

Swedish Fear of the Russian Bear

A Discourse Analysis of the Debate About the
Status of the Swedish National Defence in
Newspapers in Sweden During Spring 2013

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Abstract

By using Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory, the debate about military spending and the state of the Swedish national defence is examined. The material used is newspapers in Sweden and the period of interest is December 2012-May 2013. The discourse that is discernible in the debate is deconstructed by exposing the chain of equivalence that establishes meaning within it. The conclusion that is drawn is that the national defence-discourse is constructed with Russia as a defining component. It is constructed as having an impact on Swedish security and the capacity of its national defence.

Keywords: Laclau & Mouffe, Discourse, Russia, Sweden, Defence

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1 Introduction

Between December 2012 and May 2013 the debate about military spending and resources in Sweden was seemingly intensified. At the centre of the debate was the size of the military defence budget of the Swedish state. During this period, in December 2012, the Swedish supreme commander made a public appearance to announce that the military capability of the Swedish state was enough to defend the country for one week, Mikael Holmström writes in *Svenska Dagbladet* (Holmström, 2012). Reactions to the statement would not wait and a debate in Swedish newspapers ensued. This reignited the debate about the state of the military defence in a country that has not seen war in over two hundred years. The debate focuses on the capacity of the Swedish national defence and whether it is capable of defending Sweden or not. Actors participating in this debate have been plentiful and range from professionals employed by the Swedish department of defence to newspaper journalists. Frequently reoccurring within this debate were the doings of Russia, a country that Sweden has a history of relating to. The timing of the debate was strikingly interesting, seeing as the Swedish Defence preparation committee was due to release a report on the direction of development of the Swedish military defence by the 31st of May 2013 (Ritter, 2013).

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

My hypothesis when beginning was that a certain discourse is gaining ground and a struggle for hegemony between different discourses is taking place within the debate about the Swedish national defence. In the light of this struggle, the construction of Russia in the debate is interesting. In this study a discourse analysis is conducted, with the purpose of deconstructing the discourse dominating contemporary Swedish defence politics. In addition, an attempt is made to display how Russia is constructed within that discourse. The aim of the study is to answer the following research questions:

- How is the discourse constructed?
- How is Russia constructed in it?

The relevance of this subject to the academia is unquestionable. By building on the works of other authors on the phenomenon of discourse and its construction I seek to advance and adapt existing research that has been done on the subject. By doing this, this study adds to and participates in an academic discussion,

potentially cumulatively contributing to the academic discussion on discursive construction and particularly to the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe. The purpose of the study is to examine and challenge seemingly established presumptions that frequently reoccur in the Swedish national defence-discourse. This is done by deconstructing the discourse through a thorough analysis, with the aim of exposing how the national defence-discourse is constructed and how Russia is constructed within it.

The subject holds relevance outside of the academia as well. Particularly since the period that is studied in this paper just predates the release of a report on the direction of development of the Swedish national defence. The report is called *Vägval i en Globaliserad Värld* and was released by the Defence preparation committee (Försvarsberedningen, Ds 2013: 33). These reports are important to Swedish defence politics, since they form basis for the strategic defence decisions in Sweden. Wilhelm Agrell argues in the book *Fredens Illusioner – Det Svenska Försvarets Nedgång och Fall* (2010) that the decision 2004 gave way to a whole new way of thinking on all levels in the Swedish defence (Agrell, 2010: 216).

The analytical tool of choice for this study is discourse theory, originally developed by political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In the book *Diskursanalys Som Teori och Metod* (1999) Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips present its strengths and weaknesses. I draw my theoretical and methodological framework heavily from this book, as it presents discourse theory in a pedagogic and easy to understand manner.

As we shall see, discourse theory is, in a way, a package solution to an academic problem. As practice of discourse analysis is based on certain ontological and epistemological presumptions it cannot be put into just any theoretical framework. These presumptions concern but are not limited to the meaning of language in the social realm. Even though a theoretical framework is provided within the discourse analytical approach Winter Jørgensen and Phillips believe that it can be advantageously combined with additional theoretical influences (Winter Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 10). In order to put the construction of Russia within the debate in a theoretical perspective I have chosen to relate my results to Iver B. Neumann's notion of Russia as a "learning state", which is explained in section 3.3. This is presented in *Uses of the Other – "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Neumann, 1999). The theoretical framework is presented in chapter 3.

1.2 Disposition

The basic premises of this study have now been presented. The theoretical problem has been laid forward together with the purpose and research question of the study. Chapter 2 opens with a discussion about demarcation of this paper and the material used. Thereafter follows a presentation of the methodological

application of discourse theory as it is used in this paper. In chapter 3 the theoretical framework, mainly drawn from discourse theory as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe complemented by Neumann's notions of the construction of Russia is presented. Chapter 4 is where the actual analysis of the discourse is conducted, with a presentation of the discourse followed by a section in which the discourse's construction is disclosed. Thereafter follows a discussion in chapter 5, in which the results of the analysis are related to Neumann's notions of the construction of Russia. Lastly, chapter 6 contains the concluding remarks of this paper.

1.3 Historical Context

In this section of the paper the reader is provided with basic knowledge of the history of the relationship between Sweden and Russia. A short introduction to the context of this paper is necessary because it will allow the reader to gain a better understanding of the subject.

In *Sverige och Ryssland: ett 1200-årigt Förhållande* (1996) Aleksander Kan tries to give a comprehensive summary of the relationship between Sweden and Russia through history. Kan initially stresses that it is important to remember the asymmetrical nature of this relationship. It is an asymmetry of population, political weight and geographical size. According to Kan, Sweden that is the smaller country, has traditionally nurtured in its inhabitants a fear of Russia (Kan, 1996; 10).

The relationship between Russia and Sweden has varied over the centuries. In early seventeenth century Sweden was a great power in Europe, and the two were occasionally at war with each other. However at times the two powers identified one another as assets and joined forces. Such was the case in 1632 when the Swedish monarch Gustav II Adolf made a plea of alliance to the Russian government, in order to strengthen the position of Sweden in the war against the Germans and the Polish (Kan, 1996; 63ff).

