective in a double sense. By allowing sanctions against another European power they risked throwing the continent into another "civil war", and by later appeasing Italy they proved to the "coloured races" that the League was hollow.[868]

Closely connected to these portrayals of Europe and its leading powers were consequently narrations of the League as an internal antagonist. Even if the League was frequently named a European institution, its creation constituted a double-edged sword in which Europe had become a hostage to its own moral principles. Since the League was narrated as an institution that "the leading powers of the white race created with the claim to thereby secure the rule of law in the coexistence of peoples around the world", this meant that it also signified what value could be given to "the culture of the white race"[869] The League was correspondingly constructed as a character acting – as failing or doing harm – all on its own.

It was often portrayed via metaphors giving it a waning body: it was a "bursting soap bubble", a "collapsing house of cards", and a ship "that must capsize".[870] It had, as an editorial narrated, never "been able to lift more than a trembling and uncertain finger."[871] Portrayals of the League were thus often mocking, and another editor satirically proclaimed: "Oh, holy Humbug. You, the only deity of the peoples, You are worshipped sincerely and long after the

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[866] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 9, translated.
[867] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 7f.
[868] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[869] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated. See also: Editorial, 4 Sep. 1932 "Fiasko – för vem?" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Lundstedt, SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 14f; Lundstedt, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 7f; Ossbahr, SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 30.
[870] Editorial, 4 Sep. 1932 "Fiasko – för vem?" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Lundstedt, SC 26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 11; Lundstedt, SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 16.
[871] von Krusenstjerna – Sprengel, 8 Jul 1936 "Två svenskar ser på Genève och kejsaren" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3, translated.

star of Bethlehem has been hidden by heavy clouds."[872] A parliamentarian told a similarly ironic story of the institution:

> I once heard a definition of what was meant by hypocrisy. That definition said that hypocrisy is the praise of vice to virtue. The League of Nations and sanctions play about the same role nowadays. In other words, the League of Nations and sanctions are the great badge of virtue which diverts attention from what is real.[873]

The League as a character thus put Europe in peril because it had been created as an organisation signifying the "authority of the white race", but all it did was exposing that authority as void, while allowing the "yellow nations" and the "coloured races" to step in and challenge its leadership.[874]

Finally, Italy was, in the Abyssinia issue narrative, described as the main antagonist despite being a European power. It was portrayed as a "criminal country" ruled by a "temperamental" dictator who was willing to put European stability at risk for the country's attempt "to play the champion of civilization."[875] Italy was narrated, however, as having "arrived late to the set table, where others have already cut themselves a piece as they please", but that while Italy was requiring "adherence to the Italian policy which defends the prestige of Europe vis-à-vis the inferior races" the only "solidarity […] promoted by Italian policy, […] is an anti-European one."[876] In other words, no support for Italy's proclaimed "civilising mission" was given in the narrative.

Italy was instead narrated as creating difficulties for the other European powers in the Mediterranean, and as exposing Europe's own weaknesses and lack of solidarity within the context of the League.[877] Italy was also differentiated based on a cultural inferiority vis-à-vis Nordic culture. Italy was, for example, even portrayed as fanatical, cruel, and racist in the portrayal of Italy as a mob hurling overt racial abuse as the Abyssinian Emperor in the League context. An editorial portrayed Italy in the following way:

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[872] Editorial, 7 Sep. 1925 "Ett dilemma" *Göteborgs Handels- och sjöfartstidning*, p. 12, translated.
[873] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 14f, translated.
[874] See, for example: Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Correspondence, 8 Mar. 1932 "Ett gult imperium i Asien?" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page.
[875] Editorial, 7 Feb. 1935 "Abessiniens bekymmer" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3; Editorial, 24 Jul 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Lundstedt, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 8ff.
[876] Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[877] See, for example: Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4

> They roared: "Murderer! Arsonist! Thief! Negro man! Slave trader! Pig! Shut up! Enough of the nigger talk! This is Italy speaking! Long live Mussolini!" [...] Finally, there was silence and Negus was able to continue. [...] A bit way from me stands a little Italian with a magnificent sniffing nose and whistles as if he is about to lose his breath [...] nothing can stop these good patriots. They spray whistles, spittle sizzles around them. [...] My companion steps forward and begins to clap his hands over the Italian's head. He doesn't notice, but all the others' […] break out in laughter. It looks terribly comical with the little, mouthy gentleman jumping and hopping like a monkey, while the Swede calmly and smilingly claps his hands together over his gray hat.[878]

Here the Swede is constructed as different from the Italian's blatant racism and from his erratic temperament. However, as will be illustrated in the following subsection, the editorial itself still portrayed Ethiopian representatives in a deeply racialised way as well.

The rise of Asia and the awakening of the "coloured races"

The European powers were told as the drivers of political action in Europe, for better or worse, and the League and Italy were cast as antagonists complicit in Europe's weakening, but the foreign policy narrative also constructed a set of characters that functioned more as a constitutive outside. On the one hand, the Asian nations were told as challengers to European and "white supremacy". On the other hand, the colonies and the "coloured races" were narrated as "awakening" and disputing the rule and governance of Europe's imperial powers. However, these characters were not cast as straightforward villains in relation to the more specific crisis moments.

In the Manchuria issue narrative, Japan was not told as the main antagonist because of its advancements in Northern China. Instead it was portrayed as having a legitimate concern with overpopulation, and, as one parliamentarian held, Japan could not be expected to "take a walk out into the Pacific Ocean and swim among the fish. The country has no other option than to orient itself towards the west."[879] Japan was further told as having valid problems with China. It was portrayed as a "modern" power performing "constructive work" by bringing a "chaotic" China.[880] It was, moreover, portrayed as providing a "shield against Bolshevism", protecting against the "Bolshevisation of all

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[878] von Krusenstjerna – Sprengel, 8 Jul 1936 "Två svenskar ser på Genève och kejsaren" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3, translated.
[879] Lundstedt, V. SC 9 Mar. 1932 No. 22, p. 29, translated.
[880] Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Key, 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f (cursive added by author).

Asia", and halting the spread of the so-called "Asian contagion" which was narrated as ultimately threatening the "survival of the white race."[881]

Yet, these narrations correspondingly constructed Japan as a strong power with the potential to challenge European dominance. The great power in the "Far East" was narrated as having the potential to "close off Europe to Asian markets", and to counter its economic and imperial dominance in the region.[882] In relation to these portrayals, Japan was cast as "militarily advanced" and as having "special talents in the matter of organisation", but also as being an opportunist. This was narrated in an editorial which held that "every time the power situation ties the hands of the other powers, Japan makes a new push."[883] Both the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives thus constructed Japan as a threat seeking to establish a "yellow empire in Asia" with "plans to launch a pan-Asian campaign" or an "Asian offensive" against Europe.[884]

The portrayals of China were also marked by tensions. On the one hand, China was told as a "formless mass" plagued by a "bloody anarchy", and, as was narrated in an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet*, the population in Manchuria was portrayed as being better of with a more "civilised" Japan:

> It can also be rightly stated [...] that the Chinese's capacity for state-building is so weak that they find particular comfort and security precisely in the enclosure of such foreign enclaves in their territory, which they themselves claim to be an intolerable intrusion on their dignity and patriotic feelings. Nothing is more obvious and it is very possible that the majority of the Chinese population in Manchuria now finds it most peaceful under Japanese rule.[885]

In this regard, the narrated unrest in China made Japanese actions desirable from a European perspective. On the other hand, China was also told as "awakening", where a "Chinese national feeling of new strength is being born", with the risk of it "being driven into an effective great power."[886] Alongside there narrations, the Chinese were portrayed as a "more hardened race than the Japanese" and as being forced to "think militaristically again […] and

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[881] Forssell, C. FC 19 Jan. 1932 No. 6, p. 46f; Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 15f.
[882] Correspondence, 8 Mar. 1932 "Ett gult imperium i Asien?" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page; Correspondence, 6 Jul. 1932 "Fascismen avancerar i Japan" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page.
[883] Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[884] Correspondence, 26 Jul. 1933 "Stillahavsromantik" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 10; Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[885] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[886] Editorial, 22 Feb. 1932 "Kinas väckelse" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.

develop into a military state".[887] From such portrayals followed an understanding of Japanese actions in Manchuria as risking China becoming another threat to Europe. An editorial, for instance, drew a parallel between China and the emergence of Nazism in Germany:

> What has brought it to its acute stage is Chinese nationalism. The similarities between this and the more widely known German national socialism are striking. Both are expressions of a spontaneous reaction to pressure from outside. […] The social reform demands of the Nazi program correspond to the last of the three principles – of national independence, democratic government and social reorganisation – which constitute the guiding principle of the Chinese nationalist party, the Kuomintang. [...] What in fact made China's position so weak in Geneva was its consistent denial of all treaties that had been forced upon it by force or threat. Typical of the nationalist movement's propaganda in this respect is the revision of foreign policy [...] in which [it] passionately denounced the policies of the great powers, and especially England, France, and Japan [...] One can easily imagine, without straining one's imagination, the consequences of accepting the Chinese position.[888]

As is further illustrated by the end of this quote, narrations were consistently related back to what developments in Japan and China meant for the longer trajectory of European decline. As another editorial held: "Yesterday one could hardly notice in China that a nation there had its life to defend. Now the whole vast continent is in motion."[889]

While the Asian nations were portrayed as future challengers to European dominance, the Abyssinia issue narrative did not narrate Ethiopia specifically as a future threat to that supremacy. Instead, sympathy was given to this character as "European aggression against the only African state that has survived the division of the continent between foreign powers with intact independence appears in the clearest light."[890] However, Ethiopia was also told as naïve in the face of a superior European great power. As an editorial narrated:

> Lately, however, the Negus seems to have come to realise that he was as naïve as the African negro kings, who, at their first contact with whites, took them for gods and their coloured glass marbles for real pearls. [...] The question is whether this is also the beginning of the end for Abyssinia itself. In open defiance of the fog-shrouded islands up

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[887] Sjösteen, 4 Mar. 1932 "Bland kineser och japaner" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page;
[888] Eriksson, 4 May 1933 "Gul nationalism" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page, translated.
[889] Correspondence, 8 Mar. 1932 "Ett gult imperium i Asien?" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page, translated.
[890] Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.

> in northwestern Europe, the new Rome is completing its Gallic war. [...] And the Negus flees, defeated by technological superiority.[891]

Ethiopia was further portrayed as "only a collection of tribes, which are infinitely more primitive and backward than the population of French Morocco."[892]

These portrayals were also accompanied by narrations Africa more broadly as a "wilderness" populated by "countless Negro tribes".[893] Such deeply racial narrations also followed into portrayals of the Ethiopian representatives in Geneva. An article in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, despite stating a clear support for Ethiopia in its war with Italy, still narrated Ethiopians presence in Geneva in the following way:

> It is dead quiet in the large room full of people when the Negus ascends the podium. [...] In his black silk cloak he moved quickly, gliding across the floor and up the steps. It was as if he had pushed his way cautiously through an African jungle with his head held high and his eyes shining, and when he used his hand to fold up a leaf in the thick bundle he had placed on the pulpit cushions in front of him, it seemed to me that he had bent aside a branch in the jungle to peer through a clearing. […] He spoke in his own language without taking his eyes off the papers in front of him [...] The two blacks in the side-seat looked up at their lighter-coloured likeness with satisfaction and admiration. They looked like chiefs of wild tribes, which they perhaps were. The European clothes were too tight on their massive bodies. With clumsy hands they fingered the headphones and then stuck them a little hesitantly over their black-curly heads.[894]

These portrayals notably contain both exotifying portrayals of the representatives, and contribute to marking them as out of place in Geneva based on racialised stereotypes. Furthermore, even if the narrative did not construct Ethiopia as an antagonist, it did narrate a future threat in the "awakening of the coloured races" that this crisis moment was told as leading to. Although this was not narrated as a negative progress *per se*, it was accompanied by a vocabulary of fear and anxiety for what this would mean for Europe. Italy's actions were narrated as "sowing a dragon seed" in the "heart of the coloured

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[891] Editorial, 3 May 1936 "Början till slutet?" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.
[892] Correspondence, 17 Oct. 1935 "Växande sanktionsovilja i Paris" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 6, translated.
[893] Key, H. 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 9f; Editorial, 7 Feb. 1935 "Abessiniens bekymmer" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3. See also the construction of Africa as spatial setting above.
[894] von Krusenstjerna – Sprengel, 8 Jul 1936 "Två svenskar ser på Genève och kejsaren" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3, translated.

peoples", and as bestowing them with "anti-European" sentiments.[895] What the Abyssinia issue narrative consequently identified as a future danger was the "coloured races'" "natural affinity" in the "fight against the white man."[896] Yet, the blame for this development was, as discussed, allocated to Italy.

The Nordic small power(s) and domestic threats

Sweden and the Nordic states were notably secondary characters and did not occupy a central place in the issue narratives. When Sweden was portrayed, it was also narrated with a duality. It was told as a peaceful and proud nation, but with political leaders and domestic antagonists who had set it on a perilous path by making Sweden a League member. A recurring image in the Manchuria issue narrative was *satirical* portrayals of Sweden as a "steadfast tin soldier" that had given a very "manly statement" by calling out Japan as the aggressor, and Sweden's political leaders were narrated as having led with "irrational feelings of justice" and "running off with their good senses."[897] Similar narrations also followed into the Abyssinia issue narrative. Consider the following narration by a parliamentarian in the *Riksdag* in 1936:

> […] the situation and should be considered more closely by all these superficial friends of peace who falsify the situation by their phrases about the solidarity of nations and their common duty to take action against the peace-breaker. To ignorant or simple-minded people these phrases have a beautiful and idealistic ring. But those who try to think more closely into the complicated context, understand that the friends of peace, through their simplifying slogans, completely involuntarily form the most terrible of all war parties, terrible precisely through their ignorance and the associated irresponsibility. Are you, you peace-loving friends of sanctions, really prepared to throw our almost defenseless country into a world war?[898]

The narrator further held that although Sweden was a "thus far happy land", it was now being threatened by the exposure that the sanctions of the League entailed. The narrative thus underscored how Sweden had been "forced to

[895] Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4 The construction of the crisis moments as sowing anti-European sentiments were also found in the Manchuria issue narrative, see: Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[896] Editorial, 24 Jul 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[897] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 16, translated.
[898] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 7f, translated.

abandon its neutrality" by both the League and Sweden's own misguided government.[899] These narrations firmly rejected that Sweden should behave as a "world conscience" and "dictate how other states should behave".[900]

In addition to portrayals of Swedish representatives as leading Sweden towards danger, the foreign policy narrative also emphasised internal characters that represented a threat to Sweden, namely the radical left as foreign agents corrupting Sweden from within. As a parliamentarian held, "it is the Asian contagion that has eaten into the minds of, unfortunately, too many Swedish men here. There we see what kind of enemy we are dealing with."[901] Such narrations illustrated why Japan's actions during the Manchuria crisis were also protecting Sweden, because without it would "not be long before, under the leadership of Russia, the whole of Western culture would be trampled to death and the white race, at least in Europe, would receive its death blow."[902]

A final secondary character that was especially associated with Sweden was the Nordics. While the Nordics as a distinct character had not *acted* in the Manchuria issue narrative, it was narrated in the Abyssinia case as a presently latent community with the possibility of joint *future* action. The Nordics was notably told as a body that had presently been dragged into war and become the collective victim of the League's sanctions machinery, but it was also portrayed with the potential of an agency of its own. As a parliamentarian held:

> I am a very ardent supporter of [Nordic] solidarity […] Sweden should be the leading power, but then it is also important for us, if we find it to be in the Swedish interest to withdraw from the League of Nations, to take the lead in this matter and seek cooperation on this point from the other Nordic states.[903]

Here Sweden was portrayed as occupying a leading position, and "the solidarity that exists between the Scandinavian countries" was told to "rest on a firmer foundation than membership in the League."[904] The Nordics were thus portrayed as a more natural and durable community of states than the organisation in Geneva. The relation between these nations were narrated as being

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[899] Ibid.
[900] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66, translated.
[901] Forssell, C. FC 19 Jan- 1932 No. 6, p. 47, translated. Here external characters were narrated as threats causing domestic unrest and violence from the revolutionary left. While the socialist-reformist had connected Japanese militarism to the Munch Corps, this narrator held that "the Munck Corps, which has placed itself at the disposal of the authorities, is by no means a reprehensible or reprehensible phenomenon, but rather an expression of healthy social solidarity."
[902] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 15f, translated.
[903] Ossbahr, C. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 51f, translated.
[904] Ossbahr, C. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 30f, translated.

more equal compared to a League plagued by the diverging cultures and mentalities of its member states. This special "affinity" between the Nordics was constructed as grounded in both geography and a "natural" cultural kinship.[905] What further marked the portrayals of the Nordics was their shared will to "live in peace", but also their history as a "northern front" against Asia.[906] Sweden and the Nordics were, nonetheless, apparent secondary characters in the issue narratives. Where Europe and the European great powers steered events and the differentiated others made up the looming threat, the small powers in the Nordics were granted little agency over the plot itself.

Portraying Sweden

As the character portrayals above have already illustrated, Sweden was not a central character in the cultural-realist foreign policy narrative, and where it appeared it was mostly narrated through the failings of its own political leadership. The self-portrayals of Sweden reconstructed here consequently draw a lot on the relational portrayals of Sweden's associated and differentiated others. The narrative nonetheless constructed a set of Swedish **traits**. The most prominent portrayal was of Sweden as a nation with a distinct culture rooted in peacefulness and internal order. This was bound up with Sweden's "120 years of peace", and linked to a neutrality that had kept Sweden out of war and made it "non-violent".[907] Sweden was also given the traits being "well-ordered", and as acting with a distinct calm manner.[908] However, this superior self was narrated alongside its trait as a vulnerable state. Since Sweden was portrayed as "defenceless", and its advantage in conduct was narrated as a necessary trait to make up for its absence of material power.[909] These traits were further accentuated in the narration of Europe's long history of political

[905] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 45f, translated.
[906] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 31f; Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10
[907] See, for example: Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 67; Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb.1936 No. 10, p. 31f; Ossbahr, C. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 8f.
[908] Lundstedt, V. SC 26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 9; von Krusenstjerna – Sprengel, 8 Jul 1936 "Två svenskar ser på Genève och kejsaren" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3. Consider also the narration of a parliamentarian claiming that it was unthinkable that Swedes themselves committed "horrendous brutalities" because it was not part of their "mentalities", instead any instigation to unrest in Sweden must come from foreign agitators, see: Forssell, C. FC 19 Jan-1932 No. 6, p. 46f.
[909] See, for example: Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 11; Meyerhöffer, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66f.

and cultural accomplishment alongside the Nordics peaceful histories, suggesting that Sweden was likewise an "advanced" and "modern" society.[910]

At the same time, Sweden was, through its political leadership, provided with some contrasting traits. The Swedish governments and their delegations were recurrently portrayed as "foolish", as "immature", and as sheepish followers of Europe's leading powers and the institution they had created in Geneva. At times, the European great powers were told as acting with "rational" calculation whereas Sweden's own leadership irresponsibly sought to "morally pressure" them into confrontations.[911] This created a notable tension in the portrayals of Sweden's traits: Sweden was ordered and advanced, but its leaders were irresponsible and immature. They thus contributed in making the Swedish government and its delegation in Geneva internal others against which the Swedish nation itself was differentiated. While its representatives were careless and childish, Sweden remained a responsible and mature nation.

