

From ‘Nordic Exceptionalism’ to ‘Swedish Expansionism’

A Narrative Analysis of Swedish Penal Policy

Jack Lowe



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Department of Sociology, Lund University, Sweden

Supervisor

Sébastien Tutenges, Department of Sociology

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Abstract

Author: **Jack Lowe**

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The recent growth of the Swedish prison population and police force suggests a stark reversal from the small, rehabilitation oriented criminal justice system described in the “Nordic penal exceptionalism thesis.” This paper is based on a narrative analysis of documents published by the Government Offices of Sweden in the collection titled “A Safer Sweden” from 2013 to 2021. This research aims to understand the narratives Swedish criminal justice institutions use to describe themselves and the crime problems to which they respond, as well as how narratives work to shape assumptions about crime control and harm-causing policies. By using the critical narrative criminology perspective, and specifically Lois Presser’s “general narrative logic of harm” this paper will look at how narratives reduce targets of harm and how criminal justice institutions present contradictory stories regarding their license to harm and their unavoidable role in punishing. Presser’s framework allows for narrative theories to be linked with criminological theories on the growth and expansion of penal institutions. Building from these theories on political narratives, I will structure my results and analysis in three sections, actors, plots, and master narratives. These sections will focus on how narratives are used to construct collective identities and “target populations,” how narratives are sequenced in a way that creates causality, and how the narratives found in the dataset are nested within widely known master narratives that encourage specific types of policy action. Taken together, these narratives work to justify the cumulative expansion of penal power, which I term ‘Swedish expansionism,’ and overpower the solidaristic and egalitarian assumptions that were, at least theoretically, at the foundation of the ‘exceptional’ Swedish criminal justice system.

Keywords: narrative criminology, Nordic exceptionalism, punishment, prisons, policing, political narratives, gangs

Popular Science Summary

In this paper, I analyze publications from the Government Offices of Sweden on topics of crime, crime control, and punishment. I will use theories based in narrative criminology to understand how stories inspire and give meaning to the harmful action of imprisonment. Therefore, I will analyze how Swedish criminal justice institutions tell stories about themselves and the crime problems they are trying to solve which in turn shape people's beliefs about appropriate punishments.

This project challenges the assumption that punishment is an inevitable response to crime. Inspired by previous literature that shows no direct correlation between punishment practices and crime rates, punishment will be analyzed independently of crime to focus on the social and political factors driving the increases in Sweden's prison population and the expansion of their police force. This expansion is analyzed against the backdrop of Sweden's reputation for having a criminal justice system shaped by the egalitarian ideals of the welfare state that emphasizes alternatives to incarceration and rehabilitative practices.

Overall, I find that narratives about urban violence and gang crime have reshaped the meaning of safety and security in Sweden. Blaming immigrants and foreigners for these types of crimes abandons the assumption that lawbreakers are "just like us" that formerly drove Sweden's emphasis on humane punishment and rehabilitation. Instead, stories about solutions to the crime problem fit into widely known stories about proportionality, deterrence, risk management, control, security, and threat which justify policies that target racialized urban populations and increase the use of imprisonment. I propose the concept of 'Swedish expansionism' as a way to describe how the expansion of Sweden's punishing power is framed through the benevolent values of the welfare state and directed at the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in Sweden.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

“Prison is not for punishment in Sweden. We get people into better shape.”

Nils Öberg, Director-General of Kriminalvården (2013)

1.1. Research Problem

On the global stage, Nordic countries stand out as an exception to the global norm of long, retributive prison sentences and large, overcrowded prisons. While the logic of small prisons, short sentences, and rehabilitative programs are recognized as traditional principles of criminal justice systems in most European countries (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2011), Sweden, Norway, and Finland, in particular, are held up as the exemplars. With their prison populations consistently among the smallest in the world, Nordic Prisons are hailed as “exceptional,” “beacons of tolerances,” and in the case of Halden Prison in Norway, even called the “perfect prison” (McConnell, 2018). The narratives often associated with Nordic prisons are not about escapes or mistreatment, but instead focus on humane treatment and rehabilitation. In developing the “Nordic penal exceptionalism thesis,” John Pratt presents several anecdotes that include inmates cooking their own meals in communal kitchens, the ability to visit local shops for groceries, use of knives and axes to do agricultural work, and prison governors who believe that if a prisoner escapes “it is better to let the man go than put a hole in him... we can always catch him later” (Pratt, 2008a, 2020, p. 5).