Between the first and second world war, Russia (which was not Russia but Soviet) and Sweden had diplomatic relations, even though Sweden hesitated to acknowledge the Soviet Union at first (Kan, 1996: 128). However, due to Soviet hesitation to reimburse Swedish citizens for confiscated property, the political relationship was not a close one (Kan, 1996: 129).

Nor was it any better after the Second World War. The Cold War made a working relationship impossible. The Swedish principle of neutrality was perceived by the Soviet Union as being pro-west (Kan, 1996: 139).

During the 90s the relationship was one of uncertainty. Wilhelm Agrell describes the ambiguousness with which Swedish policymakers perceived the fall of the Soviet Union in the 90s, and the state of Russia. Russia was no longer seen as an immediate threat, but instead it was regarded as a country that could

potentially develop towards democracy and economic growth. However, this development was uncertain, and there were fears that the implosion of the Soviet Union would not be the end. Indeed, there were fears that the Russian Federation was also at risk of falling asunder, potentially causing the development to go backwards, to a more totalitarian state (Agrell, 2010: 77).

2 Method

In the first chapter the reader was given an introduction to the scientific problem, the empirical context and the purpose of this study. In the second chapter the method of this study is presented in detail. First the demarcations and material of this paper are presented. Right after that is a short section about translation and its implications for this study. After that comes a methodological discussion wherein my reasons for choosing to work with discourse theory methodologically are presented. Lastly the methodological application and relevant terms of discourse theory are introduced.

2.1 Material and Demarcation

In order for the aim of this study not to become too broad, some limits need to be clarified. The primary sources of material for this study are Swedish newspapers through which various actors have chosen to contribute to the debate that is the object of choice for this study. Using public sources such as newspapers is beneficial, since they can be easily accessed by anyone.

In order to find the right material a single database was used. Its name is Retriever Research. To find articles that were relevant to the subject the combination of two words was used for searching within it; the Swedish word 'försvarsmakt' and the Swedish word for Russia, which is 'Ryssland'. These two words were used, in different forms and orders, for searching the database. The search was not done without limitations, but with the explicit aim of finding articles from newspapers that together reach a large proportion of the Swedish population, that are published daily and that represent diverse political stances. Some of the articles are editorials and therefore lack a name of the author. Also I found that some newspapers were more active than others in the debate about the Swedish national defence. These are the ones that have been chosen for this paper. As a consequence, this paper contains articles from *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*, *Sydsvenskan*, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. These all have many daily readers. In 2012 the amount of daily readers for each was as follows: *Aftonbladet*: 912000, *Expressen*: 826000, *Sydsvenskan*: 247000, *Dagens Nyheter*: 781000 and *Svenska Dagbladet*: 437000 (Resumé, 2012). These newspapers have a big spread, and reach a large part of the Swedish population. This was important to me, since I wanted to examine the popular debate, and not the academic or field-

specific. Having said that, it is highly probable that the results of this paper would be quite different with a different selection of articles.

Concerning the period of interest for this study, it stretches from December 2012 to May 2013. This period starts with the earlier mentioned (chapter 1) announcement of the Swedish supreme commander. It ends at the date of publishing of the report on security politics that is handed to the Swedish parliament by the Defence preparation committee, in preparation for a decision on new strategic direction of the Swedish national defence in 2015 (Ritter, 2013).

2.1.1 Translation and the Linguistic Barrier

Since this paper is written in English, while the empirical material is in Swedish, there is cause for a section like this. Throughout this study you will find quotations from Swedish newspapers that have been translated by me. Every time something has been translated it is marked like this: [My translation]. This makes it clear to the reader when something is not presented in its original form. This is important as the quotations have great bearing on the interpretation of this paper, and as a consequence on its results. I have been most diligent when translating and my aim has been to translate as direct as possible from Swedish to English. Early on during the process of this paper I noticed that one word in particular would be very important. The word in Swedish is *försvarsmakten*, which is a word that refers to the apparatus of the Swedish military. I found no entirely satisfying translation of this word, but ended up with two options: *national defence* and *armed forces*. I have chosen to go with *national defence* despite its connotation with the somewhat complicated term nation. I hope that the reader will be lenient and accept that I do not get involved in a debate about this connotation, since it is not the same in Swedish. The reason for this choice is mainly that *armed forces* is a too technical expression, which I have interpreted as denoting strictly the “field business” of the military. Also, *försvarsmakten* in Swedish is a word that emphasises defence, making *national defence* more appropriate.

2.2 Methodological Discussion

Even though I have chosen to work with Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory as a method, that does not mean that other alternative methods would not have been possible to use. Other kinds of text analyses would possibly work just as well, however, beneath I explain why I chose discourse theory.

In their book *Metodpraktikan; Konsten att Studera Samhälle, Individ och Marknad* (2012) Peter Esaiasson, Mikael Gilljam, Henrik Oscarsson and Lena Wängnerud explain the benefits of different kinds of qualitative text analyses.

According to the authors qualitative text analyses are to be preferred before quantitative in cases where the entirety of a text is presumed to be something else than just the sum of its components (Esaiasson *et al.*, 2012: 210). The authors then categorize text analyses into two categories depending on their most common purposes; systematise a material or critically examine a material. By their definition, various discourse analyses fall into the second category. Discourse analyses, according to Esaiasson *et al.* mostly are applied when one wants to critically examine relationships of power, which is why they have placed it in their second category. However, they add, that is a simplification, since discourse analyses can be applied with other purposes and therefore does not automatically belong to the second category (Esaiasson *et al.*, 2012: 211f). This goes well with my own reason for choosing to work with discourse theory as an applicable method. Granted, discourse theory as a method is complicated enough, having to learn first the relevant terms that are necessary to operationalize the theory. But, having these down, one then has the tools to critically examine the material at hand, while having the option of presenting the material in a systematised and structured fashion. This option, according to me, is in a way built into the etymological toolkit that is needed to conduct an analysis with the help of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory.