The foreign policy narrative moreover defined a set of **roles** for Sweden, but these were given as much by what roles Sweden was narrated as *not* having. Sweden was, throughout the issue narratives, explicitly denied an international role.[912] As mentioned above, the narrative clearly stated that Sweden should not act as a "world conscience" nor presume to dictate how other states handled their own affairs.[913] Sweden pushing to name Japan as an aggressor and participating in sanctions against Italy was narrated as roles wrongly taken and as an overreach into affairs outside the nation's proper sphere of interest – something that could also have dire consequences at home. However, to manage its own concerns included Nordic ones. Sweden was, for instance, allowed a leadership role within the Nordic community. Sweden was tasked with withdrawing from the contest between European civilisation and its threatening other, but it was still narrated as having a particular part in leading itself and its neighbours towards the preservation of their own distinct cultures as "the descendants of the proud Vikings."[914]

These roles carried with them a set of corresponding (non-)**responsibilities**. The foreign policy narrative's most insistent responsibility for Sweden

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[910] See, for example: Key, H. 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 9f; Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 45f.
[911] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 14f; Lundstedt, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 9ff.
[912] Ibid.
[913] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66f.
[914] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 18, translated. This narration related to the threat of Asian Bolshevism.

was its duty was to distance itself from the League whose destructive mechanisms placed the nation in greater peril. It was subsequently *not* Sweden's task to actively participate in the League. As a parliamentarian held:

> […] to throw one's own country into a world fire out of idealistic enthusiasm and to contribute to the throwing of other countries into it is an involuntary betrayal of both one's homeland and the cause of peace. […] Your thirst for justice, ladies and gentlemen friends of peace, is a […] flood-of-sin-policy, it means *Ragnarök*, not only for yourselves, but also for your descendants.[915]

Another responsibility was for Sweden was thus to avoid escalation. Sweden was tasked with the duty to *not* provoke other nations or take antagonistic stances that risked feeding the confrontations that the narrative anticipated, and this included avoiding "co-responsibility" in League actions "entailing the danger of war."[916] Sweden was instead charged with the responsibility to protect its own survival and to be able to properly defend the nation.[917] Cooperation was something that Sweden still had the obligation to pursue, but only together with the Nordics, whereas the League was narrated as something that Sweden had the "duty to get away from."[918] Sweden's portrayed responsibilities thus implied a reorientation away from the international, even the European, towards the protection of a regional cultural sphere.

These traits, roles, and (non-)responsibilities were further consolidated by the construction of Sweden's associated and differentiated others. Sweden's order and civilised ways were ascribed to Europe's own, and especially linked with the even more so peaceful Nordics. At the same time, Sweden, or rather its political leaders, were implicated by Europe's own error in binding its fate to the League. Sweden was subsequently associated with some of Europe's more negative portrayals, but the narrative connected these to the failing of its own government(s) rather than the nation as such. Sweden was also differentiated from the European great powers who, more so than Sweden, had the (material) possibility and responsibility to shape international events. Finally, Sweden was more sharply differentiated from the non-European characters and Italy whose "erratic" conduct or internal "anarchy" constituted Sweden as cool and ordered. This also included overtly racialised narrations where the

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[915] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 11, translated.
[916] Ossbahr, C. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 9.
[917] See, for example: Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 8f; Meyerhöffer, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66f; Meyerhöffer, SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 31f; Ossbahr, SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 51f; Ossbahr, C. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 8f.
[918] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 15, translated.

portrayal of the "white race" as, for instance, more advanced, superior, or modern followed into portrayals of Sweden through that linking.[919]

8.3 Emplotments and programmes

The preceding sections established the settings of the cultural-realist foreign policy narrative, as well as the characters that were portrayed within them. This section turns to its **emplotment**. The past was constructed via the ascendancy of "European supremacy", how it was shaken by Japan's victory over Russia at the turn of the century, broken by the "civil war of the whites" in 1914, and confirmed by the establishment of the League. The present(s) was constructed predominantly by what the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments meant for Europe, while the future suggested a continued European decline. Europe's loss in authority culminated in the prospects of the League unleashing another war upon the contient, or opening it up for an attack from its antipode. This section dives into the narrative's constructions of past, present, and future events, and demonstrates how the emplotment was connected to a specific **programme** for Sweden. Because Europe and the "white race" stood at the threshold of an irreversible loss in standing, and because the Swedish leadership had recklessly left Sweden more exposed (reasons), Sweden was to protect and preserve Sweden's territorial and cultural integrity (objectives), by loosening its ties to the League, repairing its own national defence, and resuming a neutrality policy with its Nordic kin (actions).

European supremacy and decay

The past constructed in this foreign policy narrative begun with the evolution and eventual global dominance of European civilisation. This past was narrated through more detailed images of "industrialisation promoting prosperity" through the "revolution of the relations of production" via "steam, electricity, motorism, and the associated communications system."[920] The "boom in shipping" and "the emigration from Europe to foreign continents […] laid

[919] See, for example: Key, 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 9f; Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10; Editorial, 7 Feb. 1935 "Abessiniens bekymmer" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3.
[920] See, for example: Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.

the foundation for [its] economic boom", where it had also performed "housekeeping" and "missionary" tasks by "administrating" and "schooling" the more disordered and uncivilised parts of the world.[921] Before that, Europe was narrated as having developed a "priceless culture" through "our art, our law" which it had then shared with the rest of the world.[922]

However, the foreign policy narrative also constructed a more immediate past which constituted a break from the progression of Europe's global supremacy. One such disruption was found in 1914 and the outbreak of the "civil war of the whites" where Europe had signalled its own weakening to the rest of the world.[923] This was then confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles: in the treatment of a humiliated Germany, but also in its establishment of the League.[924] The latter was narrated as Europe giving non-Europeans and the "coloured races" false promises of a legal order under which Europe itself would be judged, but was unable to follow through on because these standards were mere idealistic dreams.[925] In this vein, a parliamentarian narrated that the League had "in spite of the most favourable imaginable time […] been unable to achieve anything positive."[926]

The past creation of the League was further narrated as perilous because it have simultaneously given a platform for the "coloured races" to voice their grievances. An editorial, for example, held that Japan's permanent seat in the Council had given space for anti-European elements in the organisation:

> From the first moment, Japan has belonged to the privileged circle of the permanent Council powers as the main representative of the non-European, and in many cases anti-European elements, which have been incorporated into the League of Nations and which will one day therefore make it very difficult for Europe.[927]

Another editorial similarly drew a direct line between the past creation of the League and Europe's present challenges:

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[921] See, for example: Key, H. 10 Mar. 1932 "Arbetslöshet och emigration" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 9f; Westman, 19 Apr. 1936 "Vita och färgade" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 13.
[922] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10.
[923] See, for example: Editorial, 24 Jul 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[924] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 11.
[925] See, for example: Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated; Ossbahr, SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 29f.
[926] Ossbahr, C. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 29, translated.
[927] Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated.

> Certainly, many are now asking themselves whether it was fortunate that the League of Nations was made into a world-embracing institution with the same legal order for Europe and Asia. But the men in charge in 1919 wanted it that way, and their work was greeted with jubilation around the world. […] Now it seems that the enthusiasm in many places has turned into fear.[928]

However, the decline of Europe was not only narrated as self-inflicted. This was also delineated from the "awakening of the coloured races." While the "awakening" itself was connected to a past of the colonies having acquired influences from "Western ways of thinking, customs, [and] forms of government", it was also related to more specific events.[929] Most commonly, Japan's victory against Russia in 1905 was told as an "epoch-making event". An editorial narrated the end of the Russo-Japanese war as having "ignited the first sparks among coloured peoples around the world of the feeling that white supremacy may not be irresistible forever."[930] Another told this story as follows:

> Japan […] took up the fight against Russia's centuries-long relentless advance across the Asian continent. The world was astonished at the cold-blooded audacity with which the "yellow dwarf" ordered the giant to halt or fight on the Manchurian battlefield. Hardly anyone suspected that one of the great epoch-making events of world history was looming. Few knew that Goliath was facing a David's sling.[931]

Abyssinia defeating Italy at Adwa was not as emphasised, but an editorial held that "the Japanese killing blow against the advance of Russia and European supremacy had a predecessor in Menelik's victory in the battle for Abyssinia."[932] This was then further strengthened by the "spectacle of the whites' devastating civil war with the call-up of coloured support troops [which had] initiated a world-historical change in the feelings of Asians and Africans."[933] From the war, "coloured nationalisms" had blossomed, and then the League foolishly proclaimed the right of all peoples to self-determination and equal judgement under the Covenant.[934]

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[928] Editorial, 22 Feb. 1932 "Kinas väckelse" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[929] Westman, 19 Apr. 1936 "Vita och färgade" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 13, translated.
[930] Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[931] Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated. See also: Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4;
[932] Editorial, 24 Jul. 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated. See also: Editorial, 10 Jul. 1935 "Revanchen för Adua" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4
[933] Editorial, 24 Feb. 1935 "Den europeiska expansionens skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4; Editorial, 24 Jul. 1935 "Vad skall ske?" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[934] Eriksson, 4 May 1933 "Gul nationalism" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning,* final page.

New warning signs for Europe

The foreign policy narrative had thus constructed a past around the beginning of European civilisational decline, and this weakening was further emphasised in the selection and ordering of events in the present. The issue narratives notably narrated the crisis moments as critical and urgent. However, these constructions of significant moments were not related to a need to hastily respond to the crises themselves. They mattered as warning signs within the larger temporal setting of a Europe in decline vis-à-vis the rise of its antipode. They were made critical only as moments illustrating why Europe needed to "wake up".[935]Even the retellings of events occurring in Manchuria and Abyssinia were thus consistently narrated back to what they meant for the core spatial setting of European civilisation.

The Manchuria issue narrative, for instance, emphasised a present that linked Japan and Geneva together, but the selected events were narrated as creating "chaos in international relations", and this was by the League's doing.[936] It correspondingly emphasised the decision-making taking place in London and Paris (and in the Council), and narrated their initial careful approaches as wise. To place Japan on the pillory would be to threatened Europe's own connections to the Asian markets, and in a time of economic decline this would be to place Europe at a disadvantage.[937] The Assembly sessions and Sweden's presence therein were thus contrasted as events generating instability, while the European great powers' presence was narrated as generating stability. An editorial held that the former's decision on the Lytton report "has only made a mockery of the white race [….] the impression in East Asia of the European demarche has been very unfavorable." [938]

However, the Manchuria issue narrative also selected present events occurring in Northern China; narrating Japan's military advancements alongside Chinese resistance and growing nationalism.[939] Japan's actions in Manchuria were, for example, told as Japan "daring", where European powers had been weak and "lost all prestige", in seeking to quell the "bloody anarchy" in China.[940] This present was also accompanied by descriptions of the military

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[935] Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.
[936] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 11f.
[937] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 15f; Key, 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f.
[938] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f.
[939] Editorial, 22 Feb. 1932 "Kinas väckelse" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4; Eriksson, 4 May 1933 "Gul nationalism" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page.
[940] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f.

modernisation and superiority of Japan.[941] At the same time, Europe was narrated as potentially miscalculating the presently growing nationalism in China, and events of both Chinese struggles on site and its attempts to turn to the League for aid were narrated as potential dangers for Europe.[942] The events transpiring in Manchuria, China, and Japan were consequently connected, first and foremost, to what they would mean for Europe further down the line.

The Abyssinia issue narrative also followed different sets of events. On the one hand, it selected events surrounding Italy's military build-up, and described these by images and illustrations of Italian military force. The invasion was then plotted as "modern warfare" set against "tribal warfare."[943] However, these narration did not express support for Italy, since the invasion was said to have contributed to European instability, as well as being an expression of the "desire of the stronger to secure peace (possibly civilisation) by taking possession of the properties of the weaker."[944] Even if narrations thus did not buy into Italy's "civilising claims", they were accompanied by stories that either said that Sweden and Europe should never have involved itself in Italy's "colonial war", or that a threatening "coloured solidarity" was became all the more likely as a result of that war.[945]

On the other hand, the Abyssinia issue narrative consequently also selected events surrounding the League, as well as European great power negotiations with Italy. The former events included depictions of the Italian representatives as "fanatical", and of the Ethiopian representatives as "looking out of place" within the League context (see section 8.2).[946] The League itself was narrated through events that marked it as failing in two ways: it was unable to halt Italy's plans and then responded rashly by implementing sanctions against a fellow European power. A parliamentarian, for instance, narrated the use of sanctions in the following way:

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[941] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10.
[942] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[943] Editorial, 7 Feb. 1935 "Abessiniens bekymmer" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3; Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Meyerhöffer, SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 14f.
[944] Editorial, 4 Aug. 1935 "Med, utan eller mot Genève" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4, translated. See also: Editorial, 24 Feb. 1935 "Den europeiska expansionens skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[945] Editorial, 19 Jul. 1935 "Europas skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Ossbahr, SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 30.
[946] von Krusenstjerna – Sprengel, 8 Jul 1936 "Två svenskar ser på Genève och kejsaren" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3.

> Revenge begets revenge. The atrocity against the Swedish ambulance was an act of revenge, prompted by the revenge that the Abyssinians had carried out against Italian prisoners. And now a large part of the so-called civilised world wants to take revenge on Italy both for this country's act of revenge against the ambulance and, above all, for its attack on Abyssinia. Supported by the crests of the waves of justice, international revenge may grow like an avalanche, in which our entire continent will soon find itself buried. Truly, a more dangerous game with fire than that which is now taking place between the peoples of Europe has never occurred.[947]

The events transpiring in Geneva were thus used to illustrate how the core spatial setting of Europe was made disordered by both Italy and the League. The events surrounding the other European great powers' actions were narrated with more duality. These characters were first said to be responsibly manoeuvring Italy's antagonisms to keep Europe itself stable, but then they had allowed the sanctions regime which only threatened to turn an isolated war into another European "civil war".[948] This notably followed how the later stages of the Manchuria crisis moment had also been narrated as the League ending up jeopardising Europe by "pillorying" Japan and preventing a "natural development" in the region.[949]

Through the League's many failures, Europe and the "white race" thus suffered, not only in how the "moral defeats" verified its own inabilities to the rest of the world, but in risking a broader war in Europe while "obscuring the view of what [was] happening" by turning to "documents of international law" like they were "holy scriptures".[950] The present events were thus frequently related back to that grave error of 1919-20. Europe, and the "white race" more broadly, had decided to bring its own world dominance to a conclusion by signing the "unfortunate Treaty of Versailles [which] created a situation that was particularly ominous for Europe."[951] It was narrated now "trapped" in an "institution which the leading powers of the white race have created with the claim to thereby secure the rule of law in the coexistence of peoples around the world."[952] This meant that Europe had wilfully tied its own future to the

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[947] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 7, translated.
[948] Editorial, 24 Feb. 1935 "Den europeiska expansionens skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4; Lundstedt, SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 8ff; Ossbahr, SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 29f.
[949] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 16; Key, 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f.
[950] Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning,* p. 10; Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[951] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66, translated. This was related to both the creation of a dangerous institution and the humiliation of another European power, see section 8.3.
[952] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.

organisation so that when the League failed in the present, the European civilisation indicted itself.

Competition and war

The foreign policy narrative constructed an overarching future of continued European decline and a weakening of the standing of the "white race". This future was told as one that with certainty awaited. However, there was a difference in how narrators constructed this civilisational regression. The future was broadly narrated as a waning in political and economic dominance as other powers were developing their societies and economies by following and learning from Europe.[953] The foreign policy narrative, for instance, foresaw a Europe that would become increasingly challenged by Asian markets. In other words, one path to the weakening of Europe was found in its commercial access, including to its present colonies, and this was narrated in an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* as follows:

> By all accounts, a development is currently taking place in East Asia – without attracting much attention from neither Europe nor America – which in many respects indicates a strong upswing. Certain economic advantages have recently emerged in connection with this, which should arouse the most serious reflection among the white peoples. But Europe prefers to sleep or discuss insignificant intra-European disputes. If developments continue in the same way, it may happen that the Europeans one day wake up and find their trade relations cut off from half the globe.[954]

At the same time, the future was also understood as a cultural challenge. The weakening of Europe was narrated through a loss of moral prestige and authority and these aspects of European civilisational decline were frequently attributed to the League.[955] The future problem that this narrative constructed was that Europe had tied its own hands to the Covenant, and opened itself up to be judged on the League's principles by non-Europeans. This was narrated as an issue because "an international legal order […] cannot withstand the strain of what a great power considers to be a vital interest."[956] In parallel to this, the narrative described a future in which the colonies would develop their

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[953] Correspondence, 8 Mar. 1932 "Ett gult imperium i Asien?" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page; Editorial, 24 Feb. 1935 "Den europeiska expansionens skymning" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[954] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 7f.
[955] Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[956] Editorial, 22 Feb. 1932 "Kinas väckelse" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.

own national self-consciousness and challenge European governance, and here economic decline, a loss of political rule, and a weakening of moral authority was interconnected. Consider, for example, the following quote from another editorial in the same newspaper which held that Japan's actions in Manchuria spurred on the so-called "awakening":

> The struggle that is going on in Manchuria will not set the masses in motion across the vast Asian continent. But its waves will nevertheless roll forward over the entire globe. The effects of the battle will not be less than they were when migrations of peoples arose as a result of similar struggles and spread across the globe. A new era is ringing in with the roar of cannons. European hegemony is over. The leadership of the white race is in peril. The form of defence that Europe has pursued through its standoffs in Asia has ceased. It is an Asian great power that is subduing North China. It is thus leading its conquest of the largest market on earth. Down in the Indian archipelago, the thunder of cannons fades like distant funeral bells. They ring the European dominion to rest. [...] The people are listening. […] all of Central Asia are pondering the meaning of the thunder of cannons. Africa is trying to interpret it. Many think they can read the password: down with the Europeans.

What linked Sweden to this future was its complicity in the false and dangerous idealism that the League represented.[957] The creation of the international institution and the legal order it was claimed to be representing did not only open the doors for non-Europeans to enter into the world stage, it explicitly closed the eyes of the European to threats emerging on the horizon.[958] These future threats included both external ones (e.g. the rise of Asia and the colonies) and internal ones (e.g. a new European war). The naïve idealism associated, in this foreign policy narrative, with both the League as such, and with Sweden's own political leadership, was thereby constructed as setting Sweden, Europe, and the "white race" on the path towards its own downfall.

These broader futures of the weakening of Europe were constructed predominantly in the Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives. The former constructed a more immediate future in which Japan's military dominance was believed to be able to subjugate China. Japan was thus believed to be able to strengthen its position in East Asia even further, and emerge as an "Asian world empire".[959] This, on the one hand, contributed to the narration that making Japan the aggressor in Geneva would be an entirely meaningless gesture.

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[957] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 14.
[958] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4; Editorial, 7 Jan. 1933 "Kriget i Östern och Europa" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 10; Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.
[959] Sjösteen, 4 Mar. 1932 "Bland kineser och japaner" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page.