I embarked on this project to see the ‘exceptional’ Swedish prison system for myself and explore whether it contained insights that could help Americans like myself address the crisis of mass incarceration. I intended to focus my research on the rehabilitative ethos of Swedish prisons and the inclusionary character of reentry programs. While preparing to move to Sweden, I read about Swedish prison officials discussing how their “role is not to punish” but instead to “get [people] back out into society in better shape than they were when they came in” (Aleem, 2015). They also discussed the decreasing inmate population and closing of prisons (James, 2013). Yet, when I arrived in Sweden in 2019, it was difficult to recognize the inclusive and downsizing prison system I read so much about.

Crossing the Øresund Bridge for the first time after landing at Copenhagen Airport, I watched as Swedish border police tore through the bags of two Middle Eastern men even after the men presented their identification. I quickly learned that Swedes were growing increasingly afraid of crime. On my first trip to Malmö with other students, they told stories of neighborhoods such as Rosengård, which had become known as hotspots for violence and gang activity. I also visited a village outside Malmö where a grassroots political movement arose, opposing a Swedish Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalvården) proposal to build a new prison there. The people told me that a prison would hurt the sense of security and community in their village and attract dangerous outsiders. These experiences refocused my research to better understand the developments causing these changing narratives about crime and punishment.

While Sweden's prison population remains one of the smallest in the world, sentencing reforms and policy changes led the Swedish prison population to increase in 2017, for the first time in twelve years. This increase has continued annually, prompting a long-term proposal to expand the prison capacity by 20% (Einerstam, 2018; Kriminalvården, 2020). The implementation of several new crime control initiatives, most significantly the 34 Point Program against gang crime, has increased sentence lengths, grown the police budget and the number of officers, and expanded the powers of police to surveille, search, seize, and arrest. In this paper, I use the term 'Swedish expansionism' to refer to this overall enlargement of the size and capability of Sweden's penal system and the tools used to enforce it. This expansion signals that the traditional logic of prison as a last resort that has historically been the foundation of Swedish crime control strategies (Barker, 2013; Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2011) is being overtaken by something new. This paper seeks to understand these developments by analyzing the narratives present in documents about Swedish penal policy.

1.2. Research Questions

The aim of understanding the social factors shaping Swedish penal policy is pursued through the perspective of critical narrative criminology. The marriage of narrative and critical criminology opens a window into how narratives can influence, give meaning to, or justify the way that penal institutions deliver justice, carry out punishment, and inflict harm. Instead of focusing solely on the policies and statistics, I look at the ways that stories (used interchangeably with narratives

throughout this paper) drive penal policy by shaping assumptions and beliefs about crime and punishment.

This paper focuses on a dataset composed of documents published by the Government Offices of Sweden in a collection titled “A Safer Sweden” (*Ett Tryggare Sverige*¹). This collection includes official government documents, including press releases, articles, op-eds, official reports and legislation, on the topic of crime, sentencing, punishment and prisons. A large portion of these publications focus on aspects of the 34 Point Program against gang crime. This nationwide, interagency anti-gang program was presented in September 2019 with support from all political parties, and is termed the largest ever package against gang crime (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020l). As a result, I have developed a set of research questions, based in the perspectives of critical narrative criminology, that aim to understand how narratives set the stage for harm-causing penal policies and how they shape the assumptions and understandings that justify and legitimize crime control strategies. These questions are:

1. Through what narratives are criminal justice institutions telling a story about themselves and the problems they are trying to solve?
2. How are these narratives related to changing assumptions about crime control?

How do these narratives fit into the dominant crime control ideologies?