2.4 Discourse Theory in Practice

To provide the reader with a comprehensive picture of how discourse theory is used in this paper, an explanation of how it technically functions is called for. In using discourse theory, some words and their meanings are essential in creating the methodological framework. These words are the analytical tools that are used to organise the discourse. Here follows a description of the important terms.

According to Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, discourse can be understood as a fixation of meaning within a specific domain. It is established as a totality, as a web of words, all gaining meaning through their relationship to other words within said discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:33). The aim of the analysis of this paper is to deconstruct the discourse and identify the significant words that make up its composition.

Winther Jørgensen and Phillips propose that one see the words in a discourse as ‘signs’ forming a web. The changing of their positions in relation to each other alters meaning within the discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 32).

When a discourse is established, what in effect happens is, the exclusion of possible alternative meanings is sought for. This is due to the seeking of uniqueness for each term that constructs a discourse. The sum of the excluded possible meanings is known as the ‘discursive field’. Accordingly, a discourse is always constituted in relation to the discursive field (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:34).

All words that are part of the discourse are known as ‘moments’. Together they form a web of words that gain meaning through their relation to each other. It is the difference between them that provide them with specific meaning, in other words it is their ‘differential positions’ that make them relevant as parts of a discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:33).

Words that are particularly eligible for different infusions of meaning are called ‘significant floaters’ (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:35). Words within discourses that denote a social room are known as ‘myths’ in discourse theory. (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 57). These are significant floaters that refer to a whole (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:47).

Words that are at the center of the discourse are called ‘nodal points’. These are the signifiers of the discourse, and the discourse is organised around them. In a way, the nodal point is the principal differential position that the other moments get their meaning from. However, nodal points in themselves are without meaning if not inserted into a discourse. This means that nodal points are simultaneously moments (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:33ff). The positioning of words in relation to other words within a discourse in order to change their meaning is called ‘articulation’ (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:35). This is an act that effectively reduces the amount of possible meanings of a word, and fixates its meaning in accordance with a particular discourse.

In this paper, through thorough reading of the empirical material an attempt is made to deconstruct the discourse that I have come to identify as the national

defence-discourse. The deconstruction is done by identification of the different components that make up the debate. These are then related to the terms provided by discourse theory, which allows for a deeper understanding of the construction of discourse.

2.4.1 Organisation of a Discourse – Chain of Equivalence

In section 2.4 the relevant terms for the practical conduct of discourse theory were presented. As the signs in a discourse in themselves are meaningless, their positioning in relation to each other is of vital importance. Signs relate to each other and are thereby infused with meaning by being placed in what is known as ‘chains of equivalence’ (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 57). By thoroughly reading a material it is possible to trace the source of meaning through these chains. One can map out a discourse and its construction by identifying the nodal points, and by seeing how these relate to each other one can discern the chain of equivalence (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:58).

In section 4.2 of this paper the national defence-discourse is deconstructed by the exposure of a chain of equivalence. In order to achieve this I thoroughly read all of the material, marking moments of the discourse that would repeatedly be used in a similar fashion. Thereafter an attempt was made to establish how these moments relate to each other within the discourse. Hence, how they are infused with the meaning bestowed upon them by articulations within the discourse in the struggle for the privilege to fixate meaning.

3 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the theoretical framework of this study is presented. Initially discourse theory, as defined and developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, is discussed, focusing on ontological and epistemological presumptions. After discourse theory and its epistemological implications is presented a short section with critique against it follows. Thereafter Neumann's idea of Russia as a "learning state" is presented.

3.1 Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe

In this section of the paper an extensive outlining of the theoretical approach is provided. This includes a more abstract discussion on the theoretical scientific choices that are made in relation to the epistemological and ontological positions of this study. Central to this paper are the theoretical presumptions that come with discourse theory as it is presented by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

In order to be able to really understand the specific philosophical traits of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory one must first gain insight into the general field of social science. In the book *The Philosophy of Social Science; an Introduction* (1994) Martin Hollis discusses at great length what scientific peculiarities that are unique to the social sciences as opposed to the natural sciences. Hollis' text is instrumental for this study in that it concerns itself with the consistent dilemmas of the social sciences, which can help illustrate some of the fundamental criteria for the points of departure of this study. Hollis notes that when one is dealing with the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition of social theory the social world is to be understood from within (Hollis, 1994: 143). Human action has meaning and meaning in itself, according to Hollis, is of importance to social theory. Notably, Hollis states that "The meaning of many actions depends on the model of the social world which is in the actors' heads." (Hollis, 1994: 144f). The implication of this statement is basically that the result of this study will, even if guided by a structure and framework, be greatly influenced by the interpretations and understanding of its writer. Even so, the aim is to reach a high level of intersubjectivity, so that this study can be reconstructed.

As will be discussed later, language is central to discourse theory as presented by Laclau and Mouffe. Hollis establishes that in order to be able to understand social action from within, one must study it "from within the rules which give it meaning" (Hollis, 1994: 151). Language in particular, according to Hollis, can be understood once one has knowledge of both the meaning of a word and what the

actor expressing something means in its particular setting. Yet, different senses of meaning are present (Hollis, 1994: 151). This understanding of language warrants the search for conflicting positions between discourses and explains why one has to carefully study each utterance in order to find what it is that creates meaning.

Kristina Boréus and Göran Bergström describes the uniqueness of discourse analytical studies in the book *Textens Mening och Makt* (2000). According to the authors a discourse analysis concerns itself more with discursive relationships than it does with relations between groups, therefore it can be described as being a tool for studying social phenomena with a linguistic focus (Bergström & Boréus, 2000: 354).

In discourse theory, an important assumption is that social phenomena cannot be finished or complete, and because Laclau and Mouffe see discourse as a social phenomenon, meaning can never be finally fixated. Hence, according to discourse theory, there is constant social struggle for meaning and definitions of society. This has social consequences (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 31).