To do so only suggested a future with increased animosity between Japan and Europe, and with nothing gained as Japan would likely carry on with the task of curbing its unruly neighbour.[960] At the same time, the evolving "national feelings" of China were believed to continue to resist a Japanese vassal state in Manchuria, and so control over Northern China was told as likely to be troublesome for the East Asian power.[961]

The longer trajectory narrated in the Manchuria issue narrative, on the other hand, emphasised the future competition between Europe and Asia's largest powers, this included Japan as the great power in the East, but also Soviet Russia and, in the longer span, also China. This competition was, as mentioned, constructed as one between Europe's and Asia's commercial interests. However, it was also a future of cultural prestige, and that depended on present actions in Geneva. If the Covenant was fully enforced against Japan, including via economic sanctions, then Europe either made an enemy out of a powerful empire in the East, or Japan, as the only protection against the Bolshevisation of Asia would have its "great power status crushed" and the white race would receive the "death blow" from such as future projection.[962]

Europe's own future was thus paradoxically narrated as dependent on Japan keeping its power and control in the "Far East", while also regarding Japan as the one leading in an "Asian offensive" against Europe.[963] China created another paradox. It was presently too weak to counter Japan and thus told as entirely dependent on aid from the League, and its growing nationalism was narrated as likely to remember what the League chose to do for years to come. In other words, how the League acted would be judged in the eyes of the "intellectually awake" part of the Chinese population, and it would see the League as the criterion for what contemporary Europe and the "culture of the white race" meant for the world.[964]

Finally, the Abyssinia issue narrative likewise constructed an immediate future in relation to the war between Abyssinia and Italy as the latter, with certainty, being able to soon conquer the former. In early narrations, this narrative did not believe that Abyssinia could expect any help from Europe since

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[960] Editorial, 15 Nov. 1931 "Prövningens stund" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[961] Sjösteen, 4 Mar. 1932 "Bland kineser och japaner" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, final page; Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[962] Lundstedt, V. SC 19 Jan. 1933 No. 5, p. 15f.
[963] Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[964] Editorial, 12 Sep. 1932 "Europas stora fråga" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.

no one "risks a war out of love for the people of Africa", and that Italy's modern warfare would thereby secure Abyssinia as part of its empire.[965] However, this future was not emphasised so much as what Italy's war against a "coloured people" signified for the relation between races. While the past(s) had narrated a beginning "awakening" of the "coloured races", the future told following Italy's invasion was one in which they would collectively challenge European governance and world leadership.[966]

After the decision on economic sanctions, however, the narrations turned almost exclusively to the telling of another European "civil war" approaching. Even before the decision, Italy's invasion had notably been condemned, first and foremost, because of the instability and uncertainty it brought to Europe's doorstep. Yet, the implications for Europe were told as escalating with the decision on a sanctions regime, and as already leading to the "the collapse of the League".[967] The present actions of the League, its leading powers, and Sweden itself was thus narrated as setting Europe on a certain destructive path where, as was narrated by a parliamentarian, "everything seems to be tending towards such a state that one power group stands against the other."[968] The sanctions were specifically told as contributing to bringing Italy closer to a Germany already engaged in rearmament, and the issue narrative stressed a particular danger for Sweden where "enmity with Italy then means enmity with our nearest neighbor to the south."[969]

Connecting Sweden

The cultural-realist narrative emplotted a trajectory of European civilisational decline in which the crisis moments became warning signs for its hastened regression. Manchuria was a sign of an ascendant Asia alongside an idealist institution that brought "ridicule on the white race", and Abyssinian was the moment when that institution's misjudgements threatened to ignite a "*Ragnarök*" in Europe.[970] Although Sweden had not played a leading part in any of

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[965] Editorial, 7 Feb. 1935 "Abessiniens bekymmer" *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, p. 3. Although there were also narrations of Italy likely finding it difficult to establish an Italian colony in Ethiopia. See, for example: Westman, 19 Apr. 1936 "Vita och färgade" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 13.
[966] Editorial, 21 May 1935 "Europa, Abessinien och de färgade folken" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 4.
[967] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 29f; Ossbahr, SC 2 Apr. 1936 No. 22, p. 9.
[968] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66, translated.
[969] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 8, translated.
[970] Key, H. 22 Aug. 1933 "Europas nederlag" *Svenska Dagbladet*, p. 8; Lundstedt, SC26 Feb. 1932 No. 18, p. 9.

the issue narratives, and appeared more often as a misguided bystander than an influential agent, the foreign policy narrative still connected events in such a way that a specific programme for Sweden, as well as for Europe more broadly, was constructed.

First of all, the **reasons** that the narrative provided for its specific programme followed directly from the dangers that its emplotment and character portrayals narrated. The most fundamental one was the conviction that Europe, and the "white race", stood at the threshold of an irreversible loss in standing. The danger of Asia's great power challenging Europe, as well as the suggested awakening national feeling of the "coloured races" risked vengeful anti-European attitudes. The prospect of the continent one day finding its leadership position in the world challenged, or even overthrown, was said to be expected. Since Sweden was positioned as belonging to the European civilisation: what endangered Europe also endangered Sweden.

Another reason contrarily located the danger from within Europe. The League was not narrated as a safeguard against European decline, but as one of its main engines. By binding Europe to a Covenant untethered from the realities of power politics, the institution exposed the European nations to judgement by the peoples they had historically and presently subjugated, and it had blinded them to the threats gathering around Europe. The Manchuria and Abyssinia issue narratives sharpened this into the narration that the League had actively manufactured that peril by antagonising Japan, by humiliating Italy, as well as by increasing antagonisms between Europe's own powers. The reason for Sweden's programme was therefore as much about disentangling Europe from this self-made trap as it was about preparing for new rivalries between European powers.

A final reason then connected these dangers to Sweden more specifically. As a small state of limited material power, Sweden could neither shape the contestation between great powers and civilisations, nor shield itself from the consequences of Europe's own miscalculation. An editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet,* for instance, said that:

> every European state, especially the materially weaker ones, are now faced with the question of what peace and the maintenance of peace really mean. Peace cannot always be preserved and every conflict is "peacefully resolved" by the weaker party sacrificing enough rights and possessions for the stronger to find the spoils satisfactory to its demands.[971]

[971] Editorial, 4 Aug. 1935 "Med, utan eller mot Genève" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4, translated.

Sweden as a materially weaker state was thus especially vulnerable. Even worse, its own leaders were narrated as having added to this exposure by entangling the Swedish nation with crises that were none of its concerns (e.g. pushing to name Japan the aggressor and joining the sanctions against Italy). Each such involvement was told to be drawing Sweden deeper into conflicts in a way that both damaged its own prestige and risked pulling it into new wars. As a parliamentarian held:

> […] a spirit of short-sightedness prevailing everywhere in the world has forced us into this situation, which has now forced us to abandon our policy of neutrality and to tread the path of fatal sanctions. It is true that so far it has been more a question of gestures than of actions on our part. But these gestures have already been sufficiently provocative to lay the foundation for an enmity with a foreign power, an enmity which we may in future wish in vain to see levelled. It is also true that the power in question is at present at a seemingly safe distance from our shores. But this situation can very easily change.[972]

The reason for a distinct Swedish programme was thus found in the gap between the nation's limited capabilities and the added risks that its idealistic engagements had invited.

From these reasons followed a set of **objectives** that foreign policy narrative constructed for Sweden and Europe more broadly. An overarching aim was self-preservation rather than reforming or strengthening an international legal order. To safeguard the civilisation that Sweden belonged to, and to thereby (at the very least) slow down, rather than hasten, the decline that the emplotment foretold, became a necessary aim. This was notably an objective that Sweden was narrated as sharing with Europe as a collective character, but, from a Swedish perspective, it was to be pursued from a particular position. Sweden was not portrayed as a guardian of Europe, but as a nation whose duty was to avoid adding to the forces unravelling the continent. A related objective was consequently, in short, to refuse the current naivety marking Europe, the League, and Sweden's own political leadership.

The primary objective for Sweden specifically was, however, the protection of its own territorial and cultural integrity. Each issue narrative translated this aim into a more concrete one: in Manchuria the objective was to stay clear of a conflict that pitted the nation against a distant power on which Europe's future economy and defence against Bolshevism were depending on, and in Abyssinia, above all, the objective was to keep out of a confrontation that

[972] Lundstedt, V. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 7f, translated.

threatened to escalate into a European war via the League's sanctions mechanism. The common objective for all three was thus to safeguard Sweden's own stability, to avoid entanglements that could expose a materially weak state, and, as a parliamentarian clarified, to "ultimately ensure that the kingdom will survive and that we will all be able to retain our freedom."[973]

These objectives were then linked to the **actions** that the foreign policy narrative prescribed for how they could be realised. Sweden was, firstly, to loosen its ties to the League, preferably through a withdrawal, but also by holding back from the collective measures that the international institution had forced it into (e.g. arbitration procedures, the naming of aggressors, and sanctions). The Abyssinia issue narrative pressed this action the hardest by narrating the Swedish participation in the sanctions regime as particularly perilous, and narrations urging for Sweden to withdraw, both from such commitments and from the League in its entirety, became more frequent. As a parliamentarian asked, why should Sweden "support an international policy that would lead not only us but the peoples into pure ruin, if it did not always at critical moments abandon its own principles?" Another provided the negative answer:

> continued membership in the League of Nations entails greater risks than withdrawal. I am of the opinion that of two evils one must choose the lesser of two evils. Since, as I see it, I believe that the League has developed more and more into an alliance rather than into a universal solidarity league, I must for my part find that future membership may place us in a rather serious position against other powers in Europe, powers which stand outside the League and one of which, a great power, is our neighbour. There are rather serious signs which indicate that the League of Nations is intended to become such an instrument for the conduct of a coalition policy with the spearhead at the moment directed against a power on the Mediterranean but tomorrow perhaps against a great power on the Baltic. These are quite serious complications that could very easily arise if we continue to be members of the League.[974]

However, disengagement was not alone narrated as enough to secure a defenceless Sweden. Two additional action was therefore to repair Sweden's material weakness through rearmament, and to resume an absolute policy of neutrality. A statement from a "right-wing organ", quoted by a parliamentarian, narrated it as follows:

> The country's defense has been neglected in recent years. We do not wish to dispute who is to blame for this. Instead, we want to strive to urgently repair what has been broken. […] The League of Nations has become a pawn in the game of the great powers

[973] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66f, translated.
[974] Ossbahr, C. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 30f, translated.

> for their changing interests. For the small nations, their peace and neutrality, the League is no security. We Swedes want to stand outside the game of the great powers, we want to live in peace and security.[975]

A final action nonetheless allowed this self-reliance to expand to a collective North. Sweden did not have to stand alone, but was to resume both neutrality and rearmament as a joint Nordic path to regional security. Especially in the act of resuming a neutrality policy, Sweden "would have our most important foreign policy problems solved, and we could act within the Nordic countries in a spirit of consensus, in a spirit of good will to develop what we believe to be the cause of peace."[976] Sweden was thus to coordinate with the other Nordic states on a withdrawal from the League because, as a parliamentarian held, "it would be infinitely more pleasant if this withdrawal could be justified in connection with the Nordic peoples in general."[977]

At the same time, this prescribed action also extended to Europe. Although the foreign policy narrative wanted Sweden to limit its role in the current European order in Geneva, it could still advice Europe to abandon the idealism that had bound it to principles that were, in practice, unenforceable. Europe was thus urged to recognise the realities of an advancing Asia and the "awakening of the coloured races". For Sweden, the path forward was clear: to withdraw, to rearm, and to seek out a neutrality policy together with its Nordic kin. Europe as a whole also needed to abandon the League project to "get its house in order" before the external threats arrived.[978]

8.4 A cultural-realist foreign policy narrative

This chapter has introduced a final foreign policy narrative as it was reproduced across the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments. The narrative analysis illustrated how the spatial and temporal settings of the narrative made Europe a civilisation facing definitive decline. This core setting held powerful but negligent leaders, internal antagonists in both the League and Italy, and a Sweden that was mostly silent. The foreign policy narrative also constructed an alternative setting as Europe's antipode, and described its characters as de-

[975] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 32, translated.
[976] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 17 Jan. 1936 No. 3, p. 66f, translated.
[977] Meyerhöffer, A. SC 19 Feb. 1936 No. 10, p. 32, translated.
[978] Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4

veloping into its dominant threats. The emplotment connected a past of beginning European decline, to a present that again and again confirmed that path, and a future with new rivalries and war looming over the continent. This connected to a requirement for Sweden to withdraw, rearm, and reorient closer to home.

This foreign policy narrative was, however, not told in the source material relating to the Corfu case. Although it included some references to cultural differentiations between Southern and Northern Europe, this crisis moment was not told as a threat to neither European culture nor to the standing of the "white race". It was also sparsely reproduced in a distinct Mosul issue narrative, and albeit the source material pointed to it as a crisis for Sweden's honour and judgement, it was not narrated as a existential crisis for European civilisation in the way the issue narratives of the 1930s did.[979] These cases have therefore not been included in this chapter since the narrative analysis did not reveal a reproduction of a distinct cultural-realist foreign policy narrative that linked to later stories (re)telling this narrative.

The foreign policy narrative was, however, frequently reproduced in the **Manchuria** case, forming an issue narrative which described Japanese expansion in northern China as bringing chaos in international affairs – not by Japan's doing, but in the League's own response to events. The institution's actions were narrated as generating greater instability and as bringing "ridicule on the white race", whereas the careful approaches of London, Paris, and the Council were narrated as wise in a time of economic depression when Europe could not afford its connection to Asian markets. Japan's advance was further told as the constructive work of a power filling a vacuum left by a negligent Europe that had turned a blind eye to a disordered China. The decision to accept the Lytton report was then narrated as great shame for Europe, and something that further demonstrated its own weakening position in the world.

Finally, the foreign policy narrative was also reproduced in a specific **Abyssinia** issue narrative which constructed Italy's invasion of Ethiopia as Italy bringing instability to, first and foremost, Europe's own shores. This instability was then told as being further escalated by the League, by Europe's leading powers, and by Sweden's own involvement. The implementation of sanctions against Italy were narrated as an idealistic self-endangerment that risked turning a war in distant Africa into a European civil war. In parallel with these Eurocentric stories, the issue narrative also emplotted a warning around how

[979] See, for example: Editorial, 28 Sep. 1925 "Det rätta ordet" *Göteborgs Handels- och sjöfartstidning*, p. 12.

the invasion was likely to trigger "coloured solidarity" and anti-European sentiment amongst already "awakening races." Here Japan also emerged as a key character in narrations of a parallel antagonising campaign against Europe.[980]

The cultural-realist foreign policy narrative also positioned, portrayed, and connected Sweden within this broader story of European civilisational decline. Sweden was positioned as European, "white", and Nordic, but also as small state and as having a *past* neutral position. The former positions were narrated as superior in cultural or overtly racial terms, and Sweden was portrayed as distinctly civilised, peaceful, and well-ordered. At the same time, Sweden's lost position as a neutral marked it, together with its position as a small state, as vulnerable. This was amplified by Sweden's position as European and "white" since these categories were narrated as becoming more threatened. Sweden was thus also portrayed as materially weak and, worse, as made naïve by its political leadership. Sweden's main roles were therefore found outside of the institution in Geneva, and its responsibilities were towards the preservation of its own territorial and cultural integrity. The narrative subsequently connected Sweden to a programme where the only intelligible path forward was full separation from the League and a reorientation towards rearmament and a Nordic cooperation based on their culture as much as mutual need to resume neutrality policies.

[980] See: Editorial, 20 Feb. 1935 "Japans varningsord" *Svenska Dagbladet,* p. 4.

PART IV

9 Imagining Sweden in a League of Nations

In the introduction of the thesis, it was argued that, although the question of Sweden's membership in the League was settled in 1920, the question of what Sweden could be imagined to *be* and to *do* in the context of the international organisation was still left unsettled. The research problem this thesis has engaged with has therefore concerned how Sweden's foreign policy and national identity, in the context of that membership, were reproduced and contested in the narrations of four Interwar crisis moments. The main research question to address this problem was: *How was Sweden's foreign policy in the context of its membership in the League of Nations made possible, and what alternatives were also imagined?* Two additional questions were formulated to guide the analysis. The first asked what foreign policy narratives were narrated across different crisis moments, and the second how these narratives reproduced and contested Sweden's national identity. This chapter begins with answering these questions by discussing what conclusions can be drawn for the narrative analysis and the identity reconstruction presented in Part III of the thesis. The main research question is addressed by considering how the foreign policy narratives that were reassembled in the analysis, as well as identity elements that were reconstructed from them, can be understood as making Sweden's policies during four crisis moments (presented in Chapter 4) possible. It correspondingly discusses how these policies were contested, and what alternative policies were also imagined in the foreign policy narratives.

9.1 Foreign policy narratives in Interwar Sweden

This section addresses the question: *how were crisis moments in the context of the League of Nations narrated in Sweden, and what recurring foreign policy narratives were produced across them?* The narrative analysis presented in Part III began with exploring narrations of the crisis moments in specific texts and reassembled them into issue narratives. It then considered how these narratives reproduced foreign policy narratives across the four cases. The

analysis reveals that the crisis moments of Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia reproduced four recurring foreign policy narratives: a progressive-reformist, a traditional-realist, a socialist-reformist, and a Marxist-revolutionary foreign policy narrative. The latter two crises also reproduced an additional cultural-realist narrative. A starting point for the exploration has been that there is no evident way in which a crisis presents itself because events are made meaningful through the stories told about them. The narrative analysis shows that there were competing accounts of what was happening, who were involved, and what these crises meant for Sweden. This section compares the three narrative elements: the *settings* in which the crisis moments were narrated as unfolding, the *characters* that were portrayed in them, and the *emplotments* that selected and ordered events into meaningful stories. A central finding is that the same four crisis moments were narrated from contrasting spatial and temporal settings, driven by different protagonists and antagonists, and narrated into five trajectories that pointed towards diverse futures.

Geographies and temporalities

The analysis reveals that the issue narratives drew up the borders of the spaces relevant to their narration of the crisis moments and then connected or separated them in distinct ways. They also constructed temporal settings and diverse understanding of both where in time the crisis moments occurred, and how time itself could be understood. Comparing the spatial and temporal settings of the progressive-reformist, traditional-realist, socialist-reformist, Marxist-revolutionary, and cultural-realist narratives illustrates that the crisis moments were narrated from five contrasting spatial maps and five different temporalities. Narrative contestation consequently occurred already around from *where* the crisis moments were told, and how its centre was connected, separated, or distanced from other spatial spaces. Contestation was also found in whether the past, present, and future were narrated through a single progressing, regressing, cyclical, or stagnant trajectory, or if temporalities also overlapped or differed depending on spatial settings.

One of the most fundamental differences in terms of spatial settings concerned which place was made the core of the narrative. For the progressive-reformist narrative, the centre was Geneva as the symbolic capital of a new international order (often collapsed into the League itself), and it was narrated as the spatial settings in which each crisis moments transpired. The effect was that what was correspondingly told as distant crises, were pulled towards Europe. The traditional-realist narrative, on the other hand, did the opposite. It

made Sweden the core spatial setting and narrated it as a sealed-off space for national decision-making, even if it also emphasised the wider Nordic region as another separable location. This meant that Geneva was one of several settings (e.g. great power capitals or the crisis locations) that were effectively distanced from the narrative's centre.

The other three narratives contrarily widened the spatial frame. The socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives dissolved specific locations and narrated the core spatial setting as a global system defined by capitalism and imperialism. The implications were that Geneva, Sweden, the conflict areas, etcetera, were not distinct spaces, but rather part of one imperial geography. Distinctions and hierarchies between more specific spatial spaces were always related to how deeply they were implicated by the narrative's central setting. The cultural-realist narrative also organised space from a global scale but distinguished between locations based on a belonging to European civilisation or to its constructed antipode(s). Europe was the core which was encircled, or even threatened, by non-European regions, but it was also a setting that was fractured or narrated as turning upon itself.

These different centres, as will be further discussed below, produced different positions and belongings for Sweden. When Geneva was the anchor of the narrative, Sweden was drawn into the middle of events as an active participant. When Sweden or the Nordics were made the starting-point, Sweden was set apart as its own household that watched the spectacle of Geneva from the side. The cultural-realist foreign policy narrative, albeit placing Sweden within the core European civilisation, also tucked it away into a partially separable Nordic space. The narratives centring on an imperial geography, on the other hand, diverged on the question of spatial separability. The socialist-reformist narrative allowed Sweden and the Nordic countries to be partially removed from the core spatial setting. The effect of this was that Sweden was narrated as able to critique it from the side, and it could not be fully blamed for an imperialist system it did not command. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative denied any place of external observation and located Sweden entirely within a capitalist bloc.

A recurring theme across all five foreign policy narratives was that the specific crisis locations were rarely granted weight on their own. Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia as spaces appeared consistently as peripheral settings, and their significance was given mostly from what events occurring on site meant for someplace else. Whether that relevance was narrated as tests for the Geneva order, as illustrative of great power rivalry playing out, as symptoms of capitalist and imperialist structures, or as warning signs for a declining

Europe clearly differed, but any bearing was spatially located elsewhere than in the crisis locations themselves. Although the five foreign policy narratives thus diverged in terms of both core spatial settings and narrations of how spaces were connected or separated, they consistently narrated the locations of Corfu, Mosul, Manchuria, and Abyssinia as marginal. This also travelled into the construction of time(s) since these spatial spaces were repeatedly placed further back in terms of progress and development. This suggests that the Swedish self and its others were placed on different points in time as well.