To answer these questions, I connect the narratives from the dataset with established theories in narrative and critical criminology. First, I examine the narratives criminal justice institutions use to describe crime problems and their responses to them by looking at ways narratives work to create collective identities, construct good and evil, and create moralized justifications for removing people from society. The narratives found in the data show how crime control institutions construct themselves as the collective protagonist, ‘society,’ with the responsibility of protecting ‘ordinary people’ and fighting against a criminalized and racialized enemy, mainly ‘gangs’ and ‘young people.’ Next, the relationship between narratives and dominant assumptions about crime control will be explored through a demonstration of how narratives are nested within widely recognized master narratives that promote specific types of action. Here, master narratives about ‘just deserts,’ ‘deterrence,’ and ‘situational crime prevention’ are connected to

¹ This title can also be translated to mean “A More Secure Sweden.” The Swedish word *trygghet* can have several different meanings and is translated in different ways. This is discussed in the Background chapter. I have chosen to use the translation “A Safer Sweden” because it can be used more naturally in a sentence.

criminological theories that show how narratives have a “preferred outcome” (Halverson et al., 2011, p. 21) which encourage expansionist policies. As vehicles for comprehending the world, master narratives shape understandings and assumptions about crime control which “make normal” (Snajdr, 2013, p. 230) certain types of punishment, in this case, prison.

1.3. Key Concepts

This paper focuses on the concept I developed, called ‘Swedish expansionism.’ It is used to describe the current state of the Swedish criminal justice system, as the characteristics described in John Pratt’s “Nordic penal exceptionalism thesis” no longer apply (Pratt, 2008a, 2008b). Pratt’s description of moderate penal systems driven by welfare state values of homogeneity and solidarity cannot account for the punitive in narratives, rhetoric and sentencing policies. The concept of ‘Swedish expansionism’ is twofold. The first is the expansion of the size and capability of the Swedish penal system, by increasing the number of police officers and the capacities of jails and prisons, expanding police powers and growing the budgets of all criminal justice institutions. The second part of this concept involves framing these crime control initiatives through typical Swedish values. While the policies trend in an expansionist direction reminiscent of those in the United States and United Kingdom, albeit on a smaller scale and slower pace, the narratives framing and justifying these policies differ drastically. Unlike the small government, free market thinking that drove penal expansion in the Reagan-Thatcher era, ‘Swedish expansionism’ frames interventions as benevolent and efforts to increase security as fundamental to the purpose of the “People’s Home.” Refuting Pratt’s claim that the welfare state functions to institutionalize egalitarian values and promote moderate and humane punishments, ‘Swedish expansionism’ demonstrates how the welfare state legitimizes the expansion of penal power and the increased use of carceral punishments.

A larger discussion of the narratives found in Swedish penal policy will rely on foundational concepts of critical narrative criminology. Narrative criminology is defined as a theoretical paradigm concerned with how stories inspire, sustain, or prevent harmful action (Presser & Sandberg, 2015, p. 11). Critical criminology is a “plurality of left-of-center academic communities which study systems of oppression” (León, 2021) and investigate the political-social context of crime and crime control (Hudson, 2000). The central role empirical data plays in narrative criminology is a perfect methodological complement to critical criminology’s historical

focus on critical theory and macro-level social conditions. This paper uses narrative criminology's concept of political narratives to analyze the constructivist foundation of critical criminology are used to link criminological theory to narrative research through the shared focus on meaning.

This paper's analysis of political narratives is driven by the idea that narrative criminology is "highly compatible with a view of harm as patterned and rooted in institutions, rather than as so many isolated incidents" (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). This perspective focuses on penal institutions as the object of criminological analysis in order to study how punishment is a form of harm-doing that can be understood independently of the harm created by individual crimes. The use of critical narrative criminology in this paper is particularly suited for examining the ways that institutions responsible for criminalization and punishment are "constituted by stories" (Presser & Sandberg, 2019, p. 135) and "sponsor a web of penal harms" (Presser, 2018, p. 104). The narrative from government publications highlight the ways that "institutions circulate stories to account for their practices" (Presser & Sandberg, 2019, p. 136) and how these narratives work to justify the harms their practices create.