According to Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, Laclau and Mouffe are influenced by post-structuralism and Marxism. Marxism provides the authors with a certain understanding of the social realm, whereas the post-structural foundation influences their perspective on meaning and language. An essential assumption of discourse theory is that meaning is shaped by social actions, so it is through conflicts, negotiations and mediations that discourse is formed. The struggle of fixating the meaning of words in a discourse takes place in social rooms, with the aim of closing the discourse by establishing hegemony (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:32).

As Michel Foucault is generally seen as the pioneer of the discourse analytical approach it would be wrong not to give due credit in a paper that wholly relies on that tradition. Foucault contributed greatly to the development of concepts and theory that have later been adopted by other theorists (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 19). Regarding the work of Laclau and Mouffe, one can particularly recognize Foucault's notion of power and knowledge within their theory. In Foucault's perspective, power is something that permeates social practices, not something that lies with individual actors. According to Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, power is what facilitates the mentioning of certain things in a certain manner, while other ways and meanings are excluded (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:20).

The book *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy; Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), written by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, is the principal work by said authors in which they first present their discourse theory. In its introduction the authors clarify certain cornerstones of their theoretical approach. These are important for the outcome of this paper and its analysis.

Perhaps most important is the notion that there is never one discourse or one system of categorisation that is objectively "real" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 3). Laclau and Mouffe are often put in an academic Marxist setting, but at the time of the release of this original work, the authors identified a changing world with the potential for social emancipation. It can be described as a moment in which a proliferation of social struggles is imminent, which calls for innovative thinking

(Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 1). In their book, Laclau and Mouffe describe the historical dilemmas of Marxism in an attempt to invite the reader to understand what makes it different from their own work. Marxism, they say, struggled with the floating nature of identity having for a long time defined the working class along factual parameters. This opened up for a paradoxical relationship between theory and program, which was symptomatic of an ongoing "autonomization of spheres" in all areas of society. This autonomization made clear that unity could only be achieved through "unstable and complex forms of rearticulation" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 17f).

Struggle and mediation is crucial to discourse theory, as there is constantly an ongoing struggle between discourses, with the aim of achieving hegemony (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:36). Actually, according to Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 'discursive struggle' can be considered to be the key concept of discourse theory. Within this struggle, as mentioned above, various discourses compete to establish their respective ways to perceive the social realm and to fixate the meaning of relevant words (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:13).

In this section the reader has been provided with the basic ontological presumptions that make discourse theory. In 3.1.1 Laclau and Mouffe's concepts of 'Antagonism' and 'Hegemony' are introduced.

3.1.1 Antagonism and Hegemony

In this subchapter a presentation is given of two concepts, which are both crucial to the discourse theory designed by Laclau and Mouffe.

Winther Jørgensen and Phillips state that through the lens of discourse theory, the social is permeated by struggle and conflict. Therefore, according to them, struggle and conflict will inevitably be part of any concrete analysis using this theory (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 54). As is the case in this study, since the struggle between discourses is central to the debate about military spending in Sweden.

Antagonism is the word used to denote conflict in discourse theory. Different identities are not necessarily in a mutual antagonist position, for it is only when identities inhibit one another that antagonism is created. In short, it is when two identities make mutually contrasting demands in one single terrain that discourses block each other and antagonism arises. To sum up, one can say that that which a discourse has excluded threatens it and its domination of the meanings of words (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 55).

Once antagonism arises it can be dissolved through a 'hegemonic intervention'. Winther Jørgensen and Phillips describe a hegemonic intervention

as being "an articulation that through force reinstates uniqueness of meaning" (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 55).

3.2 Critique Against Discourse Theory

As there is against most theoretical approaches to social science, there is legitimate critique of discourse analysis as a tool in social science. This critique is important to be aware of when conducting the analysis. One argument against using discourse analysis that is specifically aimed at the more radical constructivist discourse theory of e.g. Laclau and Mouffe is that in this perspective, social phenomena are reduced to terms and ideas. Indeed, critics have accused discourse analysts of getting into a position of idealism. Critics say that the ontological perspective of discourse theory in which every social action is seen as part of a discourse makes it difficult to establish historical causal relationships (Bergström & Boréus, 2000: 400f). Another point of critique is on the object of study. Critics argue that most discourse analytical approaches are unable to study phenomena on the individual level and fail to see the actions of individual actors. According to Bergström and Boréus there is an inherent contradiction in defining discourse theory as belonging to the hermeneutic tradition of social theory even though it cannot see individual subjects (Bergström & Boréus, 2000: 402). Lastly, perhaps the most heavily resounding critique against discourse theory is that it risks a lack of transparency. Considering that each discourse analysis entails various stages of research, analysis and methodological handling the analyst may find it difficult to maintain a high level of intersubjectivity (Bergström & Boréus, 2000: 403). This critique is serious and must be handled accordingly. By thoroughly explaining each step taken in the research process and the retrieval of information a high level of intersubjectivity can be maintained nonetheless. It is the aim of this study to be highly transparent, in order for others to be able to recreate research in a similar fashion.

3.3 Neumann's Russia as a "Learning State"

In the book *Uses of the Other; "The East" in European Identity Formation* (1999) Iver B. Neumann presents his view on the importance of identity to international relations as an academic field. Neumann states that academics of the discipline have studied economic and physical borders for a long time, while omitting the importance of social boundaries. However, Neumann stresses the importance of remembering the multifaceted nature of collective identities if one is to study these successfully (Neumann, 1999: 36).

Neumann further stresses the importance of the way in which the nexus of self/other is depicted. Since collective identities must be recognized as being multifaceted, it would seem logical to deduct that no specific collective identity can be entirely privileged. However, it is important to remember that the self and the other are unbounded, and merge into each other. In contemporary academia this merging or exchange is seen as being dialogical (Neumann, 1999: 36). Further, Neumann means that since there can be no inclusion without exclusion, Russia has played the role of the other of the “west” (Neumann, 1999: 15).