The temporal settings diverged between the foreign policy narratives, but with some comparable understandings of time and temporality. The progressive-reformist narrative constructed time as progression. The relations between nations were narrated as gradually becoming ordered, and the League marked a break from a disordered past. However, it also contained the possibility of future regression and narrated moving backward in time as threatening. The socialist-reformist narrative likewise narrated time as (potential) progression. Although it was not as optimistic about confirming time as developing, it kept the door open for moving forward in time. The narrative did, however, also construct time as stagnating in a capitalist and imperialist structure, but reform was not inconceivable therein. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative contrarily closed that door, narrating time only as stagnating in the persistence of bourgeoise dominance. Here, only revolution offered change.

The traditional-realist narrative did not see time as a line moving neither forward or backward, nor as remaining stuck. Instead, it constructed time as cyclical and suggested that the post-war peace was temporary and partial because conflicts between powers were always likely to return. This meant that the crisis moments could also be narrated as confirming a repetition of history. The cultural-realist narrative, on the other hand, encompassed some temporal tensions since it also narrated an overarching cyclical (or rather swinging) timeline with recurring civilisational rivalry. However, alongside this it constructed a forked future trajectory with regression for Europe and the "white race" and progression for Asia and the "coloured races". The implications of these parallel temporalities were that the threat of decline versus "awakening" could be placed in conjunction with a narrated historical rivalry that remerged like a pendulum on a swing.

These temporal settings assigned different meanings for the same present. In the progressive-reformist narrative, the present was told as a hinge (e.g. critical tests) that would confirm the trajectory of progression. Hence, each crisis moment could be told as urgent and as necessary to respond to. In the traditional-realist foreign policy narrative, the present was not surprising, but

rather a symptom or a confirmation of the cyclical timeline. The temporalities of the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narrative either turned the present into an opening for a critical intervention, or a closed temporal frame where any reformative attempts were futile. Finally, the cultural-realist narrative narrated the present as moments of existential warning. They were urgent and critical, meaning that response was necessary, but the construction of spatial settings meant that that response was not to be taken in Geneva.

Foreign policy narrative	Core spatial setting	Core temporal setting
Progressive-reformist	Geneva as the symbolic capital of an emerging world community	Progression and the development of a new order
Traditional-realist	Sweden as its separate decision-making entity	A cyclical temporal frame of re-curring conflicts
Socialist-reformist	A global capitalist and imperialist system	Stagnation of the system with the potential for reform
Marxist-revolutionary	A global capitalist and imperialist system	Stagnation with revolution as the only path to change
Cultural-realist	European civilisation versus non-European spatial settings	A cyclical temporal frame with specified regression/progression

Table 3 Summary of the foreign policy narratives' settings

Protagonists, antagonists, and those in-between

The narrative analysis further reveals, although the issue narratives often selected the same characters as relevant for the narration of each crisis moment, that the moments were portrayed in a myriad of ways. Most notably, one narrative's hero could be another's villain, especially in narrations of the League as its own character. Comparing the character portrayals of the progressive-reformist, traditional-realist, socialist-reformist, Marxist-revolutionary, and cultural-realist narratives consequently shows that they differed in who they cast as its protagonists and antagonists, and who were made secondary characters. They also differed in what kind of character could be narrated and whether, for example, the main protagonist was an institution, a group of states, a specific nation, a region, a class, a civilisation, or a race.

The progressive-reformist narrative notably constructed the League as an institution, the European/Nordic small states as a state collective, and Sweden as a nation as the protagonists. These characters were often defined by their service to the order in Geneva. The traditional-realist kept only Sweden and the Nordic ex-neutral collective of states as the protagonists, but narrated them as constrained rather than as central for moving the issue narratives forward.

In other words, they only had the power to shape events within the core spatial setting. The socialist-reformist narrative made the same characters its protagonists but regarded them as the pioneers of its socialist peace vision who could pursue reform from inside the League setting, and it often connected Sweden to broader transnational movements (e.g. social democracy or the labour movements). It was, consequently, not the collective of Nordic/Scandinavian states *per se* that were constructed as protagonist, but more so their social democratic governments or representatives.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative broke entirely with the narration of institutions, state collectives, and/or specific nations as the main protagonist (except for the Soviet Union). Instead, the hero of this narrative was the international working-class, while Sweden as a nation was instead portrayed alongside an antagonistic bloc of capitalist states. The cultural-realist narrative also constructed a broader collective as its protagonists: Europe as a cultural entity and the "white race" as a collective character. Furthermore, it made Europe's leading powers semi-protagonists who paradoxically were portrayed as both the commanders of the continent and who to blame for its weakening. Such contradictions in the portrayals of the European great powers were also found in the other foreign policy narratives, except for the Marxist-revolutionary as it only cast them as antagonists. These different protagonists thus portrayed distinctly different versions of Sweden, which will be further discussed in the next section.

The foreign policy narratives still shared some similarities in who they cast as state-antagonists. The progressive-reformist narrative portrayed the law-breaking aggressors (here Italy and Japan) as the main enemies to the Geneva order and thus also Sweden. The cultural-realist narrative constructed Italy and Japan as antagonists as well, but in different ways. The former was an antagonist because it threatened the European civilisation from within, while Japan's actions against China were narrated as legitimate while its long-term advancement was regarded as constituting a direct threat to Europe. The socialist-reformist and Marxist-revolutionary narratives cast all imperial great powers as antagonists, although the former included some positive portrayals of Britain when narrating its Labour Party. The traditional-realist narrative softened these portrayals of the (here self-interested) great powers as its semi-antagonists who sometimes acted with needed restraint. Italy was the only state-character portrayed with overt antagonism, whereas Japan was granted a measure of legitimacy.

However, the foreign policy narratives additionally portrayed non-state actors as antagonists. For both the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives, an antagonist was also found in capitalism and imperialism *per se*. In addition, the former constructed a threat around militarism. The progressive-reformist narrative likewise portrayed nationalism and anti-democratic movements as central antagonists, while the traditional-reformist narrative narrated fascism and communism as distinct threats to Sweden. The cultural-realist narrative similarly portrayed Bolshevism as a dominant antagonist, alongside the overarching threat of "coloured solidarity" and anti-European sentiments. In other words, the narratives' othering held strong ideological elements, as well as racialised dimensions.

Another notable feature of the antagonists was how the same characters could become antagonists for different reasons. Mussolini and Italy's fascists as well as Japan's militarists were narrated as the embodiment of regression for both the progressive-reformist and the socialist-reformist narratives. In the cultural-realist narrative, Italy's antagonism was less about it being a fascist dictatorship, and more about Italy being a disturber of Europe's cultural order. Japan was instead an advanced power doing constructive work in Manchuria, but therefore also becoming a threat to "white supremacy" more broadly. Furthermore, what was consequently narrated as purely actor-driven aggression in one narrative, was told more as symptoms of a perilous system in another or narrated as being partly legitimate self-assertion in a third. The selection of antagonists in the issue narratives thus largely followed from each foreign policy narrative's prior diagnosis of what was wrong with the world.

The League itself was perhaps the character where the foreign policy narratives most clearly diverged in their portrayals. For the progressive-reformist narrative, the League was both a hero and a victim, while the traditional-realist narrative portrayed the League as both a noble ideal and as being dominated by great powers (albeit portrayals became more critical after the sanctions regime). The socialist-reformist and Marxist-revolutionary narratives were distinguishable mostly because of their portrayals of the League. The former separated the organisation from a council that was narrated as corrupting it, whereas the latter narrated the entire League as an imperialist tool (albeit with tensions after the Soviet Union's entry). For the cultural-realist narrative, the League was an internal enemy that had handed the right to judgement to those outside Europe.

The addition of secondary characters distinguished the five foreign policy narratives even further. Although Greece, China, and Abyssinia were portrayed as victims in almost all of them, the more detailed portrayals differed.

Some regarded them as law-abiding but powerless petitioners, others as fellow exposed states that were still held apart from Sweden because of their narrated internal disorder. The socialist-reformist and Marxist-revolutionary narratives portrayed them as victims of capitalist and imperialist violence, whereas the cultural-realist gave support to Abyssinia over Italy, but also subjected it to racialised and antagonistic portrayals. Türkiye finally recurred as a secondary character – half-victim and half-obstructor – in several narratives. More specific secondary characters also included the Soviet Union in the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, as well as a range of future ideological threats and domestic opponents. Most notably, Sweden itself was cast as a secondary character in the cultural-realist narrative and did not hold a central place its telling of the Manchuria and Abyssinia crises.

Foreign policy narrative	**Protagonists**	**In-between**	**Antagonists**	**Secondary**
Progressive-reformist	The League; European small states; Sweden	European great powers	Great power aggressors; nationalism	Victims (Greece, China, Ethiopia); Non-victims (Türkiye).
Traditional-realist	Nordic/ ex-neutral small states; Sweden	European great powers; the League	Great power aggressors; Bolshevism; fascism	Victims (Greece, Ethiopia); Non-victim (China, Türkiye).
Socialist-reformist	Nordic small states; Sweden; social democracy/labour movement	The League	Imperialist powers; militarism	Victims (Greece, China, Ethiopia); Non-victims (Türkiye)
Marxist-revolutionary	The working-class		The League; the capitalist bloc; imperialist powers; Sweden	Soviet Union; Victims (Greece, Türkiye; China, Ethiopia)
Cultural-realist	Europe; the "white race"	European great powers	The League; Asian nations; "coloured races"; Bolshevism	Sweden; various domestic threats

Table 4 Summary of the foreign policy narratives' characters

The many pasts, presents, and futures

The narrative analysis also explored the selection and ordering of events, and how they were connected to tell specific stories about the crisis moments. It reveals that, although the reassembled issue narratives centred on the same crises, they interpreted and gave meaning to them quite differently. Comparing the emplotments of the progressive-reformist, traditional-realist, socialist-reformist, Marxist-revolutionary, and cultural-realist narratives shows that the same crisis moment could be narrated as, for instance, a test passed, a trail failed, a certain reality confirmed, or a warning ignored. By drawing on different pasts and selecting different events to make sense of the present, each foreign policy narrative also constructed divergent futures. Even within the same foreign policy narrative, the futures could be split between two trajectories hinged on more immediate developments.

Something all narratives drew upon was the outbreak of the First World War, as well as the eventual peace treaty and the founding of the League. They diverged, however, over the meaning assigned to these past events. The war was, for all narratives, a cautionary tale, but for the progressive-reformist narrative it was used to show what the world would look like without the League's presence in it. The traditional-realist narrative drew another lesson from the war, namely that the same power politics still dominated and another war remained an ever-present possibility. The socialist-reformist and Marxist-revolutionary narratives linked the war to a capitalist and imperialist system that still remained, and regarded that system as producing a continuous state of crisis. The cultural-realist narrative understood the war as a "civil war of the whites" and narrated it as having signalled the ending of "European supremacy".

The peace settlement and the establishment of the League was another event emphasised in all foreign policy. For the progressive-reformist narrative, this event marked a definitive break from what had been before, while the socialist-reformist one had a more cautious hopefulness about what the League would mean. For the latter, the League's origin link to the Treaty of Versailles constituted an obstacle to it becoming a true peace organisation, and this was also emphasised by the traditional-realist narrative which warned that this "false peace" concealed the continuation of power politics. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative rejected that the League had, or could ever, challenge the capitalist and imperialist system, and regarded its creation only as the consolidation of the victors' power and united front against the Soviet Union. The cultural-realist narrative likewise regarded the peace as false, and considered the League as having tied Europe's fate to an organisation which

gave a platform for anti-European sentiments, and had thus contributed to the weakening Europe.

In addition to these events recurring across them, the foreign policy narrative also emphasised additional past events. The traditional-realist, cultural-realist, and Marxist-revolutionary narratives often referred back to previous crisis moments as past disappointments or proof that the League was either a limited and weak, or an directly antagonistic creation. Especially Sweden's own let-down in the Åland Island dispute was regularly drawn upon in these narratives. The different foreign policy narratives also selected past events to helped construct what the present crisis moments were about. The progressive-reformist narrative, for instance, was complemented by legal-procedural sub-pasts as well as a record of Sweden's own past involvements in developing the League. The traditional-realist narrative instead emphasised past clashing interests in relation to the conflict areas to illustrate how rivalry resurfaced, and the cultural-realist narrative here underscored events that illustrated a specific historic rivalry between Europe and Asia specifically.

The presents then differed mostly by what the crisis moments were told to really be about and in what way they mattered. For the progressive-reformist narrative the present was narrated as decision-making moments in Geneva and as legal procedure taking place there. Council sessions and Assembly debates were foregrounded, while military events on site were kept in the background. Each case eventually closed as a hard-won victory for the Geneva order. The traditional-realist narrative concentrated on different European sites of decision-making, while the legal-procedural events in Geneva were contrarily told as the League failing to live up to its promise. It thus narrated each crisis moment as ending in a defeat for the Geneva order. These two narratives consequently selected somewhat similar events but reached the opposite conclusions. Where one narrated these events as gradual progress, the other narrated them as exposing that progress as an illusion.

The socialist-reformist narrative similarly described each crisis moment as a trial for the League and its purpose of achieving world peace, and thus constructed them as significant threshold where the League might prove to be developing into a true peace organisation. However, the verdict in each case was, as in the traditional-realist narrative, told to be a defeat or a betrayal of that purpose. In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, these crisis moments were, throughout them, narrated as evidence that the League was an imperialist instrument, and the cultural-realist narrative likewise rejected the League also at the early stages of the crisis moments. While the latter narrative, more so than the others, selected and narrated present events on site, as opposed to

mostly centring on events occurring in different European settings, these were also consistently narrated by what the implications of what happened there were for the future of European civilisation.

An interesting turning-point for all foreign policy narratives was the sanctions against Italy in 1935. Although the initial decision and the following implementation of the sanctions were narrated in several different ways (e.g. as a victory for the Geneva order, as a dangerous escalation, as the use of a warlike measure or tool for anti-fascist solidarity, or as the first spark of new European war), specific texts emerging and narrations told towards the end of the Abyssinia crisis moment almost exclusively narrated the use of sanctions as a failure. Although they notably differed on where the blame for that failure was assigned (e.g. the European great powers or the League itself). However, where one of the reformist narratives then turned away from the League as a legible path to its own peace vision, the other, which notably had made the League itself an important objective (see below), turned towards the need for additional reform of the Geneva order.

Finally, the futures constructed in the foreign policy narrative also diverged, and one such key difference can be found in whether the more immediate "endings" of the crisis moments were narrated as having been open or pre-decided. The progressive-reformist narrative constructed two diverging futures (i.e. continued progression or a regression into what had been before the League) depending on the League's response. Still, it kept a longer horizon of progression open, and any disappointments from the League were narrated as only partial setbacks. The socialist-reformist narrative likewise kept the immediate future more open, and even if hope for reform through the League itself diminished in the latter cases explored in the narrative analysis, its socialist peace vision was narrated as possible to pursue through other means and actions.

The other three foreign policy narratives, on the other hand, constructed more closed futures. The traditional-realist narrative's future was partly told as pre-written because of the cyclical return of instability, as well as in its portrayals of the League as too weak and limited to alter that cycle. New conflicts were thus narrated as natural, and not something that could be reformed away in Geneva. The future was still partially open here to the extent that Sweden's entanglement in, as well as the magnitude of future conflicts, were narrated as something that could be averted. The Marxist-revolutionary future, in contrast, ran towards one single future of a capitalist institution destined to ruin itself, with the revolution of the working-class as the only alternative for achieving true peace. The cultural-realist future was likewise a straight line

towards intensified civilisational rivalry, and here the question was whether and when Europe and Sweden would open its eyes to, and thereby successfully adapt to, these developments or not.

Foreign policy narrative	Main pasts	Main presents	Main futures
Progressive-reformist	Disorder and world war; order and peace through Geneva; past Swedish engagements	Critical tests; decision-making moments in Geneva; hard-won victories for the League	Continued progression; risk of regression hinged on the present
Traditional-realist	Disorder and world war; a false peace emerged; past League disappointments	Decision-making in Sweden and Europe; the League fails in its response	New conflicts are likely to resurface; risks of entanglement for Sweden
Socialist-reformist	Continuous war and oppression; a partial/oppressive peace; past Swedish/social democratic engagements	Critical tests; militarism and imperialist aggressions; League failures	Continued war and oppression; reform and a move away from this future is still possible
Marxist-revolutionary	Continuous war and oppression; creation of an imperialist tool; evidence of League imperialism	Capitalist violence and imperialist aggressions; League complicity	Continued war and oppression; collapse of the League; revolution only path to change
Cultural-realist	Historic rivalries; emergence of "European supremacy"; "civil war of the whites"; creation of an treacherous institution; "awakening of the coloured races"	Advancing Asian nations and continued "awakening"; growing anti-European sentiments and solidarity; proof of European decline	Continued European decline; loss of Europe's global leadership; increasing culture/race competitions; another European civil war

Table 5 Summary of the foreign policy narratives' emplotments

9.2 National identity in Interwar Sweden

This section addresses the second empirical question: *how did the foreign policy narratives (re)produce and contest Sweden's national identity in the context of its membership in League of Nations?* The identity reconstruction, presented in Part III, looked at how the foreign policy narratives that were reproduced across the four crisis moments presented imaginaries of Sweden. It reveals that they were not only a part of giving meaning to the crisis moments but correspondingly told stories about who Sweden was as a nation. This section discusses how the construction of settings included *positioning* Sweden within hierarchal categories; how the portrayals of characters involved *portraying* Sweden's own traits, roles, and responsibilities; and how the selection and ordering of events meant *connecting* them to a Swedish programme of specified reasons, objective, and actions. This section also presents additional key findings. At the most sedimented layer of positions, the foreign policy narratives produced a shared set of categories but filled them with somewhat different hierarchal meanings; at the less sedimented layer of portrayals, they narrated similar traits but more diverging roles and responsibilities for Sweden; and, at the least sedimented layer of programmes, they constructed different courses of action from a diverse set of reasons and objectives.

Sweden's hierarchal categories

The identity reconstruction following the narrative analysis began with how each foreign policy narrative positioned Sweden, or rather how they categorised Sweden and often provided categorisation with hierarchal meaning. The construction of the foreign policy narratives' spatial and temporal settings also involved positioning of Sweden in them – as belonging to or being set against certain groups of nations and imbuing those categorisations with notions of superiority or inferiority. Comparing these positionings across the progressive-reformist, traditional-realist, socialist-reformist, Marxist-revolutionary, and cultural-realist narratives reveals that Sweden's positions were largely sedimented, but that the same categories were given somewhat different meanings in term of hierarchal meanings.

A category that recurred in all foreign policy narratives was Sweden's position as belonging to a group of small states. Although the progressive-reformist narrative acknowledged this small state positions as material inferiority, it reinterpreted this into moral power within the core spatial setting. In Geneva, small states were narrated as morally superior to the militarily strong,

especially since their moral influence was constructed as a more modern and progressive form of power. A similar narration was also found in the socialist-reformist narrative which understood Sweden's material inferiority as something that allowed it to be more detached from an imperialist system, and thus also encompassing a moral superiority set against the imperialist powers' immorality. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in contrast, rejected that a Swedish small state position provided moral redemption from its association to capitalism.

The two realist narratives also emphasised Sweden's small state position, but they narrated this belonging almost exclusively as a source of material inferiority, even as a distinct defencelessness and powerlessness for the cultural-realist narrative. The traditional-realist narrative still granted Sweden a moral standing inside the materially weak group of small states, but this standing was not associated with the categorisation *per se* but rather found its accompanied position as a distinct *neutral* small state. The cultural-realist narrative likewise did not provide a small state categorisation with moral qualities and narrated it exclusively as a position of vulnerability and exposure to more powerful forces. The effect of this in both realist narratives was that Sweden was rarely narrated as a driver of external events, and was often explicitly portrayed as not having the power to do so.

Another position that was broadly narrated across the foreign policy narratives was Sweden's position as belonging to Europe. However, that same categorisation was associated with both superiority and a sense of guilt. For the progressive-reformist narrative, a European position linked Sweden to the institutional centre of Geneva. It often bound up Sweden's small state position with a collective of European small states that were narrated as having a unique moral standing in the core spatial setting. In the cultural-realist narrative, Sweden's European belonging was narrated as its most dominant position, and it was constructed as a distinct marker for civilisational superiority. At the same time, that superiority provided by Sweden's European position was precisely what was narrated as threatened.