The constructivist tradition focuses on the social construction of crime, and separately, the political construction of punishment. This perspective takes "acts" as its starting point and analyzes "what is considered an 'unwanted act,' how many [of these acts] are constructed as criminal, and how those acts are punished" (Christie, 2004, p. 3). The act of taking money out of a woman's purse, for example, is not often considered criminal when a child takes money from their mother's purse. But if another child of the same age takes the same amount of money from that same woman's purse on a train, they are labeled as a pickpocket and the act is seen as criminal. In other words, acts *are* not criminal, they *become* criminal, people *are* not criminals, they *become* criminalized (Christie, 2004, p. 6). This perspective also rejects the assumption that punishment is an inevitable response to crime. Research on the political construction of punishment shows that the expansion of penal practices have no correlation with trends in reported crime rates (von Hofer, 2003). Incorporating narrative analysis into this perspective allows for a focus on meaning-making, which is emphasized in both narrative and critical criminology. The two fields take a deconstructionist approach, with narrative criminology focusing on the characters represented and how stories and their plots are sequenced. Critical criminology looks at why acts are constructed as criminal and how punishment is exercised based on those constructions.

A concrete conceptual framework that ties the work on narratives together with large scale criminological theories is Presser's two part "general narrative logic of harm" (Presser, 2013). The first part is the reduction of harm targets, mainly by characterizing them as enemies or people with very few interests (i.e. the gang member interested in nothing besides drugs and violence). The second part of this logic is what Presser describes as an internally contradictory understanding of one's license to act harmfully and one's inability to act otherwise (Presser, 2018). For penal institutions, this duality manifests in an institutional expression of the power to punish and a claim that punishment is an inevitable response to the actions of others. For example, "we demand violence against the enemy, highlighting purpose and resolve, even as the action is purportedly preordained, a fated next step in people's progress" (Presser, 2018, p. 50). This logic takes the form of stories, with crime control institutions as protagonists negotiating some form of meaningful conflict to move towards a better future (Presser, 2013, 2018).

Presser's logic of harm is central to this paper's analysis because it brings together the stories that crime control institutions tell about the targets of penal harm and the stories they tell to justify how and why they harm. To understand how harm targets are reduced, this paper uses narrative theory to explore the construction of collective identity and the use of binary codes to establish heroes and villains. The contradictory stories that the harm doers tell about themselves corroborate theoretical discussions of punishment as an unavoidable reaction to crime (Christie, 2000), of penal expansion as destiny (Wacquant, 2001a) and of the cultural foundations which legitimize the harm done by penal institutions (Garland, 2002; Kramer, 2020; Smith, 2005).

Chapter 2. Background

The Nordic countries are the site of much criminological intrigue. In comparative criminology, scholars look to the Nordic countries to explain how certain societies could have so *few* prisoners (Christie, 2000). This question spawned a rich genre of literature that focuses on crime, punishment, and criminal justice policy in the Nordic region. Since my data only covers the period from 2013 to 2021, I will rely on previous literature about the historical development of Swedish penal policy as essential background information that places this thesis in conversation with the other works in Nordic criminology.

2.1. History of Swedish Penal Policy

The foundation of Sweden's penal system, known for its insistence on humane punishment and rehabilitation, is the welfare state. In 1928, Swedish Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson developed the welfare state through the concept of "the people's home" (*folkhemmet*), which emphasizes a universalist, democratic, anti-elitist spirit that seeks to provide security and stability for all members of society (Barker, 2013; Pratt, 2020). The multi-facet concept of *trygghet* is the foundation of the welfare state. Pratt defines *trygghet* to mean "safety" and "stability" while Barker uses the word to refer to "social security." Hermanson and Sahlin translate *trygghet* as safety and its opposite, *otrygghet* to mean insecurity (Hermansson, 2019b, p. 13; Sahlin, 2007). In the early development of the welfare state, *trygghet* was understood in relation to the dangers associated with harsh Nordic winters, poverty, starvation, mass emigration and hostile German and Russian neighbors (Pratt, 2020). Vanessa Barker describes the importance of *trygghet* to the welfare state below:

In Sweden, this internal logic is driven by the need to provide *trygghet*, security to members. *Trygghet* is a thick and resonant term in Swedish that conveys a sense of personal security, economic wellbeing, and a sense of belonging or attachment to society. I call this configuration *social security* to signal the centrality of economic and social dimensions. John Pratt and Anna Eriksson (2013: p. 75) similarly identify *trygghet* as central organizing principle of the Nordic welfare state ... with an emphasis on

economic security. I emphasize the social dimension and membership (Barker, 2019, p. 9)

Trygghet also carries great symbolic importance for the development of crime policy. That the dataset invokes this word in its title, “*Ett Tryggare Sverige*” is an early indication that understanding safety and security and the complex social processes that underpin them will play a large role in this paper’s analysis.

The welfare sanction influenced crime policy by making prison an institution for rehabilitation. Law-breakers were seen as “orphans of the Swedish people’s home (*styv barn i det svenska folkhemmet*)” (Pratt, 2008a, p. 130) who needed to be reintegrated into society during their time in prison so they could be restored to full membership in the *folkhemmet*. Prisons focused on normalization rather than punishment. Prison conditions were designed to as best as possible resemble free society with loss of liberty as the only deprivation (Sellin, 1947).

Attitudes towards prison in Sweden shifted following the sharp increase in prisoners after the Second World War (see Figure 1 in Appendix). From 1965 to 1975, efforts towards decriminalization and depenalization, and the emergence of grassroots prisoner’s rights movements shaped the penal system. Scholars and politicians both believed that the use of imprisonment would soon become obsolete with the Minister of Justice even predicting Sweden would reduce its prison population to just 500 (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007, 2012, p. 95; von Hofer & Tham, 2013). The 1977 report, “A New Penal System” overhauled the penal system, aiming to reduce the level of sanctions, replace short sentences with community alternatives and develop a sentencing system that appreciated the principles of justice and humanity (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007, p. 247). However, since then reforms based on the neoclassical principles of proportionality and predictability have increased the use of penal sanctions, the length of sentences and size of the prison population (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007).

Swedish incarceration rates have moved “up and down in a relatively narrow band” but generally trend upward since the 1980’s (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007, p. 245; von Hofer, 2003). Changes in incarceration rates were driven by increased political focus on three groups of offenses: drugs, violence, and sex crimes (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007; von Hofer & Tham, 2013). Penalties for drug, sex, and violent crimes increased several times in the 1980s and 90s. The 1990 general election marked the first time crime policy became in major issue in national elections and led to more sentencing increases at the turn of the century (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007).

Mixed trends characterize Swedish penal policy since 2000. The incarceration rate peaked at 79 prisoners per 100,000 people (total prison population of 7,196 people) in 2006 (World Prison Brief, 2016). For the next decade, incarceration rates dropped consistently, reaching as low as 58 per 100,000 in 2016. Then Director-General of Kriminalvården said of this trend, “reducing prison numbers to a minimum is the right thing to do – particularly in a long term effort to enhance safety and security” (Öberg, 2014). However, a 2010 sentencing reform increased sentences once again (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 51).

One cannot ignore the growth of an immigrant underclass following large numbers of immigrants and refugees arriving from the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria as a factor in the changing rhetoric around incarceration. The 2010 outbreak of war in Syria led to a dramatic increase in immigration. From 2013 to 2015, Sweden received over 281,000 asylum seekers which at several points during this period the highest per capita rate in the European Union (Barker, 2019, p. 1; Pratt, 2020). On November 14, 2015 Sweden closed its border with Denmark, shocking reversal of its open border policy and to the EU’s founding principle of free movement in the Schengen Area (Barker, 2019, p. 1). Since 2015, Sweden has expelled, rejected, and deported between two and three thousand migrants and asylum seekers each year. The growth of segregated “Nordic style ghetto areas of main cities” (Pratt, 2020) are now labeled as hot spots for gangs and violence, leading to an increase in targeted surveillance from new crime control initiatives, such as the 34 Point Program (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020i).