According to Neumann Russia is essential for discourse on European identity formation overall. The question of where Russia fits in relation to European identity is a recurring theme in European security discourse (Neumann, 1999: 65). In the post-cold war era, Neumann claims, the European notion of Russia increasingly concerns its future rather than its past. In European discourse, Russia is increasingly being constructed as a “learning” state, developing in the direction of the European West. As Russia supposedly becomes more like the European “us”, it ought to become less threatening to Europe by that logic. However, as Neumann notes, that “us” is as subjective and changing as any other identity (Neumann, 1999: 107f). As much as Russia is increasingly seen as a “learning” state, it is also constantly a state that is constructed as being “on the border”. Neumann states that as for as long as this is the case, Russia is perpetually infused with and connoted with danger (Neumann, 1999: 111). So to summarize, the points of Neumann described here which will be used to discuss the results of the analysis in this paper are two. The first one is the notion of Russia as becoming a learning state, namely seen as coming closer to Europe. The second one is the statement that Russia is central to European security order, something that will also be discussed in relation to the findings in chapter 4, in chapter 5.

4 Analysis

In this chapter the analysis of the national defence-discourse is presented. The chapter provides the reader with a display of the patterns that have been made visible through thorough reading of the debate about military spending in Sweden. Initially a wider approach is used, presenting the national defence-discourse in a general fashion in 4.1. After that, in section 4.2, the struggle to fixate the discourse is shown, along with the construction of the discourse and its nodal points.

The analysis of the articles is presented using central concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. The terms used by Laclau and Mouffe are applied in this analysis to show how the discourse is organised. In chapter 4.1 the struggle for meaning is in focus.

4.1 Presenting the National Defence-Discourse

When thoroughly reading and structuring the articles from the period of time that is the object of this study one notices that the debate is split into two "camps". However, one of the two "camps" is heavily underrepresented in terms of how many articles reflecting it that can be found during the period. Certain antagonism is present, and this part of the paper aims to bring it to light.

In the article sparking the debate the supreme commander of Sweden, Sverker Göransson, talks about Sweden's ability to defend its borders. When the supreme commander is asked point blank whether Sweden can defend itself or not he answers: "We can defend ourselves against an attack on a limited target. We are talking about approximately one week on our own." [my translation] (Holmström, 2012). In the same article, the supreme commander states that "insecurity has increased" [my translation] (Holmström, 2012). When asked to get into specifics about possible threats against Sweden the supreme commander elaborates: "The state of normality has changed compared to ten years ago. The amount of exercises from the Russian side of the Baltic Sea and the Norwegian Sea has increased. The exercises are bigger and more complex. They are on their way up in terms of quality of their national defence." [my translation] (Holmström, 2012). With these statements the supreme commander indicates that Sweden's ability to defend itself has become more important over the last ten years, hinting also that this is due to an increase in Russian military exercises. Another article author, Peter Hultqvist, writing on the same subject in *Aftonbladet* puts it differently, yet

reiterates the point: “Now minister of defence Karin Enström (M) claims to be content with the ability to defend a limited part of the country for one week only.” [my translation] (Hultqvist, 2013). The title of the article is “Enström’s satisfaction with the defence is precarious” [my translation], which indicates that the author is not content with the fact that the minister of defence is satisfied. However, the author does not stop there but goes on to state: “In Russia a rearmament is taking place. In the analysis of security policy that is to be presented this spring there must be clarity on this.” [my translation] (Hultqvist, 2013). As one can see, the author stresses that there is a problematic relationship between Sweden’s alleged inability to defend itself and the fact that Russia is entering a process of rearmament. This can be seen as an articulation with the purpose of reducing possible meanings of Russia, and at the very least implies a militarised view of the country.

In the editorial from one of Sweden’s biggest newspapers *Dagens Nyheter* one can read about the same subject, only this time the subject is broadened and related to a membership for Sweden in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Referring to the previously mentioned announcement of the supreme commander of Sweden, the author puts it as follows: “If we are in need of and are counting on support but can only make it on our own for one week, shouldn’t we then take the plunge and apply for membership in NATO?” [my translation] (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2013). This statement alone does not add anything for the purpose of this paper, but when one continues to read the same article the author goes on to explain that voices have been raised that are in favour of an increase in military funds aimed at defending Swedish territory. Additionally a revised analysis of threats against Sweden has been called for. Referring to this, the author of the article continues: “Unfortunately there are good reasons for these conclusions. Basically this is about Russia.” [my translation] (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2013). Making this connection between the limited ability of Sweden to defend its territory and Russia, the author does not try to hide the fact that there is cause for worry.

However, in this article the author also tries to nuance the grim image that is initially painted. For instance one can read: “Sweden is outside of what is traditionally considered to be the Russian area of interest. Even if Moscow may become more nationalistic and threatening it is primarily the closest neighbours that have cause for worry” [my translation] (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2013). Although still not entirely refuting the image of Russia as a country with militarist intentions, this articulation can be seen as differing from the aforementioned examples brought forward. With this statement the image of Russia as a direct and concrete threat against Swedish national security is perhaps blurred.

Even though articulations that diversify the discourse by opening up for alternative meanings, are scarce in this context they are not non-existent. In this article published by *Aftonbladet*, written by Pierre Schori, the describing of Russia as a direct threat to Swedish national security is once again related to the intricate relationship between Sweden and NATO (Schori, 2013). On the subject of Sweden’s possible membership in NATO and how this would affect the relationship with Russia the author writes: “Besides the Baltic Sea today is a more

peaceful sea than ever before and Russia is the greatest partner of trade to the EU and a, for Obama, important actor in world politics. On the other hand Russia's military planning would of course change in a negative direction for us, if we were to join the nuclear-armed alliance that is currently experiencing its worst crisis since the failure in Afghanistan" [my translation] (Schori, 2013). This articulation can be seen as downplaying an assumption the aggressive nature of the relationship between Russia and Sweden that we have seen being reflected in various articulations throughout the discourse above. This kind of articulation constitutes a subtle diversification of available meanings, for instance by highlighting Russia's role as a trade partner.