In both the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives, a European position was contrarily narrated as a distinct moral inferiority. To belong to Europe was, for the former, to be implicated in European imperialism. For the latter, to be categorised as European meant being a part of a morally inferior and antagonistically portrayed bloc of capitalist states and their institution in Geneva. While a European position was also narrated in the traditional-realist narrative, it rather emphasised Sweden's belonging to a distinct group of northern European or Nordic states who were given superiority

in terms of order and stability, also vis-à-vis Europe's southern and eastern parts. This construction of Sweden's more regional positioning within a larger European collective of states was notably also found in several other foreign policy narratives.

Another common position for Sweden was its belonging to a distinct northern European or Nordic/Scandinavian position, and this was a categorisation that almost all foreign policy narratives imbued with a sense of superiority. The progressive-reformist narrative often emphasised this group of states as working collectively against the narrative antagonists, and the socialist-reformist narrative likewise narrated this group of states as performing critical reformation based on the narration of their shared humanitarian calling. In both realist narratives, the Nordic sphere was separated as consisting of uniquely ordered and rational polities, and for the cultural-realist one this categorisation meant a distinct cultural kinship and shared history (e.g. its proud Viking ancestry). The Marxist-revolutionary narrative was, by contrast, the only one placing relatively little weight on regional categories since its decisive division was between classes. However, as discussed further in Chapter 8, this narrative also imbued the Swedish or European working-class with a hierarchal superiority over non-European or "non-white" categorisations.

Another aspect of Sweden's narrated position as European was the construction of Sweden as a "white" nation. Although such a position was not explicitly stated, it was narrated in relational constructions of the "coloured races". For the cultural-realist narrative, narrations often started from the collective of the "white race", and it was a position overtly narrated as a present, but endangered, "white supremacy". The socialist-reformist narrative reversely narrated Sweden's belonging to the "white race" as a position of moral inferiority. While it constructed this categorisation as a presently dominating one, that very dominance was cast as morally inferior. Although Sweden was not positioned as an imperialist state in any of the foreign policy narratives, the socialist-reformist and the Marxist-revolutionary narratives constructed Sweden as (partially) complicit with other imperialist powers. All foreign policy narrative, even where racialised differentiations were not emphasised, notably encompassed racialised portrayals of non-European characters, and included notions of Europe as a core setting for politically meaningful action.

A final position that was commonly shared across the foreign policy narrative was Sweden's categorisation as an (ex-)neutral nation. The traditional-realist narrative constructed a Swedish neutral position as a very much alive and defining category for Sweden. Even if the narrative registered Sweden as drifting away from it, this positioning still played a significant part in, not only

Sweden's historical and present belonging to a collective of neutral states, but in its later portrayals (e.g. a Swedish role as a neutral state) and in the connecting of a Swedish programme (e.g. the need for a neutrality policy). The Marxist-revolutionary and cultural-realist narratives also narrated a distinct neutral position for Sweden, but these narratives constructed this categorisation as only a historical/past categorisation. For both, the loss of this position was detrimental, and also signified a loss in superiority. However, they also constructed this position as less about Sweden's belonging to a group of like-minded neutral friends, but it was a categorisation that had provided Sweden with some redemption or protection in a world marked by either the oppression of the proletariat or civilisation/racial rivalries.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the identity reconstruction is consequently that all these positions appeared as relationally and hierarchally defined, and they played into and drew upon self- and other-portrayals that further clarified who Sweden was associated with and differentiated from. The foreign policy narratives, with only a few exceptions, constructed Swedish national identity mostly via a sense of superiority by narrating either morality or culture into these positions. Sweden was frequently positioned as morally or culturally elevated, whether by its small and European position, its neutral and Nordic position, or its "white" position. Inferiority was, in turn, narrated as both moral and material, and this was a point where they notably diverged. Sweden was narrated as occupying an inferior position by its material weakness in the two realist narratives, but by its moral compromise in the socialist and Marxist ones. While these positions and Sweden's categorisations can thus be understood as largely shared and sedimented, the relational hierarchal ordering of them was contested across the five foreign policy narratives.

Foreign policy narrative	**Dominant categorisations**	**Hierarchal meanings**
Progressive-reformist	Small; European; democratic	Moral superiority; material inferiority (without Geneva)
Traditional-realist	Small; Neutral; Nordic; European	Material inferiority; moral and cultural superiority
Socialist-reformist	Small; Nordic; European; "white"	Moral and cultural superiority; material dominance; moral inferiority
Marxist-revolutionary	Small; Neutral; capitalist; European; "white"	Moral inferiority; material dominance
Cultural-realist	Small; Nordic; European; "white"	Material inferiority; cultural and racial superiority

Table 6 Summary of identity positions

Sweden's traits, roles, and responsibilities

The identity reconstruction further explored how each foreign policy narrative portrayed Sweden with more detail, sorting the analysis into Sweden's narrated traits, roles, and responsibilities. These self-portrayals were also relational, and Sweden is, within the conceptual framework of this thesis, understood as correspondingly being portrayed via the other-portrayals of associated likeminded friends, as well as in its differentiations from antagonistic and non-antagonistic others. While the positioning thus sorted Sweden into hierarchal categories that narrated where and with whom Sweden belonged, the self- and other-portrayals narrated who Sweden *was*. Comparing the self- and other-portrayals of the progressive-reformist, traditional-realist, socialist-reformist, Marxist-revolutionary, and cultural-realist narrative illustrates that they presented similar Swedish traits, but assigned roles and responsibilities differently.

The traits of Swedish national identity still ranged across the foreign policy narratives from honourable to vulnerable, and, although the traits were broadly shared, a difference can be discerned in what traits were most emphasised. The progressive-reformist narrative portrayed Sweden as an honourable, peace-loving, and law-abiding nation, and often condensed Swedish qualities into the individual figures representing Sweden in Geneva. The socialist-reformist narrative presented similar, but also more confrontational traits, such as Sweden being, not only a humanitarian and peaceful nation, but an anti-imperialistic and anti-militaristic one. These traits were, moreover, often associated with specific social democratic Swedes, and not only provided to the nation as such.

The traditional-realist narrative, in contrast, emphasised Sweden as, not only dutiful and reliable, but as vulnerable and restrained. The cultural-realist narrative, in turn, split Sweden between a nation that was peaceful, advanced, and well-ordered, and its political leadership that was portrayed as foolish and immature. Much like the other realist narrative, it also narrated Sweden as a weak and exposed state. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in more stark contrast to the other narratives, portrayed Sweden with several negative traits, including as being an exploitative nation complicit in capitalist and imperialist violence. Sweden's more positive traits, such as being peaceful, honourable, or anti-imperialistic, were instead reserved for its working-class. This further illustrates a not uncommon theme across the foreign policy narratives of separating between the nation and its internal either associated champions or differentiated, even threatening, individual figures or domestic collectives.

The roles that the foreign policy narratives also constructed for Swedish identity shows even more clear divergences between them. Sweden was assigned the varied and contrasting roles: an activist, internal critic, and vigorous reformist; a peace-broker and guardian of legal order; a dutiful and reliable member; a passive and adaptable observer or bystander; and a distinct Nordic leader. Notably, some of these roles were further attached with different meaning. Sweden as a leader in a Nordic context could be narrated as Sweden leading its neighbours towards active participation in Geneva, but also as the need for Sweden to lead the Nordic states towards a joint withdrawal from the League. In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, Sweden as a state was stripped of any worthy role other than that of a non-participant, and a more active (i.e. revolutionary) role was instead assigned to the Swedish working-class specifically.

The responsibilities that the foreign policy narratives subsequently constructed for Sweden also spanned between active involvement, restrained participation, and direct refusal. The progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative gave Sweden the responsibility to partake in, advance, and protect the developing order in Geneva. The socialist-reformist narrative likewise narrated a Swedish duty in both sustaining and transforming the League, but that responsibility was not towards the organisation *per se*, but rather towards a broader socialist peace vision. The traditional-realist narrative, on the other hand, regarded these responsibilities as secondary. Although it narrated a duty for Sweden in terms of upholding its commitments to the international organisation, its primary responsibility was found in the nation's own security and stability.

The cultural-realist and Marxist-revolutionary narratives, in contrast, presented no responsibilities for Sweden in relation to the League other than detachment from it. For the former, it was rather a duty for Sweden to protect its cultural and territorial integrity, and, since the League was narrated as endangering that specifically, Sweden had an obligation to withdraw and instead focus on duties closer to home. For the latter, Sweden had an obligation only to distance itself from the League as an imperialist tool, and it was tasked with avoiding further co-responsibility by withdrawing for the organisation as well. Both foreign policy narratives consequently refused any Swedish obligations with regards to the League. In the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, active duties were, once again, predominantly presented for a working-class tasked with uniting in its revolutionary action against any capitalist and imperialist structures.

These self-portrayals were, in every foreign policy narrative, further strengthened relationally through the portrayals of the other characters. However, here they had notably diverged in who was narrated to be Sweden's closest friends or its antagonistic enemies, meaning that relational portrayals differed in both how Sweden's others were described and who Sweden was linked to or differentiated from. Sweden could, for example, in one narrative be linked to the League and differentiated from great power aggressors, while another narrative distanced Sweden from an antagonistic League and instead linked Sweden to more favourable collectives (e.g. the Nordics). A particularly interesting theme was that, although most foreign policy narratives associated Sweden to the positive portrayals of associated characters so that Sweden was made to share in them, some also linked Sweden to antagonists in a way that portrayed Sweden in a negative light as well.

The former, more positive associations, could, for example, take the form of Sweden being linked to other European small states so that the narration of their honourable acts also defined Sweden itself. It could likewise include associating Sweden to Europe and the "white race" so that the narration of Europe as a superior and more advance character also meant portraying Sweden as the same. However, some narratives correspondingly involved narrations associating Sweden with negative, even antagonistic, portrayals of others. For example, connecting Sweden to a capitalist bloc meant that Sweden itself was portrayed as exploitative and oppressive, just as linking Sweden to other small states meant that Sweden shared in their distinct vulnerability or powerlessness. This, in turn, was often used to narrate why Sweden needed to follow a specific programme because by relating Sweden to other characters they could serve as both warnings or role models in the foreign policy narratives.

Foreign policy narrative	Main traits	Main roles	Main (non-) responsibilities
Progressive-reformist	Honourable; courageous; peaceful; law-abiding	Active participant; legal guardian; peace-broker	Accept assignments and obligations; participate in developing an international legal order; speak up against aggressors
Traditional-realist	Peaceful; stable; reliable; restrained; vulnerable	Reliable member; neutral observer	Ensure national survival; fulfill obligations *Not* overcommit/overreach
Socialist-reformist	Humanitarian; peaceful; anti-militaristic; anti-imperialistic	Peace promoter; reformist; internal critic	Critique and transform; pursue the realisation of a socialist peace; speak up against aggressors *Not* participate in warlike measures
Marxist-revolutionary	*Nation*: Immoral; weak; complicit in oppression *Working-class*: Peaceful; honourable	*Nation*: Non-participant *Working-class*: Revolutionary role	*Nation*: Withdraw *Not* remain actively complicit in oppression *Working-class*: Unite in revolution
Cultural-realist	Peaceful; well-ordered; advanced; defenceless	Neutral observer; regional leader	Protect national integrity; Withdraw *Not* contribute to the further weakening of Europe

Table 7 Summary of identity portrayals

Sweden's reasons, objectives, and actions

The identity reconstruction finally explored how each foreign policy narrative connected Sweden to the crisis moments, or, in other words, how they translated the emplotments of them into a specific programme for Sweden. The positionings located Sweden in the narratives' spatial and temporal settings, and the portrayals gave more detail to who Sweden was as a nation vis-à-vis other nations, and the connecting of narrative emplotments into programmes then provided Sweden with specified reasons, objectives, and actions. Comparing the progressive-reformist, traditional-realist, socialist-reformist, Marxist-revolutionary, and cultural-realist foreign policy narratives illustrates that

they all constructed different, and often incompatible, programmes for Sweden. Even when a similar course of action was suggested, the foreign policy narratives often did so based on quite dissimilar reasons and objectives.

The reasons each foreign policy narrative narrated for a Swedish programme followed more directly from how they had constructed settings, characters, and emplotments into meaningful stories. The progressive-reformist narrative held that, because of a past in which Sweden as a small state had been vulnerable, it was necessary for it to now contribute to a legal order that both secured it and gave it an influential voice. Since the new order in Geneva could not secure its own survival and implementation, and because it was both in Sweden's own interest and morally right, Sweden had a compelling reason to ensure that the League prevailed and acted in accordance with its Covenant. The socialist-reformist narrative, which also supported a Swedish programme partially anchored in Geneva, did so for somewhat different reasons. This narrative reasoned that because of the continued existence of harmful imperialist oppression and militaristic violence, as well as due to Sweden's own humanitarian vocation, it should contribute to the development of the League into a true peace organisation.

The traditionalist-reformist narrative contrarily presented reasons anchored in a cyclical temporal setting and an understanding of the relations between states as naturally conflictual and competitive. It followed from this that Sweden could not fully rely on a legal order subordinate to power, nor on a League that was still ultimately shaped by the interests of the great powers. However, reasons were also formulated from the narrative's dubble portrayal of Sweden as a vulnerable *and* reliable nation that could be expected to honour its commitments and act predictably in an uncertain external world. The cultural-realist narrative likewise presented reasons based on an understanding of an inherently competitive world, however, it specified a set of threats to European civilisation as a whole. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative, finally, narrated reasons from the dominance and harm of capitalist and imperialist structures and constructed Sweden's entanglement in them as the problem that needed to be solved.

From these reasons followed correspondingly divergent objectives for Sweden. The progressive-reformist narratives constructed safeguarding and strengthening the Geneva order, including small states' place within it, as an objective. Although this followed from the reasoning that it provided Sweden itself with security and influence, the development of an international legal order was often narrated as a key aim in and of itself. The socialist-reformist narrative, in contrast, narrated that order more as a means to another end,

namely a socialist peace based on disarmament and the elimination of class struggles. An implication of this was that the socialist-reformist narrative more readily critiqued the League itself, whereas the progressive-reformist one often directed criticism following any narrated set-backs towards other member states instead.

The traditional-realist narrative's primary aim was to instead focus on preserving Sweden's own survival, but a secondary objective was presented as honouring international commitments so long as those commitments did not override the main one (e.g. by making it impossible for Sweden to pursue a neutrality policy). The cultural-realist narrative's main objective was also safeguarding the integrity of the nation, and the two realist narratives consequently agreed on the overarching aim. However, the latter did not construct upholding any international commitments as an objective for Sweden to pursue. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative likewise did not narrate an international obligation for Sweden as part of any objective, but it did construct a primary goal in the world-wide eradication of capitalism and imperialism, and thus a secondary objective for the Swedish nation to detach itself and refuse any entanglement in such structures.

These objectives were then translated into actions for Sweden to pursue. The progressive-reformist narrative called for Sweden's active participation in Geneva, whether by speaking out against aggressors, taking on key tasks, or seeking its perseverance through reform when necessary. The socialist-reformist narrative constructed similar actions, but with some limitations. Sweden was, for example, not to push for any coercive actions like economic or military sanctions through Geneva. Sweden was also urged to seek out alternative paths for its objectives (e.g. social democratic cooperation or cooperation with the labour movement both within and beyond the League context). The Marxist-revolutionary narrative did not regard actions within the League as viable for abolishing capitalism and imperialism, and thus constructed withdrawal as the only intelligible path for Sweden to follow. Action was instead to be taken by the working-class in a united revolution against their capitalist governments and institutions.

The traditional-realist narrative counselled a careful balance between upholding Sweden's sworn commitments and not overreach in the League to the detriment of its own safety. As mentioned, this narrative narrated gambling with a Swedish neutrality policy as such a step and thus urged passive wait-and-see approaches within Geneva as opposed to leading in calling out aggressors or pushing for collective action. Beyond that, Sweden was also to prioritise actions within its own corner of the world such as rebuilding the

nation's defence or seeking out Nordic cooperation. The cultural-realist narrative likewise narrated rearmament and Nordic cooperation as primary actions for Sweden but refused any activities connected to the League beyond Sweden's own withdrawal. It especially regarded this as necessary for Sweden to be able to resume a neutrality policy.

An interesting finding relates to how the foreign policy narratives handled moments where their programmes were narrated as tested or challenged also within their own narrations of the crisis moments. One example was, as mentioned above, the tensions in several foreign policy narratives following the use of sanctions against Italy. In the progressive-reformist and traditional-realist narratives, this was in early narration constructed as Sweden having to participate in order to honour its commitments to the League. In later narrations, both narrated the use of sanctions as a failure, but drew different conclusions from it (i.e. the need to push for reform or the need to detach Sweden from such mechanisms). It was, moreover, in connection to this event (as well as in narrations of the disarmament conference) that the socialist-reformist foreign policy narrative begun turning away from the League as an instrument for its specific peace vision.

The Marxist-revolutionary narrative also involved tensions between narrators who regarded the sanctions as still being a harmful tool of capitalist states, while other narrated sanctions as a helpful mean for anti-fascism. A tension had notably emerged already following the Soviet Union's entry which some constructed as making the League something more than just an anti-socialist front. While socialist-reformist narrative thus started including narrations that turned away from actions in the League context, some narrations reproducing the Marxist-revolutionary narrative begun accepting such activities. Finally, the cultural-realist narrative included no such tension, and narrated any (potential) use of sanctions in relation to both the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moment as an unintelligible course of action.

Foreign policy narrative	Main reasons	Main Objectives	Main Actions
Progressive-reformist	The League provide smaller states with security and influence; support for the League is morally right and in line with Sweden's peace tradition	Protect the League from antagonists; develop the League towards a universal and strong legal order; ensure security and influence through a legal order	Participate in the League's work alongside allies; speak out in support of the League and against aggressors; work to reform and strengthen the legal order
Traditional-realist	International law is subordinate to power; Sweden cannot count on protection from a legal order; Sweden is vulnerable but reliable	Safeguard Sweden's own peace and survival; signal Sweden's external reliability; achieve domestic cohesion	Avoid overcommitting to the League; fulfil commitments and obligations; increase Nordic cooperation; rebuild the national defence
Socialist-reformist	Capitalism and imperialism create violence and oppression; Sweden has a unique peace tradition; the Nordics have a humanitarian calling	Eradicate capitalism and imperialism; achieve a socialist peace based on disarmament and proletarian solidarity (including self-determination for the colonies)	Reform the League into a true peace organisation; advance a socialist peace within and beyond the League; seek cooperation between the Nordics and/or within the labour movement
Marxist-revolutionary	Capitalism and imperialism create violence and oppression; Sweden is complicit in that violence and oppression	Eradicate capitalism and imperialism; overthrow capitalist governments and institutions; disentangle Sweden from capitalist and imperialist structures	Withdraw from the League; resume a neutrality policy; unite the working-class in a revolution
Cultural-realist	Europe's global dominance is declining; Europe and the "white race" is threatened; Sweden is vulnerable and exposed	Protect Sweden's cultural and territorial integrity; avoid contributing further to the idealistic naivety marking Europe and the League	Withdraw from the League; avoid participating in collective measures; resume a neutrality policy; rebuild the national defence; assume Nordic leadership

Table 8 Summary of identity programmes

9.3 The possibility of policy in Interwar Sweden

This section draws the conclusions from the two secondary research questions together to address the main one: *How was Sweden's foreign policy in the context of its membership in the League of Nations made possible, and what alternatives were also imagined?* The four cases explored in this thesis were approached as moments of narration. The theoretical and methodological approach developed in Chapter 2 set out an understanding of foreign policy and national identity as mutually constitutive, arguing that, to understand Sweden's foreign policy, we must also understand how different imaginaries of the nation are narrated into being. Different foreign policy alternatives are thus not pre-given, but are constructed as intelligible in narratives. Chapter 4 provided an overview of the crisis moment and Sweden's policies in the League in relation to each. This section revisits that chapter to discuss how reading the policies in parallel with the narratives that were told in Sweden during each case, reveals how they were made possible and what alternatives were also imaginable. Doing so yields three main findings.