An article with the title *Defence Panic in Wait* [my translation] also contains articulation with a presumably diversifying effect. Commenting on the debate ensuing the announcement of the supreme commander mentioned earlier, the author states: "It is a good thing that the debate is intensified. However there is no reason for defence panic" (Sydsvenskan 2, 2013). Taking a stand against the incendiary tone of the debate, the author's articulation removes discourse from the "edge" and opens up for alternative meanings, by stating that there is no cause for panic. The author then embarks into a discussion describing how certain political actors, who believe that the disarmament of the Swedish national defence has gone too far, are catching momentum. The author then gets to the role of Russia in this discussion and writes: "But a Russian threat, like the Soviet one, does not exist" (Sydsvenskan 2, 2013). With this statement the author quite frankly rules out the possibility that Russia poses a threat to Swedish national security. Thereby it can be stated that the national defence-discourse houses differing opinions on the status of the Swedish military defence. However Russia is almost singularly discussed as a strictly militarized entity.

Albeit taking into account the display of opposition between two primary stances that has been provided in this chapter, there is only a minimum of exposable struggle over the meaning of Russia. A certain amount of antagonism is present. However, it becomes quite clear when examining the debate throughout the articles that the discourse has been temporarily closed. With that in mind, in chapter 4.2 the discourse's construction is examined along with the organisation of the discourse using the central concepts of Laclau and Mouffe.

4.2 The Chain is Formed

It is now time to truly delve into the national defence-discourse, taking a closer look at its signs and how they are interconnected. In this section the struggle of fixating the discourse is examined closely. It is here that it is established how the discourse is organised along with which signs hold what positions within it. In 4.2 the discourse is presented through its signs and the meaning ascribed to them by their relationship to each other within the discourse. This is where the chain of equivalence is exposed (explained in 2.4.1).

4.2.1 National Defence

As has been shown in section 4.1 the discourse at hand is one about defence, and defence should be understood in its military sense. Through thorough reading of the material available during the period of choice it becomes clear that certain signs consequently resurface and are reiterated as part of the discourse. Which these are and how they connect to each other is what is presented in this section. The central notion of the material of analysis is that of 'national defence'. According to my interpretation of the articles the myth of the discourse is 'national defence'. As was explained in section 2.3 the myth organises the social room, in this case it can be seen as principal differential position around which all other signs organise themselves. National defence is also a nodal point, seeing as it is at the centre of the discourse, and most likely to be the target of struggle for infused meaning. Moments of the discourse generally gain their meaning by being related to the nodal point (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:33). Throughout the material national defence is the topic of most of the articles and it is that which defines the other signs' meanings in the context of this discourse. However, it is evident that different actors refer to national defence with different understandings of its actual meaning. Therefore I argue that national defence is also a significant floater. Significant floaters are, as mentioned previously, moments that are particularly receptive of being bestowed with different meanings (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:35).

Several articles published during the first half of 2013 all focus on the wellbeing of the national defence in Sweden. The concern is of a general nature but what all of the articles really have in common is that they form part of the discourse that we call the national defence-discourse (Hultqvist, 2013; Johansson, 2013; Dagens Nyheter, 2013; Olsson & Agö, 2013; Holmström, 2012; Sydsvenskan 2, 2013). These are all constructed in a way that supports the notion of national defence as the myth and principal nodal point of the discourse.

Throughout the discourse one can perceive an on-going struggle for fixating the other signs that are part of the discourse. The ones that can be deemed fixated become moments of the discourse. Through repeated re-articulation the moments get infused with a certain meaning within the discourse. As mentioned in section 2.3 moments are all the signs that are part of the discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:33). In this section of the study however, the main purpose is to identify the most prevalent moments to examine how they are interconnected. Additionally, it is of relevance to see if the moments tie together in what Laclau and Mouffe call a chain of equivalence.

A number of signs that are reiterated throughout the articles examined are potentially more than moments within the discourse. Through thoroughly reading the articles I have come to identify a set of signs that can be said to be moments of a discourse that is discernible among the material. The signs, except for the myth that is national defence, will be accounted for in the following sections. These signs make the nodal points of the National Defence-discourse.

4.2.2 Nodal Point: Capacity

One sign that is frequently used is ‘capacity’. In this article published by *Sydsvenskan* it sounds like this: “That the national defence can singlehandedly withstand an attack from one attacker during one week in a limited part of the country is, according to minister of defence Enström, a reasonable capacity” [my translation] (*Sydsvenskan* 3, 2013). The sign also surfaces in an article published by *Dagens Nyheter*: “That our capacity to defend our own territory is that limited gives cause for questions about the restructuring from invasion to action defence” [my translation] (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2013). The sign capacity is used in a similar context by Mats Johansson, in an article published in *Expressen*: “[...] If USA is weakened militarily in our part of the world and we on our hand fail to strengthen the capacity of our defence during the coming decade” [my translation] (Johansson, 2013). As one can see, the sign capacity is categorically linked to the national defence with similar denotations in all these cases. This way it becomes possible to draw the conclusion that the sign capacity is a pivotal part of the discourse’s formation, which means that it can be interpreted as being a nodal point of the national defence-discourse.

4.2.3 Nodal Point: Security

Moving on to examine what other signs that frequently surface in the articles that make up the material of this study, we find ‘security’. The sign security is used as a point of referral throughout the material. In one of the articles published in *Dagens Nyheter* cited earlier in this study it is used in the following setting: “But in two short sentences he manages to brush several of the weak spots of Swedish securitypolitics” [my translation] (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2013). Here security is referred to as if being the umbrella of the debate, as if it was the topic of the discourse of which it is part. Interesting to take notice of here is also the referral to some sort of “capacity” by mentioning weak spots. Considering the context in which it is used it seems safe to assume that it is used with the same purpose as has been discussed earlier in this study.

A similar mention of the sign security is found in an article written by P J Anders Linder and published in *Svenska Dagbladet*: “The restoration of the Swedish defence- and securitypolitics must set out from a reasonable description of reality, so it is important stuff” [my translation] (Linder, 2013). In this case the author of the article is arguing that the Swedish politicians have developed a faulty sense of how the Swedish national defence actually functions. Hence the hint about the description of reality and its essentiality for better security politics in Sweden. Again, security is referred to in a rather general way, although intimately connected to politics. Actually throughout the material security is referred to in relation to politics, with an underlying understanding that security is “what it is all about”.