Firstly, the policies that Sweden pursued cannot be understood as following a single foreign policy narrative. They were rather given different meanings and made possible in the intersection of several narratives. Secondly, some narratives still appear as more dominant in the sense that certain programmes were pursued while others were not, and the source material provides some insights here given that intergovernmental and governmental spaces of narrations predominantly produced certain foreign policy narratives, while others appeared mainly in parliamentary or press spaces. Thirdly, every crisis moment was still narrated across the foreign policy narratives in a way that made alternative policies than the ones pursued appear possible as well. Finally, however, the narratives explored have been analytically reassembled from specific texts but they are not isolated from neither each other nor other narratives. Specific texts often draw upon a produce a range of narratives, and, although an analysis moving from issue to foreign policy narratives can be analytically helpful, they should not be understood as exhaustive of the myriad of stories told in the source material.

Revisiting the Corfu crisis

An initial mapping of the Corfu crisis suggests that Sweden applied a policy of forceful but constrained advocacy for League competence. Hjalmar Branting, as Sweden's representative in the Council, spoke for treating the crisis as

a clear breach of the Covenant and for keeping the issue within the League rather than to hand it over to the Conference of Ambassadors. When Branting did not get support for this line in the Council, Sweden pushed to have the underlying question of competence referred to the PCIJ, but later conceded to having it referred to a committee of jurists instead. The conservative government in Stockholm meanwhile spoke for a more constrained line, and although it supported Branting on the principle of competence, it argued against a too forceful stance against Italy risking the use of the sanctions article.

This policy can be understood as made possible by, above all, the progressive-reformist and the traditional-realist foreign policy narratives. The former constructed a programme for Sweden centred on strengthening the League's legal order, and the Corfu issue narrative reproducing it specifically narrated the crisis as a test for that order's endurance. Within the setting of a critical decision-making moment in Geneva, the narrative portrayed Sweden as a small but influential nation whose honour compelled it to intervene against Italy as the antagonist. The latter foreign policy narrative instead narrated the need for Sweden to fulfil obligations without overreaching in its commitments to the international organisation. In the issue narrative, it constructed the Corfu crisis moment as a warning because Italy's attack proved that power, not a legal order in Geneva, still decided the fate of smaller states. This narrative nonetheless portrayed Sweden as a restrained but dutiful nation, where a bounded participation in the League context was made possible.

Sweden's policy during the Corfu case can consequently be read as made imaginable by these two narratives. They were also the narratives that dominated in the different intergovernmental and governmental spaces of narration. In the Council, the Swedish representative's own narrations mainly drew upon and reproduced a progressive-reformist narrative, but some of the specific texts found in the Assembly space also reproduced a traditional-realist one. The various reports and correspondences analysed from the Foreign Ministry's material likewise reproduced both foreign policy narratives. They were also frequently narrated in press spaces where both the liberal, social democratic, and conservative papers included specific texts narrating the crisis moments along the lines of progressive-reformist and traditional-realist narratives.

To take an active stance against Italy as an antagonist was, however, also narrated in the socialist-reformist narrative. Sweden seeking to actively transform the League and ensure its development into a true peace organisation was made an imaginable path in it. The issue narrative on the Corfu crisis

moment reproducing a socialist-reformist narrative notably narrated Branting's efforts as doing just that. This narrative, much like the traditional-realist narrative, correspondingly constructed the need for Sweden to avoid participation in what it narrated as warlike measures (i.e. sanctions). Specific texts reproducing this narrative was, however, mainly found in the open parliamentary spaces, the social democratic party spaces, and the press spaces of narration. Still, the socialist-reformist narrative can be understood as making Branting's forceful approach in the context of the Council conceivable as well.

At the same time, other policies in relation to the Corfu crisis moment were also narrated as imaginable. The traditional-realist narrative correspondingly made a less active approach possible, and especially one where Sweden was instead narrated as having to pursue a more cautious approach as opposed to taking a lead in pushing the competence question in the context of the Council. This path was also constructed during the Corfu crisis moment in governmental, party, and press spaces of narrations, although it did not appear as often in parliamentary spaces of narration. Its issue narrative on Corfu further described the Conference's handling as confirmation that Sweden could expect little help from Geneva if it found itself in a similar situation as Greece, and that it was therefore necessary to remain more passive to avoid gambling with a Swedish neutrality policy with regards to this specific crisis moment.

Finally, the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, in contrast, constructed the Corfu crisis moment as one episode in a longer capitalist and imperialist offensive against the working-class. The policy it narrated as preferable, and thus also made imaginable in the Swedish context, was instead one where Sweden would refuse a presence within the League as a capitalist and imperialist instrument all together. The parliamentary and press spaces of narration included specific texts narrating this understanding with regards to the Corfu case, including parliamentary motions urging for Sweden's withdrawal from the international organisation. Its issue narrative on Corfu was, however, not reproduced in specific texts in the intergovernmental and governmental source material. A cultural-realist foreign policy narrative was, moreover, not produced in a distinct issue narrative on the Corfu crisis moment.

Revisiting the Mosul crisis

An initial mapping of the Mosul crisis suggests that Sweden applied a policy of active engagement in the League's mediation and arbitration process. As *rapporteur*, a role first assumed by Branting and then Östen Undén, Sweden held a central task throughout the League' handling of the dispute between

British-mandated Iraq and Türkiye over the former Ottoman province of Mosul. In the context of the Council, Branting first sought to clarify the League's role as an arbiter, and Undén later pushed for a specific compromised solution by attempting to rally the Council members around Sweden's own suggestion. When this failed, Sweden eventually accepted the Council's adoption of the PCIJ's advisory opinion which awarded the entire province to Iraq.

This policy can likewise be understood as made possible by the progressive-reformist narrative, albeit in a different way compared to the Corfu crisis moment. Here the setting also placed the main events in Geneva and treated the crisis as a legal process to be worked through by the League. Both Mosul and Iraq were rarely constructed as spaces with meaningful political agency and appeared instead as objects of legal processes and decision-making moments in Geneva. Within that setting neither Britain nor Türkiye were portrayed as simple aggressors, but as partly obstructing characters. This narration made Sweden's compromise-seeking approach within the Council intelligible, in contrast to the more condemning line towards Italy which had been pursued during the Corfu crisis moment. The progressive-reformist foreign policy narrative thus made the Swedish delegation's active pursuit of a settlement a possible course of action, and it allowed it to be narrated as a minor step towards the development of a legal order in Geneva.

Here the traditional-realist narrative constructed an alternative as a more preferable policy for Sweden, and thus also made another path imaginable for the nation in relation to the Mosul crisis moment. Although the narrative acknowledged Sweden's need to fulfil its commitments to the League, the issue narrative on Mosul constructed Sweden assuming the central task as *rapporteur* as overcommitting. It narrated the crisis moment as another lesson in the subservience of legal procedure to great power interests, and Sweden's direct and central involvement in it was said to be a reckless wager with the integrity of Sweden's primary neutral role and responsibility. This means that Sweden's policy with regards to the Mosul crisis moment was narrated as stepping over the limit of what this narrative held that a restrained small state like Sweden could risk. An alternative was therefore for Sweden to refuse such significant missions in Geneva, but not to abandon the organisation as such.

Specific texts in the League, in the Foreign Ministry, and in the secret FPC spaces of narrations were predominantly narrations reproducing a progressive-reformist narrative, but they included individual stories narrating a traditional-realist one as well. Sweden eventually accepting what most of the Council wanted as opposed to continuing a forceful pursuit of a distinct Swedish line was, for example, narrated as avoiding overreaching in specific texts

reproducing the latter narrative. A more pro-British line was, moreover, narrated in the FPC sessions by narrators who held that going against a great power's interest, and then to fail, would be to advertise Sweden's own weaknesses and limitations. However, to let go of the Swedish line was also thinkable in a progressive-reformist narrative emphasising the objective to protect the survival of the League, for example by allowing it to reach a conclusion to the crisis moment, above other aims.

The socialist-reformist narrative contrarily made an even more forceful approach fully condemning Britain imaginable. The issue narrative part of reproducing this specific foreign policy narrative notably constructed the Mosul crisis moment as an imperialist quest for new territories to exploit, but it portrayed Sweden's attempts as praiseworthy for seeking to de-escalate military tensions on site, while correspondingly trying to find a solution that did not allow British interests to take centre stage over the League's true peace mission. At the same time, the final decision was constructed as a betrayal (on the Council's part) for eventually allowing a great power's imperialist interest to win and thus delegitimise the League's stated ideals. A socialist-reformist narrative nonetheless contributed to narrating an active Swedish mission in the context of the League as thinkable, but it rather emphasised a policy centred on Sweden's role as an internal critic, including of how the Council in the case of Mosul had, as the narrative held, enabled an imperialist agenda.

Even if specific texts reproducing this issue narrative were predominantly found in press spaces of narration with regards to the Mosul crisis moment, the socialist-reformist narrative thus constructed an alternative policy for Sweden that centred more on being an internal critic, as opposed to Sweden, as the issue narrative held, stepping aside to allow the Council to accept a decision in favour of British imperialism. Finally, the Marxist-revolutionary narrative again offered another alternative policy for Sweden by narrating withdrawal as the only intelligible option. The issue narrative constructed the Mosul crisis moment as revealing the League as an institution serving imperialist aims, and that Sweden therefore had to detach itself from it. A cultural-realist foreign policy narrative was not, however, reproduced in a distinct issue narrative about the Mosul crisis.

Revisiting the Manchuria crisis

The initial mapping of the Manchuria crisis indicates that Sweden's policy changed from an early passive approach, towards a "small state activism" which named Japan the aggressor and sought collective action from the

League. The liberal government first took an impartial, or even Japan-sympathetic line, and was reluctant to aggravate relations with the East Asian power. This policy shifted ahead of the Extraordinary Assembly where Swedish delegate Eliel Löfgren openly called out Japan for acting in violation of the Covenant. The later social democratic government pressed for, not only the adoption of the Lytton report, but also a censure and the permanent non-recognition of Manchukuo. It was open to the use of sanctions and explored options for an arms embargo. These points were dropped, however, since Foreign Minister Rickard Sandler sought a Geneva consensus on this over unilateral action from Sweden.

Sweden's shift from a cautious approach to activism can be understood as made possible by the progressive-reformist and traditional-realist narratives, but also the socialist-reformist narrative. Sweden's initial policy, narrated as Sweden refraining from taking an active stance against either party of the conflict, as well as the later boundaries of Sweden's activism (e.g. abstaining from unilateral action) relates to the traditional-realist narration of the crisis moment. The issue narrative constructed the Manchuria crisis as implying a specific risk for smaller states and held that Sweden's presence in Geneva was jeopardising its neutrality policy. It narrated a discomfort with a too active Swedish line, because to lead in calling out aggressors exposed the nation. This narrative was broadly narrated during this crisis moment, and was produced within several spaces of narration, including in the Foreign Ministry, in secret and open parliamentary debates, as well as in party and press spaces.

However, the progressive-reformist narrative also constructed it as preferable for Sweden to work through rather than around Geneva, and later abstentions from unilateral actions on Sweden's part were also made possible here. Sweden's policy can, on the other hand, be understood as made thinkable primarily within the progressive-reformist as well as the socialist-reformist y narratives. Especially the former's account of a European small state bloc as the moral conscience of Geneva made Sweden's policy of calling out Japan imaginable, and narrations by Swedish delegates in League spaces predominantly produced a progressive-reformist narrative. The Manchuria issue narrative also centred on Sweden's need to defend the legal order, and portrayed Sweden's has holding influence to shape events together with the other European small states. In other words, it was narrated as both possible and necessary for Sweden to call out Japan, to assert the urgent need for the League's upholding the principles of the Covenant, and to lead in this, even from a position of material weakness, because its voice held a moral force in Geneva.

This policy was, however, made intelligible also within a socialist-reformist narrative which portrayed Sweden as an internal critic tasked with calling out both member states and the League itself when they strayed from what the narrative constructed as the international organisation's main mission of accomplishing world peace and disarmament. Here a Swedish policy of critiquing, not only Japan's invasion, but also the League for responding too slowly, was made possible as well. The government's openness to considering the use of sanctions against Japan were, however, within this narrative constructed as a perilous policy for Sweden to pursue. Although specific texts producing a socialist-reformist narrative were sparse in the intergovernmental and governmental source material, they were commonly found in parliamentary, party, and press spaces of narration during the Manchuria case.

Sweden's early cautious and Japan-accommodating policy was, moreover, also made possible in a cultural-realist narrative. Even if the Manchuria issue narrative producing this broader narrative did not consider it a viable policy for Sweden to remain in the League at all, it encompassed narrations similar to the traditional-realist narrative's portrayal of Japan as providing a bulwark against the spread of a threatening Bolshevism in Asia. While specific texts narrating a cultural-realist narrative during the Manchuria case were sparse in Foreign Ministry spaces of narrations, this source material still included narrations notably drawing on racialised portrayals of both Japan and China. A specific issue narrative of the crisis moment reproducing a cultural-realist narrative was, however, predominantly found in the press spaces, and, albeit to a lesser extent, in open parliamentary spaces.

The cultural-realist narrative still emphasised an alternative policy beyond just expressing sympathy for Japan's "constructive work" in northern China. Its narrated need for Sweden to withdraw from the League and prepare for future competitions between Europe and Asia was not pursued by the Swedish government during the Manchuria crisis moment. The Marxist-revolutionary narrative likewise constructed this as the only intelligible policy for Sweden (as a nation) with regards to the League. Yet, since both these narratives constructed other alternatives for Sweden, they subsequently made withdrawal, alongside either a national reorientation towards Nordic neutrality and rearmament, or a revolution from the Swedish working-class against capitalist governments and imperialist institutions, imaginable in the context of Sweden's membership in the League and the Manchuria crisis moment.

Revisiting the Abyssinia crisis

A mapping of the Abyssinia crisis shows that Sweden pursued a policy of active participation in the League's sanctions regime against Italy. The government, having coordinated in advance with the Nordic and ex-neutral foreign ministers, supported the Council's finding that Italy had violated the Covenant and joined all the economic sanctions suggested by the League's coordination committee (including trade restrictions, a credit ban, and an arms embargo). The government had, however, also made clear that Sweden would not lead in invoking the sanctions article, would not take any unilateral measures, and would not participate in military sanctions against the law-breaking member state. Its instructions to the delegation specifically counselled a "double preparedness". Following narrations of the failing effects of the sanctions and Italy's continued occupation of Ethiopia, Sweden eventually declared, alongside the other ex-neutrals, that it no longer considered itself bound by the sanction's provisions of the Covenant.

Sweden's participation in the sanctions regime can be understood as made possible by the progressive-reformist narrative's emphasis on the need to safeguard the Covenant and ensure its full and just application. The previously contested sanctions article thus became thinkable in Sweden because it was narrated as necessary to ensure that the legal order was implemented and survived. Sanctions were, in its issue narrative on the Abyssinia crisis moment, narrated as an intervention required to protect the order that a small state like Sweden depended on for its own survival and influence. The traditional-realist narrative notably also constructed this as possible because Sweden needed to fulfil promises made, and the socialist-reformist narrative, in turn, held that Sweden needed to extend sympathy for Ethiopia and involve itself in a critique of both Italian imperialism and the Council's slow response. Here Sweden's Foreign Minister, for instance, directed open criticism towards the Council in an Assembly session; a policy that can be considered as made thinkable within a socialist-reformist narrative as well.

At the same time, the traditional-realist narrative made the "double preparedness" policy, as well as Sweden's later statement that it would no longer consider itself bound by the provisions of the sanctions article, possible. While narrations reproducing a traditional-realist narrative constructed it as necessary for Sweden to participate in sanctions because of its external commitments and portrayed reliability, it specifically urged Sweden to not lead nor take unilateral action – something that Sweden's government had also instructed. Later narrations connected to this foreign policy narrative further emphasised how the failed sanctions had demonstrated that collective security

could not protect a small member state against a greater adversary, and that they risked entangling Sweden in future conflicts. Sweden's policies were thus made not only thinkable but directly urged in specific texts producing its issue narrative on the Abyssinia crisis moment.

The progressive-reformist narrative notably also made Sweden's abandonment of an obligation with regards to the sanctions article possible, not because it narrated it as preferable for Sweden to leave the League project in any way, but because reform was a central aspect of it. Much like it had constructed earlier let-downs as partial milestones on the path towards the League's gradual development into a stronger legal order, the narration of the sanctions as eventually failing only suggested that Sweden needed focus on how the League could be transformed to fully function. Intergovernmental, governmental, and parliamentary spaces of narrations were thus dominated by the progressive-reformist and traditional-realist narratives alike, in addition to their frequent narration in the other spaces of narration explored in the thesis. The other reform-centred narrative, in contrast, actively disputed Sweden's policy on participation in sanctions, which it narrated as Sweden partaking in a war-like measure. It constructed the need to, not only completely abandon the League's coercive mechanisms, but to start considering alternative paths to a socialist peace beyond the context of the organisation in Geneva. Sweden's policy on abandoning the sanctions provisions were thus also made possible by a socialist-reformist narrative, but it correspondingly made other alternatives thinkable as well (e.g. labour movement cooperation).

The cultural-realist narrative narrated the Abyssinia crisis moment as an episode when the League's misjudgements threatened to ignite another "civil war" in Europe. It specially constructed the use of sanctions against a fellow European power as absurd and *un*thinkable. Sweden's later detachment from the same was thus narrated as an imaginable policy, not only because sanctions implied the threat of an escalation to open war, but because such an action suggested a recognition of the other dangers that the narrative held that Geneva had created. From its perspective, the League had also given voice to "awakening" anti-European voices and solidarities, and Sweden needed to pursue a policy that meant a full withdrawal from the organisation. While specific texts producing this narrative were predominantly found in the parliamentary and press spaces of narration during the Abyssinia crisis moment, they illustrate how a policy of complete detachment was also made thinkable in the context of Interwar Sweden.

For the Marxist-revolutionary narrative, withdrawal was also frequently narrated as the only option for Sweden, and a partial withdrawal in terms of

abandoning Sweden's commitments to participate in capitalism's war-like measures was thus welcomed. However, during the Abyssinia crisis moment this narrative encompassed contestation over Sweden's programme, where some narrator constructed Sweden's participation in sanctions as a potential for anti-fascist solidarity alongside a Soviet Union that was now a member of the League. The narrative thus made Sweden's initial policy on sanctions participation imaginable as well. At the same time, Sweden's later withdrawal from the sanction's provisions were also made thinkable by the narrations that held that they only constituted active participation in war, even when directed towards a fascist antagonist. Both narrations were, however, mainly told in the parliamentary and press spaces of narration.

10 Returning to the Present

This thesis begun with the words of the conservative party leader Arvid Lindman and his concern over Sweden's abandonment of a century old foreign policy tradition in favour of an alliance with other states. His words echoed in Sweden's more recent debate on the NATO membership, even if they were spoken over a century ago. It is, as the introduction set out, not the first time Sweden has faced the problem of having to reconcile its national identity and foreign policy with membership in an international organisation promised on collective security. What can the stories told about the League tell us about how such reconciliations are made, and how they are contested? This final chapter takes us back to the present in three ways. First, it reconsiders current scholarly understandings of, and debates around, Swedish foreign policy and national identity in the twentieth-century. Second, it considers what stories this thesis has left unexplored and suggests directions for future research and new conversations to be had. Third, it ends with a brief reflection on the original framing of the thesis, and asks what Interwar Sweden can tell us about how scholars can think about and approach Sweden's current reimagining in the context of its NATO membership.

10.1 Insights from the Interwar period

The scholarships on Swedish twentieth-century foreign policy, national identity, and the politicisation of the former (reviewed in Chapter 3) have approached Sweden from different perspectives, but often refer back to the Interwar years as the period in which a particular policy model, certain identity concepts, or a specific political culture either first took shape or was consolidated. At the same time, each of them tends to leave that period comparatively unexplored, and it is not always allowed to speak for itself. The Interwar years have often functioned as an origin story, but having now engaged with that story, this section revisits these scholarships to offer new insights and reflections. The section also ends with some brief reflections on what the thesis has contributed with to research about the League.