Lingering in the same article, the sign security is used in yet another way: “Instead of welcoming a serious discussion about our security situation and our defence capacity, we get exhausted variations on old themes such as ‘our preparedness is good’ [...]” [my translation] (Linder, 2013). In this paragraph of the article the author is discussing the reaction of Swedish politicians to the debate in massmedia on national defence issues. Security is here referred to as a situation that, the reader is to understand, is not an optimal one. The quotation is part of a more extensive discussion about the Swedish defence capacity and the politics affecting it.

Security resurfaces again in an article written by Anna Dahlberg and published in *Expressen*. In this article security is used in relation to capacity: “Which capacities do Sweden need to develop when we build collective security with our Nordic neighbours, the EU and NATO?” [my translation] (Dahlberg, 2013). As we can see, the sign security fills an important function in the discourse. Not least in this particular quote is it evident, as capacity is directly related to it. One can even go further and, considering the context of the article, draw the conclusion that “Sweden” in this case entails the national defence. Hence it becomes: “What capacities does the Swedish national defence need to develop in order to reach security?”.

4.2.4 Nodal Point: Russia

This brings us to the focal point of this analysis, since the fourth sign that is held to be of such centrality to the discourse that it can be considered to be a nodal point is ‘Russia’. It should come as no surprise to the reader that Russia is considered important for the formation of the discourse as an entirety. Repeatedly we have seen, in quotations mostly, how Russia surfaces in the articles treating the national defence issue. In the following paragraphs we shall see how it relates to the previously mentioned signs in the discourse.

Russia is more or less directly related to the capacity of the Swedish national defence, and the other way around. In an article published in *Dagens Nyheter* Russia comes up when discussing the future of the Swedish national defence: “Björklund does not want to elaborate on how much the defence appropriation should be increased. But he points to increased Russian military armament and aggressiveness towards neighbouring countries” [my translation] (Dagens Nyheter 2, 2013). In this quote it is made obvious that (the author thinks) Russia is something that one must relate to when discussing the national defence of Sweden. By stating that Sweden needs to raise the appropriation (i.e. more money) for the national defence in 2015 and connecting it to Russia, one cannot but draw the conclusion that Russia is seen as threatening.

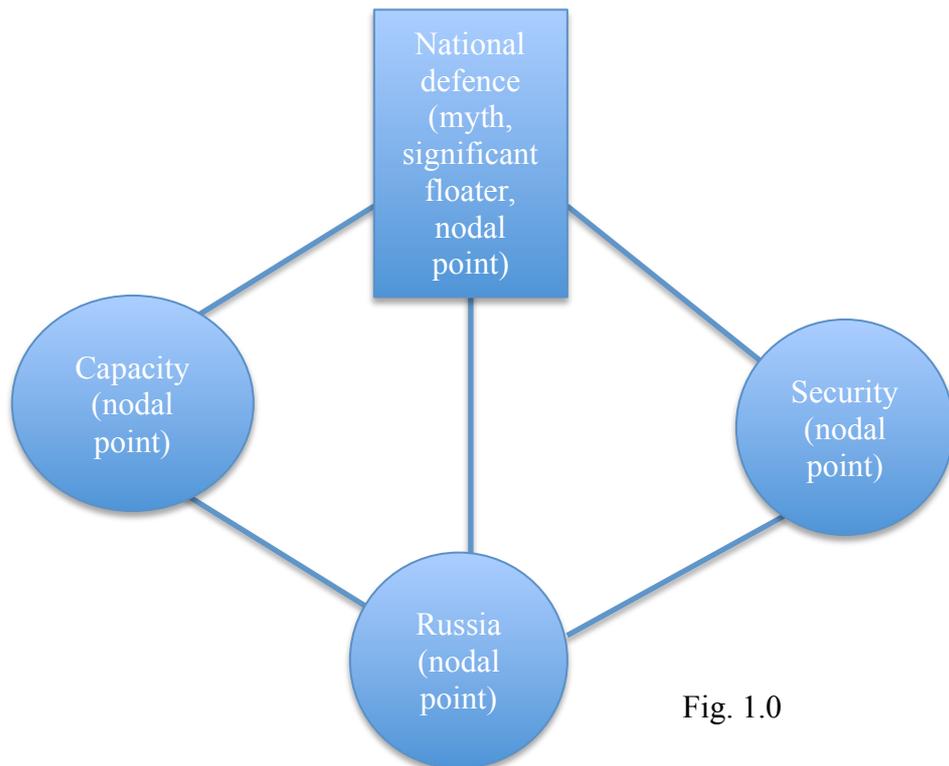
In another article Russia is discussed even more evidently from a perspective that puts it as a threat. Written by Mikael Holmström and published in *Svenska Dagbladet* this article discusses Russian rearmament in detail: “According to the report, Russia’s new *Iskander*-missiles have a reach of 700 km and can reach

targets in large parts of Sweden” [my translation] (Holmström 2, 2013). This is an example of Russian capacity being referred to in a factual way, something that has not occurred frequently in the material analysed. The sentence quoted is referring to Russia’s rearmament and its purpose is to provide an example of the increased capacity of Russia, as opposed to the decreased capacity of Sweden. In the same article one can read the following: “Russia wants stability. There is a risk that it becomes stability on Russian terms” [my translation] (Holmström 2, 2013). This statement can be seen as an articulation towards closing the meaning of Russia as something threatening, and ill intentioned. Compared to the first quote from the same article, this articulation does not refer to a material fact, but is more of an insinuation of a fear for a change in a relationship. This relationship can be interpreted to be one of power between Russia and its neighbouring countries.