First of all, the literature on Swedish twentieth-century foreign policy can be read through a recurring vocabulary of neutrality or solidarity, and the findings of this thesis suggest that these terminologies played some part in the co-constitutive relationship between foreign policy and national identity in Sweden during the Interwar years.[981] However, it does not alone capture how Swedish policy and identity were imagined during this time. The five foreign policy narratives reassembled in this thesis cannot, for example, be arranged between either neutrality or solidarity, nor along a continuum from one to the other. Both were narrated in different ways, and thus with markedly different meanings attached to them, across the foreign policy narratives.

In the traditional-realist narrative, neutrality was, for example, narrated as a defining category, role, and programme for Sweden. In the Marxist-revolutionary and cultural-realist narratives, it was instead constructed as a lost category and policy which signified either the loss of a redemptive distance from capitalist and imperialist power, or the loss of protection in a world of growing civilisational and racial rivalries. What neutrality meant to Sweden – what it *was* (e.g. categorisation, role, or policy action) and what it was *for* (e.g. reason or objective) – was constructed differently. Research on Swedish Interwar foreign policy has further argued that neutrality was held in reserve during Sweden's membership in the League, and the thesis shows how this was narratively constructed, but also how it was contested.[982] While some narratives regarded a Swedish neutrality policy as still being active, others produced it as misplaced or as incompatible with the League membership.

Solidarity also held a range of meanings attached to it. It was directed towards the Geneva order and the European small states in a progressive-reformist narrative; towards victims of imperialism and the international working-class in a socialist-reformist narrative; towards the proletariat and the Soviet Union in a Marxist-revolutionary narrative; towards Sweden's Nordic neighbors in a traditional-realist narrative; and towards Europe and the "white race" in a cultural-realist narrative. It is, in other words, more suitable to speak of solidarities and internationalisms in Interwar Sweden than it to speak of it as coherent internationalist policy standing in direct opposition to, or as complementing, a distinct neutrality policy. The question is consequently not neutrality *or* solidarity, but what kind of solidarity, and with who and why, as well as neutrality in what sense, for what purpose, and even *towards* what.

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[981] See, for example: Crazny 2018:34; Brommesson *et al* 2025:42.
[982] Bring 2008:185f; Westberg 2012.

This has implications for how a Swedish policy model based on neutrality and solidarity/internationalism can be understood. In the Interwar years, such a model was not consistently produced, but can be seen as several foreign policy narratives making the same policies imaginable in diverse ways. The findings further complicate the realist-idealist lens often used to make sense of Swedish foreign policy.[983] The narratives reassembled in the thesis, in some sense, relate to it since, for example, the progressive-reformist and traditional-realist narratives were dominant in governmental spaces of narration. Two narratives have, moreover, been categorised as reformist while two others have been categorised as realist. The difference between all five foreign policy narratives nonetheless illustrates why such a lens risks obscuring some noticeable nuances. The cultural-realist and traditional-realist narratives, as well as the progressive-reformist and socialist-reformist narratives, presented markedly difference constructions of, not only Swedish programmes, both of its self-portrayal and positioning as well.

Secondly, the scholarship focusing on Swedish national identity has often argued that neutrality, welfare, and internationalism became "hegemonic" concepts in Sweden after 1945, and that they were, during this time, projected back onto the 1930s as a period of "modern breakthrough" for Sweden.[984] The thesis contributes to this scholarship by analysing the years before these myths became so-called sanctified concepts. It illustrates that Swedish identity was far from settled during this time and that no coherent story about Sweden prevailed across the foreign policy narratives. At the same time, the thesis also shows that some aspects of Swedish identity were more sedimented, such as the positioning and the nation's belonging to certain categories of states, but even here contestation occurred around the meaning of those aspects.

Sweden's positions as small and European recurred in all foreign policy narratives, and its categorisation as Nordic and (ex-)neutral in most of them. Sweden was, moreover, portrayed as uniquely peaceful and ordered in most. Several of the identity elements that post-war accounts would likewise emphasise as part of the Swedish story were thus already in place in the Interwar years. What they meant was, however, not settled, and the narratives filled the same categories with different, even opposite, hierarchal meanings. Contestation around them also travelled to even more contrasts in the construction of Sweden's role, responsibilities, and programmes. The thesis additionally shows that the self-portrayals of Sweden as a "modern" nation was attached

[983] See, for example: Rogers 2007; Petersson 2018.
[984] Johansson 1997:140; Lundin – Stenlås 2010:8; Cronqvist 2012:197.

to its contribution to progression and reformation of international life, but also in narrations of Sweden as more ordered and advanced. For the literature on Swedish myth-making, this means that the post-war images of neutrality, welfare, and internationalism was the continuation of understandings already present, but certainly not uncontested, in the Interwar years.

In several narratives, these portrayals were explicitly linked to notions of cultural and moral superiority, and in some overtly racial conceptions of the same. The literature on Nordic exceptionalism has located the self-image of the Nordic states as moral forces, or extraordinarily "good states", and tied it to a sense of being free from Europe's colonial burden.[985] This thesis illustrates that moral elevation was a central way of positioning and portraying Sweden and the Nordics in the Interwar years. Four out of five narratives placed an emphasis on either northern European or Nordic small states as sharing, for example, unique conceptions of legal order and humanitarian callings, as well as being exceptionally well-organised and peaceful societies. For the cultural-realist narrative, "white supremacy" was an explicit position for Sweden. Post-colonial literatures has shown how racialised othering in Swedish nation-building was widespread in the early twentieth-century. This thesis confirms that such narrations were present in Swedish foreign policy narratives during the Interwar years as well, and not just overtly. All narratives tended to treat European spaces as core settings for meaningful political action, and, even when race was not narrated as a central theme, portrayals of, for example, the "Orient" as different and other were common. The thesis thus extents these insights from domestic nation-building to foreign policy-making.[986]

Thirdly, another scholarship concerned the question of a Swedish culture of consensus on, or contestation over, foreign affairs. The picture often painted of the Interwar years is that of limited exchange of views on foreign policy, a passive foreign policy elite, as well as a broad acceptance of Sweden's League membership and policy.[987] It has therefore been argued that the Swedish spirit of consensus rests on old tradition. This thesis shows that this was more complicated. Across two decades, Sweden's relation to the League was narrated through five foreign policy narratives that constructed different and often incompatible portrayals of, and programmes for, Sweden. Contestation, under-

[985] See, for example: Wæver 1992; Trägårdh 2002; Nissen 2021; Browning 2021.
[986] Cf. Hübinette – Lundström 2014; Hagren 2020.
[987] Bjereld – Demker 1995:14f; Nygren 2025:22..

stood as a struggle over meaning, was subsequently a persistent feature of Interwar Swedish foreign policy, also when it did not take the form of open parliamentary conflict.

Consensus still appeared in the narration of different stories about Sweden. A relatively broad parliamentary support for Sweden's participation in the sanctions against Italy in 1935 is one such example. The same policy action was made intelligible by four of the five narratives, but contestation still continued *within* them. The agreement on what Sweden should do also rested on disagreements about why. Åmark's notion of a distorted unity, arising when political actors agree on the means but not the goals of foreign policy, is similarly shown in this thesis.[988] A narrative approach and layered model of identity clarifies this by illustrating how contestation and sedimentation can occur at the same time. Consensus in the open parliamentary debate is, from this perspective, not understood as an absence of contestation. The analysis shows that when the sanctions later became commonly narrated as a failure, the (somewhat) agreed upon participation diverged again on how to reinterpret new actions between continued reform, the need for a conditional retreat, and towards full withdrawal.

The thesis further suggests that an Interwar consensus depends on where we look. If overt debate in parliamentary spaces are the criteria for the absence of consensus, then only the Manchuria and Abyssinia crisis moments illustrated a challenge to the Interwar consensus claim. The source material also illustrates that parliamentary debates were largely carried by social democratic, socialist, and communist parliamentarians, whereas conservatives and agrarians were often comparatively silent in these spaces (especially in the Corfu and Mosul cases). Narrations were, however, given elsewhere, and, especially so in the press, where editors, who were notably often parliamentarians as well, provided narrations that diverged across the five foreign policy narratives reassembled in the analysis. The silence that Tingsten observed could thus be partially shaped by party-political understandings of where, when, and by whom it was *made possible* to narrate foreign policy.[989] This did not mean that contestation did not presented itself in alternative spaces of narration.

Finally, the introduction of the thesis identified research on the League as a particularly fruitful site for an intensified dialogue between IR and IH, and the thesis sought to demonstrate what a study bridging the divide between the

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[988] Åmark 1973:44.
[989] Tingsten 1944:401ff. See also: Lönnroth 1959:28.

disciplines might look like. In Swedish foreign policy narratives, the League was notably portrayed in (at least) five different ways. It was a hero and a victim, a noble ideal that remained dominated by powers politics, a peace organisation corrupted by imperialist powers, an imperialist tool in itself, and an internal enemy to European civilisation. The thesis further sheds light on later narrations on the League's ultimate "failure" in the post-war context. It illustrates that, on the one hand, that verdict was an already contemporary narrative and an ending that was already given to the League across the crisis moments explored. The traditional-realist and socialist-reformist narrative often narrated the crises as culminating in a defeat for the organisation, while the Marxist-revolutionary and cultural-realist narrative cast that judgment from the beginning. Yet, the progressive-reformist and socialist-reformist narratives also portrayed the League as effectively evolving international life itself.

This "inside-out" contribution to the scholarship also builds on recent work on Scandinavians in the League. Haakon A. Ikonomou has shown that Scandinavian officials were represented in sections closely aligned with the League's imperial modes of ordering; from the mandates and minorities sections to opium control and health governance.[990] They were often recruited precisely because they were constructed, from the outside, as coming from small, neutral, non-colonial, and administratively reliable European states.[991] The thesis adds to this by showing how these qualities were correspondingly narrated and imagined at home. The moral power that several narratives attributed to the small and/or Nordic states was thus exercised over places and peoples whose agency the narratives seldom recognised. The thesis thereby contributes with a perspective on how Sweden imagined itself within the League, also in a way that made its participation in the League's imperial governance possible (even if this has not been its main focus).

10.2 Suggestions for future research

Every research design leaves some stories untold. The reflexive discussion held in Chapter 2 acknowledged that choices made in this thesis also involve certain silences and exclusions. The thesis has, for example, focused solely on Sweden's national identity and foreign policy, it has selected source material that primarily involves political elites narrating, and it consequently left some

[990] Ikonomou 2026:21f.
[991] Engh *et al* 2025:879. See also Götz 2009.

stories out and some questions unresolved. At the same time, the analysis has correspondingly brought new stories and understandings into view which, in turn, opens up for new questions to ask and paths to walk down. This section of the chapter therefore briefly discusses some suggestions for future research based on the choices made in the research design, as well as by reflecting further on what the thesis has illustrated that warrant further consideration.

First of all, the thesis has focused on Sweden in the League, and a growing body of scholarship has looked at Scandinavian states and representatives in the League.[992] The analysis suggests that a Nordic or Scandinavian perspective building on the approach developed here could be a valuable next step. "Norden" was a recurring category in Swedish foreign policy narratives, and the initial mappings of the cases suggests that they cooperated and sought to align policies (something that itself can be understood as made possible by the construction of a Nordic positioning). To what extent was Swedish foreign policy shaped and made possible by regional identity constructs? An analysis across the Scandinavian/Nordic countries could reveal both sedimentation and contestation of a Nordic identity, and shed new light on how their joint (or diverging) policies were made possible as well. As discussed, previous research has already complicated historical narratives on Scandinavian internationalism in this sense, and research on Nordic exceptionalism might want to explore the Interwar period and Nordics on the League context further.[993]

Secondly, since the thesis has reconstructed Swedish national identity from foreign policy narratives told in Sweden or by Swedish representatives in Geneva, it has focused solely on the construction on Swedish identity from within. Dialogical approaches to identity suggest that a national self is also produced in close dialogue with its others.[994] Previous research has already suggested that a Nordic identity was partly constructed in the context of Geneva where the Scandinavian states where coded by League officials as holding certain values.[995] Future research could consequently elaborate further on how Swedish identity was produced in an exchange with external portrayals of the self. The thesis has only provided some brief glimpses of this (e.g. in other member states' responses to Swedish policies noted in Chapter 4). An

[992] Ikonomou – Rasmussen 2021; Engh *et al* 2025.
[993] Ikonomou 2026. The period also encompassed conflicts such as the Åland Island and the Greenland disputes which might reveal interesting tensions in this regard.
[994] See, for example: Guillaume, X. 2011. *International Relations and Identity: A dialogical approach.* London: Routledge.
[995] Götz 2009.

exploration of how Sweden was narrated from an outside perspective could show how Swedish self-portrayals were also shaped in response to this.

Thirdly, national identity can additionally be understood as produced in dialogue with other domestic or transnational identities, including partisan ones. The thesis did not find that foreign policy narratives were produced along clear-cut partisan divides, but they did appear to follow ideological dimensions (as is illustrated in the naming of the foreign policy narratives themselves). This further invites a closer engagement with the literature on foreign policy ideology which was briefly discussed in Chapter 3. Brommesson and Ekengren have, for example, developed four ideal types of foreign policy ideologies by drawing on Martin Wight's traditions of international thought between realism, rationalism, Marxian revolutionism, and liberal revolutionism.[996] The parallels to the foreign policy narratives reassembled in this thesis are clear, and suggests the need for, not only a consideration of how Sweden's identity was constructed in conversation with domestic/transnational partisan identities, but a more genealogical inquiry of these exchanges as well.

Forthly, the thesis has, within the context of Interwar Sweden, engaged with spaces of narrations which imply an emphasis on specific texts where political elites predominantly narrate. As Chapter 2 noted, however, contestation is often most prominent in marginalised or popular narratives.[997] Future research could therefore dive deeper into spaces of narrations that have been excluded here, and ask how the stories found there complicate the findings of this thesis. Such spaces could include more source material from civil society (e.g. women's associations, peace and defence organisations, or religious groups), and encompass genres from popular culture (e.g. fiction or music). More than just complicating the narratives reassembled here, such an analysis might also reveal stories of Sweden in the League that have since then been further marginalised or even forgotten.

Finally, this thesis selected and explored crisis moments based on the argument that the telling of crises tends to prompt a surge in struggles over meaning. This choice may, however, have accentuated certain narrations relative to the everyday life of Sweden's membership in the League. Future research should therefore explore the League's work, and Sweden's engagements therein, beyond crises related to pressure on the organisation's collective security. This could follow in the footsteps of the more recent scholarships on the League, ranging from its economic cooperation, to health, minorities,

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[996] Brommesson – Ekengren 2012:8. See also: Wight 1991:7-24.
[997] Hansen 2006:65.

and the mandates system.[998] Approaching these aspects with the help of a narrative approach and layered model of identity could complicate the conclusions drawn from this thesis' analysis of the narration of crisis moments.

10.3 A note on relevance for our present moment

The contexts of 1920 and 2022, and Sweden's respective membership applications, are, in some ways, comparable, but the aim and approach of this thesis has not been to offer any lessons or predictions in this regard. However, the thesis does provide a suggestion for how foreign policy narratives and national identity can be explored and thought about also in relation to Sweden's more recent history. The stories of rupture and continuity accompanying Sweden's NATO membership can, for example, be understood as part of narrative emplotments. In 1920, the League membership was likewise told as both a sudden abandonment of one tradition, and as a step fully in line with another. From this perspective, the question of whether Sweden's NATO membership represents change or continuity cannot be settled, but a more productive question revolves around which stories made the membership intelligible, and what alternatives those stories also rendered unthinkable. A membership decision does not settle what meaning will be attributed to it. After 1920, what Sweden could be imagined to be and to do was renegotiated in every following crisis moment that this thesis has explored. It suggests that the interpretive struggles over Sweden's identity and policy in relation to its membership in NATO also lies ahead. Sweden has already, within the context of the NATO membership, taken actions that are correspondingly being narrated within broader stories about who Sweden is. How narratives are presently imagining the possibilities for Sweden in NATO, and how they are being contested, are questions that the thesis has offered a suitable framework for exploring.

[998] See, for example: Clavin 2013; Pedersen 2015.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Våren 2022 lämnade Sverige sin långa tradition av neutralitet och militär alliansfrihet och ansökte om medlemskap i Nato. Det var dock inte första gången Sverige behövde förena sin nationella identitet med medlemskap i en internationell organisation byggd på kollektiv säkerhet. När riksdagen 1920 debatterade inträdet i Nationernas förbund (NF) varnade högerledaren Arvid Lindman för att Sverige övergav en neutralitet som i över ett sekel varit utrikespolitikens ledstjärna, medan anhängarna beskrev medlemskapet som helt i linje med en svensk tradition av att verka för internationell fred och samarbete. Omröstningen avgjorde frågan om medlemskap, men lämnade öppet vad Sverige kunde föreställas vara och göra inom organisationen. Det är denna problemformulering som avhandlingen undersöker. Avhandlingens huvudfråga lyder: Hur gjordes Sveriges utrikespolitik inom ramen för medlemskapet i NF möjlig, och vilka alternativ föreställdes också?

Två delfrågor styr den empiriska analysen. Den första gäller hur stunder as kris i relation till NF berättades i Sverige och vilka återkommande utrikespolitiska narrativ som reproducerades mellan dem. Den andra gäller hur dessa narrativ också reproducerade och utmanade Sveriges nationella identitet. Teoretiskt utgår avhandlingen från en reflexiv historisk konstruktivism. Utrikespolitik och nationell identitet förstås som ömsesidigt konstituerande, och båda som formade i berättelser. Avhandlingen utvecklar en identitetsmodell där olika skikten (positioner, porträtteringar och program) möjliggör såväl en sedimentering som ett utmanande av den nationella identiteten. Analysen kopplar narrativets element – rumslig och tidslig miljö, karaktärer och karaktärsporträtteringar, samt länken mellan dåtid, nutid, och framtid – till identitetens skikt genom de narrativa handlingarna att positionera, porträttera och koppla samman Sverige i ett utrikespolitiskt narrativ.

Empiriskt undersöks fyra kriser: Korfukrisen 1923–24, Mosulkrisen 1924–26, Manchurietkrisen 1931–33 och Abessinienkrisen 1935–36. Källmaterialet hämtas från fem berättarrum: det internationella, det regeringsmässiga, det parlamentariska, det partibaserade och pressrummet. Analysen rör sig sedan i tre steg: från enskilda texter till sakfrågenarrativ om respektive kris, därifrån till utrikespolitiska narrativ som återkommer över fallen, och slutligen till en

rekonstruktion av den nationella identiteten. Efter en övergripande introduktion till de fyra fallen och svensk utrikespolitik i relation till vardera, presenteras de fem utrikespolitiska narrativ som narrativanalysen identifierade.

I det progressivt-reformistiska narrativet var Genève centrum för en framväxande rättsordning, varje kris ett kritiskt prov för denna ordning och Sverige en hedervärd väktare och fredsmäklare bland Europas småstater. Aktivt deltagande framstod här som den enda begripliga vägen. Det traditionellt-realistiska narrativet utgick istället från Sverige som en avskild beslutsenhet i en något vidare nordisk region. Det konstruerade tid som cyklisk och den dåvarande freden som tillfällig, och lät kriserna bekräfta att makt fortfarande gick före rättsliga föreställningar. Sverige framställdes som en sårbar men pålitlig småstat vars främsta ansvar var den egna överlevnaden, med försiktighet, avvaktan och en möjlig återgång till neutralitet som huvudprogram.

De socialistiskt-reformistiska och marxistiskt-revolutionära narrativen delade bilden av ett kapitalistiskt och imperialistiskt system men skildes åt i synen om på den stagnerande globala kontexten var reformbar eller inte. Narrativen skiljde sig även i porträtteringen av NF och Sverige. Det förra gjorde Sverige till en inre kritiker som kunde omvandla förbundet till en verklig fredsorganisation. Det senare gjorde Sverige till medskyldig i ett kapitalistiskt block, och framhöll att Sverige borde lämna förbundet, medan den revolutionära uppgiften tillföll arbetarklassen. Ett femte, kulturrealistiskt narrativ, som framträdde under 1930-talets kriser, berättade om den europeiska civilisationens förfall och den ”vita rasens” hotade ställning. Det framställde förbundet som en inre fiende och förordade utträde, upprustning och nordisk samling i förberedelse inför kommande ”rasstridigheter”.

Identitetsrekonstruktionen visar att de mest sedimenterade skikten i stort sett var gemensamma över de olika utrikespolitiska narrativen. Sverige positionerades i narrativen som en liten och europeisk stat, och i de flesta även som en nordisk och (före detta) neutral nation. Samma kategorier fylldes dock med olika hierarkiska innebörder, inklusive såväl materiell och moralisk underlägsenhet som moralisk och kulturell överlägsenhet. I mittskiktet återkom liknande egenskaper, framför allt om Sverige som särskilt fredlig och ordningsam. Sveriges roller och ansvar skilde sig däremot åt. Vissa narrativ gav Sverige en tydlig internationell roll och ett särskilt ansvar i relation till NF, medan andra lokaliserade Sveriges huvudsakliga roll och ansvar i relation to nationen, klassen eller den ”vita rasen”. I det minst sedimenterade skiktet konstruerades olika, och ofta oförenliga, program. Sverige uppmanades till aktivt deltagande, aktsamt närvarande, radikal reformering, revolutionärt utträde och regionalt tillbakadragande.

Att läsa narrativen gentemot den förda politiken i Genève gav i sin tur tre slutsatser vad gäller avhandlingens huvudfråga. För det första kan Sveriges utrikespolitik inte förstås som utifrån ett enskilt narrativ. Den gjordes snarare möjlig i skärningspunkten mellan flera olika narrativ som konstruerade den förda politiken som tänkbar med grund i vitt skiljda verklighets- och identitetskonstruktioner. För det andra var vissa narrativ mer dominerande än andra, främst det progressivt-reformistiska och det traditionellt-realistiska, som präglade de mellanstatliga och statliga berättarrummen. Alternativa narrativ om de fyra kriserna, inklusive om svensk utrikespolitik och nationell identitet i relation till dem, berättades dock flitigt i såväl parlamentariska sammanhang som på pressens olika ledarsidor. För det tredje gjorde varje krisstund därför också alternativa vägar tänkbara för Sverige. Detta kunde ta formen av allt från skarpare fördömanden i Genève till fullständigt utträde från NF.

Avhandlingen bidrar därmed på tre huvudsakliga sätt. Empiriskt visar den att mellankrigstiden, som ofta åberopas som ursprunget till den svenska utrikespolitiska modellen, inte låter sig beskrivas längs axeln neutralitet–solidaritet. Det fanns snarare flera solidariteter och flera neutraliteter, och dessa bidrog till den ömsesidiga konstruktionen av svensk identitet och utrikespolitik på olika sätt. Avhandlingen ifrågasätter också bilden av en etablerad konsensuskultur eftersom meningsstriden pågick även när en öppen parlamentarisk debatt saknades. Begreppsligt erbjuder den ett operationaliserbart ramverk för narrativ analys och identitetsrekonstruktion. Tvärvetenskapligt visar den också hur internationella relationer och internationell historia kan förenas i studiet av NF. Avslutningsvis föreslår avhandlingen att frågan om huruvida det nutida Natomedlemskapet innebär ett avbrott eller en kontinuitet är mindre fruktbar än frågan om vilka berättelser som gör medlemskapet begripligt, och vilka alternativ de gör tänkbara respektive otänkbara vad gäller utformningen av svensk utrikespolitik och identitet inom den militära alliansen.

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Appendix 1 Prime and Foreign Ministers in Interwar Sweden

Time period	Prime Minister	Foreign Minister
19 Oct. 1917 – 10 Mar. 1920	Nils Edén (LSP)	Johannes Hellner (-)
10 Mar. 1920 – 27 Oct. 1920	Hjalmar Branting (SAP)	Erik Palmstierna (SAP)
27 Oct. 1920 – 23 Feb. 1921	Louis De Geer (-)	Herman Wrangel (-)
23 Feb. 1921 – 13 Oct. 1921	Oscar von Sydrow (-)	Herman Wrangel (-)
13 Oct. 1921 – 19 Apr. 1923	Hjalmar Branting (SAP)	Hjalmar Branting (SAP)
19 Apr. 1923 – 18 Oct. 1924	Ernst Trygger (NP)	Carl Hederstierna (-) Erik Marks von Würtemberg (-)
18 Oct. 1924 – 24 Jan. 1925	Hjalmar Branting (SAP)	Östen Undén (SAP)
24 Jan. 1925 – 7 Jun. 1926	Rickard Sandler (SAP)	Östen Undén (SAP)
7 Jun. 1926 – 2 Oct. 1928	Carl Gustaf Ekman (FF)	Eliel Löfgren (SLP)
2 Oct. 1928 – 7 Jun. 1930	Arvid Lindman (LBP)	Ernst Trygger (NP)
7 Jun. 1930 – 6 Aug. 1932	Carl Gustaf Ekman (FF)	Fredrik Ramel (-)
6 Aug. 1932 – 24 Sep. 1932	Felix Hamrin (FF)	Fredrik Ramel (-)
24 Sep. 1932 – 19 Jun. 1936	Per Albin Hansson (SAP)	Rickard Sandler (SAP)

19 Jun. 1936 – 28 Sep. 1936	Axel Pehrsson-Bramstorp (BF)	Karl Gustaf Westman (BF)
28 Sep. 1936 – 13 Dec. 1939	Per Albin Hansson (SAP)	Rickard Sandler (SAP)

Table 9 Sweden's Prime and Foreign Ministers 1919-39[999]

[999] Edström, H. 2017. *Tradition eller förnyelse? Svensk utrikespolitik före och efter EU-inträder*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, p. 55. Abbreviations: the Liberal Coalition Party (LSP), Sweden's Social Democratic Worker's Party (SAP), the National Party (NP), the Freeminded People's Party (FF), Sweden's Liberal Party (SLP), and the Farmer's League (BF).

Appendix 2 Parliamentary Compositions in Interwar Sweden

Distribution of seats, First Chamber of the *Riksdag*

Year	Social democrats	Conservatives	Liberals	Agrarians	Socialists/ Communists	Sum
1918	16	88	45	-	1	150
1921	51	37	40	19	3	150
1922	50	41	38	18	3	150
1925	52	44	35	18	1	150
1929	52	49	31	17	1	150
1933	58	50	23	18	1	150
1937	66	45	16	22	1	150

Table 10 Distribution of seats in the First Chamber of the Riksdag[1000]

Distribution of seats, Second Chamber of the *Riksdag*

Year	Social democrats	Conservatives	Liberals	Agrarians	Socialists/ Communists	Sum
1918	86	57	62	14	11	230
1921	75	71	47	30	7	230
1922	93	62	41	21	13	230
1925	104	65	33	23	5	230
1929	90	73	32	27	8	230
1933	104	58	24	36	8	230
1937	112	44	27	36	11	230

Table 11 Distribution of seats in the Second Chamber of the Riksdag[1001]

[1000] Hadenius, S. 2003. *Modern svensk historia: Konflikt och samförstånd*. 6th Edition. Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, p. 280f. Note that both the liberals and the socialists/communists, were split into different political parties and fractions during the Interwar period.
[1001] Ibid.

Appendix 3 Example: Narrative Analysis

The following specific text is a speech delivered by Eliel Löfgren (liberal) during the League's Special Assembly convened in March 1932 in response to the Manchuria crisis moment. It belongs to the international space of narration and to the genre of Assembly speech. This example is only a single story used to illustrate the narrative analysis, and its narrative elements become part of a narrative only when they recur across a collection of specific texts.

> In his speech during the general discussion of the Disarmament Conference, Baron Ramel, the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, drew attention to the growing anxiety with which, in Sweden as in many other countries, events in the Far East are being followed, involving, as they do, a serious threat to the results obtained at Geneva in the organisation of peace. On behalf of the Swedish Government, he expressed the most earnest hope that peace might be promptly restored by the energetic action of the League and the Powers principally concerned. From that time until the last few days the position in the Far East has become worse, and although the news appears to be contradictory, no one can deny that what is taking place is war in everything but name. At this moment I will say nothing as to what has been done by the organs of the League to put an end to this deplorable conflict. I note, however, with satisfaction that, from the first phase of the conflict, the Council has laid stress on the fact that it could not be solved satisfactorily without the withdrawal of the troops concerned. No one can deny, especially after the report by the Committee of the League at Shanghai dated February 3rd, that the military means employed in the conflict between China and Japan are not in conformity with existing treaties. Sweden, for her part, has maintained on several occasions during the League discussions that the provisions of the Covenant prohibiting the use of armed force retain their entire validity whether either of the Parties describes the use of armed force as war or not. Without wishing at this moment to give any opinion on the respective claims underlying the conflict, I wish to state that, in the opinion of the Swedish Government, the landing of troops and their use in military operations on the territory of another Power are contrary to the provisions of the Covenant and of the Pact of Paris. Any such attempt to extend the conception of legitimate defence in the manner adopted in the present case would render it impossible to maintain any legal international order. Consequently, my Government unhesitatingly gives its support to the note addressed to Japan by the twelve members of the Council on February 16th last, and, in my opinion, the Assembly should endorse this appeal. I realise the complicated nature of the conflict and the special conditions prevailing in the Far East. These special circumstances cannot, however, be invoked by one of the Parties as an excuse for evading the procedure of conciliation and arbitration laid down in the Covenant. It is, however, evident that, at

> the present time, the first duty of the special Assembly is to obtain, cessation of hostilities. The latter is an indispensable condition in order that the organs of the League may contribute to a peaceful settlement of the Sino-Japanese conflict. The cessation of hostilities should, however, take place in such a manner that the position of the Parties to the dispute may not, in view of the settlement of the dispute, be influenced by military pressure and that invasion of Chinese territory may be stopped. I welcome the appeal adopted yesterday by the Assembly as a first step towards this result. I wish, however, to point out that, once hostilities have ceased, it will naturally be the essential duty of the League to ensure the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the spirit of the Covenant. In this connection I may recall the remarks contained in M. de Brouckdre's report, which was adopted as a valuable guide by the 1927 Assembly. At this moment a heavy responsibility weighs on the special Assembly of the League and on all the States taking part in it. As M. Hymans, the President of the Assembly, stated in his opening speech, we must conscientiously seek for ways and means of restoring concord through justice. It is true that small countries like ours have less possibility than the great powers of influencing the course of events; but our interest in the maintenance of legal international order is all the greater. If the League does not succeed, in present circumstances, in establishing peace based upon justice, the proper and loyal application of its own constitution, there is a danger of the more or less complete collapse of those ramparts which we have built up together with so much patience and zeal in order to prevent force from supplanting justice.[1002]

The specific text constructs two **spatial settings**. The first is the "Far East" where a conflict is narrated as unfolding, but is approach almost entirely from a distance. Events there "are being followed" (from someplace else), information about what is going on there are described as "contradictory" with "special conditions prevailing". It is narrated as spatially remote, but brought closer in a geography of affection through "growing anexity" directed, not at China, but at Geneva. The second, and dominant, spatial setting is therefore Geneva which is constructed as a legal-institutional space in references to, for example, the Covenant, the Council, and the Assembly. The **temporal setting** is described as progressive but reversible. The legal order is constructed as an accumulation of achievements via the narration of the "ramparts which we have built up together with so much patience and zeal." The present, repeatedly marked as "this moment", is constructed as a juncture at which that progress could be collapsed, and the situation is narrated into a crisis via references to a "threat to results obtained in Geneva", and as being a "war in everything but name".

[1002] Löfgren, E. 5 March 1932. "Records of the Special Session of the Assembly, Volume I" LONA, OJ SS No. 101, p. 49.

The specific text contains a number of **characters**. The League (and its organs) is portrayed as a central protagonist. Its committee is granted the authority of a fact-finder and the Assembly is narrated as having a "heavy responsibility". Sweden is also portrayed as a protagonist. The texts points to how Sweden has "maintained on several occasion" how to interpret the Covenant. Sweden's consistency and influence is further exemplified in the reference to Foreign Minister Ramel or to "my government". The "we" constructs a collective of League members who have built the existing order "together", and Sweden is portrayed alongside "small countries". The parties of the conflict are introduced as China and Japan, and the narrator declines to "give any opinion on the respective claims underlying the conflict". However, Japan is portrayed through its actions, and narrated as going against legal order in its "deployment of military means […] not in conformity with existing treaties", and in the narration of the moment as an "invasion of Chinese territory". Japan is thus constructed as the antagonist. The great powers do not appear as villains, but are differentiated from smaller states for their capacity. China, by contrast, appears mostly as a territory to be invaded or protected.

The specific text is not presented with a strict chronology, but it follows a causal logic nonehteless. The **emplotment** thus starts with past achievements by evoking the founding of the League as an institution for peace and justice, and in the emphasis on the "ramparts built together" over the past years. Then the present conflict between Japan and China emerges which has led to an ongoing disruption. The plot accentuates the attempts by the League to handle the situation, and points to an escalating situation following a number of military transgressions made predominantly by Japan. The text also establishes moral stakes and responsibilities in the present and immediate future. It further warns of a future where a failure to respond suggests a collapse of the League. The past is thus one of peace and cooperation, recent developments are narrated as having disrupted that past and caused a growing anxiety in the present, and the future offers a possibility to establish peaceful relation, as well as dangers of collapse if failing to do so.

Appendix 4 Example: Identity Reconstruction

The following specific text is an excerpt from a speech by Carl Lindhagen (social democrat) in the First Chamber of the *Riksdag* in 1935.[1003] It belongs to the parliamentary space of narration, and the genre is a parliamentary speech. The example below draws on the text's narrative elements to explore the identity elements produced in them, but, in the thesis, this is based on the narratives reassembled from a multitude of specific texts. This text offers only an illustration of what what this process has looked like.

> […] Then one asks: now that Italy is arming itself in this tremendous way – as if a giant was preparing to crush a mosquito – where is the League of Nations in Geneva? What is it doing to try to follow its own principles and regulations, to mediate between these parties? Nothing, as far as we have seen. The only thing that seems to have been done from the Swedish side is that the Swedish officers who are down there as instructors have been informed by our government that they may not allow themselves to be used in a war. The government has thus assumed that there may indeed be war down there, and that the great Italian superiority now intends to rush into this country to annex it, or certain parts of it, and to transform the country, or certain regions thereof, into vassal territories. But that such a smaller state has the right to receive the League of Nations' support for its independence is an immensely important matter for all small nations – even in Europe – and equally important for the establishment of an international legal order. For example, the Scandinavians in South Jutland and our brothers across the sea are also threatened. Particularly Lithuania, with its exposed position, is threatened with the loss of the Memel territory – essential for Lithuania's existence and future prospects – which has long been in Lithuania's possession and gives it access to the sea. The only thing I have seen in the newspapers that could be called an expression of sympathy for Abyssinia from any of the states belonging to the League of Nations is that people are said to be "concerned in England". How deep that concern goes, I do not know; but since troop shipments are now underway without the League being convened to make decisions and demand that they be stopped, it seems that all that is being done is an attempt to persuade the Emperor of Abyssinia to make as many compromises as possible to avoid invasion. It is admitted – judging from the reports in the press – explicitly, that people find it unpleasant to intervene against so powerful an ally as Italy. Imagine, such a people's league, gentlemen, and imagine, what a danger for small nations! […] With this

[1003] Carl Lindhagen changed party affiliation over the course of the Interwar period. He was a previous member of both the liberal and communist party. In 1935, he was a member of the social democratic party.

> statement, I have wished to ask the Foreign Minister, as well as the former Foreign Minister, Councillor Undén – both of whom are present in the chamber – what they think of the obligations of the League of Nations in this case, and whether they consider that these obligations have been properly fulfilled, or whether one must distinguish between a white and a coloured nation. This reasoning leads to another matter that should interest us, namely Europe's relationship to the coloured races in general. Upon that relationship depend, to a great extent, our foreign policy and our system of national defence. At the request of others, I gave a lecture last summer in Säffle on the mission of the North, and among other things I suggested that one of the North's callings is to contribute to balance, cooperation, and justice between the coloured and white races. […] Säffle pays a very large percentage of its taxes to the military system. Why do you do that? Because you believe you need a defence system. Why do you need a defence system? Because you are afraid of the great powers, which arm themselves for all kinds of wars. Why do the great powers arm themselves for all kinds of wars? Not least because they must keep their possessions in Asia and Africa under their dominion. Well then, what is the conclusion for us? It is that we must continue to maintain this burdensome military budget until the peoples of Asia and Africa are set free. Thus – a very long wait indeed […].[1004]

A **position** constructed in this specific text is Sweden's belonging to a small state category, constructed through a hierarchy of power with the image of "a giant" crushing "a mosquito". Even if Sweden is not placed in the conflict, it is positioned through a linking to the threatened small state in this specific text. The threat to small states is also extended beyond the threat to Abyssinia in references to "all small nations" and to "our brothers across the sea". The text further narrates a European and a "white" position which are given a moral inferiority in the argument that the legal order established in Europe is not extended to "a white and a coloured nation" similarly. Another position constructed is "the North" which the narrator provides with both superiority (e.g. in its ascribed mission) and inferiority (e.g. as afraid of the great powers military strenght).

The other-**portrayals** are the most clear in this specific text. Italy is constructed as an antagonists arming itself and seeking "vassal terriotires", where its militaristic portrayal contrasts with Sweden's portrayals as peaceful. Abyssinia is portrayed as a tiny and defenceless "mosquito" (i.e. Abyssinia functions as a mirror for small state vulnerability). The League is mostly portrayed through its narrated absence (e.g. "where is the League", "what is it doing?", "nothing") or through ironic portrayls of what it is doing. The great powers are cast as imperialist states arming "for all kinds of war" to keep "their possessions in Asia and Africa under their dominion", relationally portraying Sweden as non- imperialistic. Yet, the construction of the League as having

[1004] Lindhagen, C. FC 27 Feb. 1935 No. 12, p. 8f, translated.

the responsibility to act, also points to Sweden's (non-)responsibilities. The Swedish government has the duty to question League inaction, but it is the League that holds the obligation to intervene.

The self-portrayals of Sween is further split in three distinct ways. The Swedish government is portrayed as not having taken enough steps to pressure the League into action against Italy as the main antagonist, and Sweden is thereby narrated as partly complicit in the League's non-action. The "taxpayers of Säffle" are, in contrast, portrayed as having to fund the defence against the imperialist great powers, and this narration paints a picture of the vulnerable and burdened ordinary Swede, set against a partially inactive, or even collusive, Swedish government. Sweden is also bounded up in portrayals of "the North" which is assigned a specific role/mission and the responsibility of contributing to "balance, cooperation, and justice between the coloured and white races". This example thus illustrates the need to work through several specific texts, as other texts relating to this one clarifies that mission as a humanitarian calling aimed at providing, amongst other things, self-determination for the colonies. This narration also rests on an implicit non-trait where Sweden, in differentiation from the great powers, holds no colonial possessions, allowing it to stand outside the imperial order and criticise it.

The **programme** that the specific text presents is constructed through a causal chain tying Sweden (including the small community of Säffle) to the imperialist word. From this follows a number of reasons for a Swedish programme. Since great powers arm themselves to keep or expand their colonial possessions and domination over smaller states, Sweden it forced to also arm itself. The latter is not, however, constructed as an objective or action for Sweden, but as a reason for *why* Sweden should care about justice and equality between the "races". The objectives are, instead, Abyssinia's secured territorial integrity and independence, as well as the proper fulfillment of the League's obligations. In the longer time frame, the specific texts also narrates the abolishment of colonial dominance as an underlying aim. Actions are less clearly stated in this specific text. The League is, however, called to respond to the crisis, and the Swedish government as urged to pressure it into doing so. Sweden is also given the action of pursuing a Nordic mission centered on solidarity with the "coloured races".

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