As has been described in the previous paragraph, descriptions of Russia are based on both factual arguments and others, more based on a “hunch” or “feeling”. In an article written by Arne Lapidus and published by *Expressen* the rearmament of Russia is more directly related to Swedish capacity: “Russia announces weapon investments of nearly 5 000 billion Swedish Kronor, while Sweden defends the strategically important *Gotland* with *hemvärnet* (ed. no appropriate translation of *hemvärnet* found, literally it means “home guard”)” [my translation] (Lapidus, 2013). In this articulation the capacity of the Swedish national defence in one limited area is put in relation to the planned process of rearmament in Russia. In this context articulations in which one puts Russian rearmament in relation to Swedish defence capacity are not novel. They are repeated and it has been established through the numerous quotes presented in this study.

In the same article one finds another example of a non-factual articulation of Russia: “There is a vengeful spirit in Russia. After what was generally seen as degeneration after the collapse of Soviet there is an aspiration to become an empire again” [my translation] (Lapidus, 2013). This is an articulation that definitely closes the field of possible meanings of Russia. This articulation does not open up for alternative interpretations, establishing in a final way the aggressive nature of Russia.

In this chapter the core of the national defence-discourse has been examined and four nodal points have been established. Beneath a figure is provided that has the purpose of visualising the structure of the discourse:



1

Fig. 1.0

In the following chapter the construction of Russia in the national defence-discourse is discussed, relating the results of this analysis to Neumann’s notions of Russia in European discourse.

¹ Figure inspired by a similar one in Nadine Ghawi’s bachelor thesis “On This Issue, We More or An analysis of how the Sweden Democrats fixate the parliamentary discourse on immigration – and the other parties’ role in this (2012).

5 Discussion

In chapter 4 the analysis of the national defence-discourse was presented, ending with figure 1 showing the identified nodal points of the discourse. In chapter 5 a discussion is held, based on what was established in chapter 4 and how it relates to Neumann's notion of Russia's construction as a "learning state". Here the answer is provided to the two research questions of this paper, which are: 1) "How is the discourse constructed?" And 2) "How is Russia constructed within it?".

5.1 Swedish Fear of the Russian Bear

At this point there is no longer any doubt that there has been a temporary closure in the discourse, and meaning has been fixated. After a close examination of the national defence-discourse it seems as if though a hegemonic intervention has taken place, temporarily fixating meaning within this discursive domain, shutting out alternative meanings in the discursive field. This is also why antagonism is not prevalent, and why the discussion is conducted with a certain understanding.

Within the discourse that has been disclosed, which is also visible above, the nodal points have been identified. These are national defence, capacity, security and Russia. In effect, this means that the national defence-discourse is constructed with these signs at its core. As national defence is the nodal point that denotes the social room of the discourse, providing the topic that is the precondition for the discourse, it is also a myth. It structures the social room within which this debate takes place. It is the sign that, in a way, frames the discourse by being the one that the others gain their primary meaning from. What it refers to within this discourse is an institution that conducts Swedish military activity, with an emphasis on defending Sweden. Within the discourse it is frequently described, explicitly or inexplicitly, as being weak or unable.

The other nodal points all relate to national defence, and each of their meanings is interrelated with those of the others'. The nodal point capacity has a strong connection to national defence, mostly referring to the capacity of the national defence to carry out its task. Its meaning within the discourse is negatively denoted, fixated as being low, which is connected to the aforementioned weakness or insufficiency of national defence. Frequently it is described as being insufficient for maintaining Swedish security, which brings us to the third nodal point. The third nodal point that is security is, based on the meanings within the discourse of the other nodal points, connoted with absence or

deficit. “The capacity of the national defence is low, so security is absent.” It is also infused with an aura of uncertainty. Additionally, its meaning within the national defence-discourse is wholly connected to military-related issues, reducing the sign to meaning security from aggressors that pose a military threat. This also affects the understanding of the two previously discussed nodal points.

The fourth and last nodal point of the national defence-discourse as identified in this paper, is Russia. Its meaning is interrelated with those of the three other nodal points. Within the discourse, Russia is constructed as a military entity, stripped of excessive meaning. It is often referred to with negatively connoted invectives, aimed at its intentions or “nature”. Through the chain of equivalence it is related to the other nodal points as the prerequisite for their construction. Russia is constructed as a military entity that necessitates a discussion about security, capacity and national defence in Sweden. Its existence is the cause of a deficit of security, which causes the capacity of the national defence to be insufficient. If one were to remove nodal point Russia from the discourse, the understanding of the other nodal points would be altered, losing the “source” of their meaning. This is, however, the case the other way around as well. Nodal point Russia is not outstanding, but would lose its purpose and meaning without the other nodal points. The construction of Russia within the discourse is entirely based on it being an opposing force to the other nodal points, reduced as it is to a military entity.

Russia’s position as a nodal point within the discourse, and the way it is constructed can be related to the writings of Neumann as presented in section 3.3. Having examined the way Russia is constructed in the national defence-discourse, one is easily inclined to relate it to Neumann’s belief that Russia is of central importance to European security order. Its construction as a military entity can be interpreted as having a direct correlation to Swedish security within the discourse. A correlation that facilitates the fixation of the meaning of capacity and national defence, as being in a deficit or being insufficient. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Russia’s standing in this discourse is a prerequisite for its construction. This is because the nodal points all infuse the meaning of the others. Hence, Russia is a fundamental sign that explicitly affects the content of the discourse by having moments of the discourse relate themselves to its meaning.

With the way Russia is constructed in mind, one does not easily see how it can pass as being constructed as a learning state within this discourse. Considering that that would implicate an increased discursive proximity to Europe, it does not seem to be the case. The fashion in which Russia is constructed in the national defence-discourse implies a position as something bordering, unfamiliar and hostile.

6 Conclusion

The national defence-discourse is constructed by the exclusion of alternative understandings of the signs that form its nodal points. The nodal points national defence, capacity, security and Russia form its core, each contributing to bestowing the others with their specific meaning within the discourse. The meaning of Russia is reduced to a military entity, which poses a threat to Swedish security that, within the discourse, necessitates an increased capacity of the Swedish national defence.

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