2.2. Literature Review

While the Swedish prison population is currently high for Nordic standards, it remains notably lower than other parts of the world. As a result, the debate around of Nordic exceptionalism continues. John Pratt popularized this theory in his discussion of how unique characteristics of Nordic cultures, namely egalitarianism, homogeneity, social solidarity, and the welfare state work to institutionalize “cultures of equality” and moderate penal sanctions (Pratt, 2008a). While Pratt has twice defended the Nordic exceptionalism thesis (Pratt, 2020; Pratt et al., 2011), the list of his critics is long, which has created space for a robust collection of work on Nordic penalty.

Some scholars continue to believe that Nordic exceptionalism is justified. Lappi-Seppälä (2012) charts the history of Nordic penalty through how sanctions, alternatives to incarcerations, rhetoric and other factors have historically shaped Nordic penal systems, finding that penal

moderation remains even as Nordic cultures become comparatively more punitive (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012). However, Mathiesen (2011) criticizes Pratt for painting Nordic penalty as “unequivocally positive” (Mathiesen, 2011, p. 26) and discusses the symbolic nature of Swedish penal policy. Tham (2011, 2016) writes about the emergence of the victim in Swedish crime policy discourse and describes how interventionism, anti-drug policies and politicization have brought out law and order themes in Swedish crime policies (Tham, 2016; Tham et al., 2011). Estrada (2012) and Shammass (2016) discuss the way that neoliberalism has led to increasingly punitive policies in Sweden and Norway respectively (Estrada et al., 2012; Shammass, 2016). Barry (2012) writes similarly about how more punitive policies in the Nordic countries are the result of the increasing inequality of late modernity (Barry & Leonardsen, 2012). Research on *otrygghet*, the linguistic opposite of security, has characterized this term as “fear of crime” and analyzed its use in political discourse (Hermansson, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Sahlin-Lilja, 2018).

Instead of seeing the welfare state as institutionalizing cultures of equality, Barker (2013) argues that the Nordic welfare state is built on an ethnocultural conception of citizenship that enables intrusive deprivations of liberty and repressive policies in the penal field (Barker, 2013). Her theory of the “Janus-faced prison regime” highlights the duality of the welfare state in its use of inclusionary forms of social control (fines, rehabilitation, preventative welfare measures) towards citizens and exclusionary social controls (prison as confinement, migration detention, deportation) for non-citizens and racialized others. Barker’s theory of welfare nationalism also describes how the criminalization of racialized others can be seen as a way of preserving the welfare state and the ethno-cultural People’s Home and inspired others who’ve written about the “racial welfare state” (see Schclarek Mulinari & Keskinen, 2020). Barker’s recent work complements the emerging field of critical border studies focusing on the use of punishment to assert national sovereignty in a globalized world (see Aas, 2013; Barker, 2017, 2019; Bosworth, 2013; Franko et al., 2019; Ugelvik, 2013).

Chapter 3. Theoretical Foundations

This section begins with an overview of the substance and purpose of narratives, followed by a discussion of the theories that inspired this project. Discussions of these theories leads into a description of the framework that shapes my analysis and the theories that fit within it. It will conclude with an overview of the relevant criminological and sociological theories that will be used to analyze and understand the changes in punishment practices and crime control techniques.

3.1. What Is a Narrative?

Presser provides the general definition of a narrative as “a temporally ordered, morally suggestive statement about events and/or actions in the life of one or more protagonists” (Presser, 2016, p. 138). The time ordered telling (Ricoeur, 1984) and the making of a “morally transcendent point” (Presser & Sandberg, 2015, p. 2) are the foundations of any narrative. Narratives also become “a way of reasoning – temporally, causally, and meaningfully” (Presser, 2018, p. 5) by ascribing meaning to events and assigning moral positions to their plots and characters (Presser, 2018, p. 106). Smith describes narratives and their function here:

narratives allocate causal responsibility for action, define actors and give them motivation, indicate the trajectory of past episodes and predict consequences of future choices, suggest courses of action, confer and withdraw legitimacy, and provide social approval by aligning events with normative cultural codes. Social action can be seen as deeply embedded in a narrative framework. People make sense of the world with stories and act accordingly (Smith, 2005, p. 18).

This perspective on narratives allows for an analysis that identifies plots, characters, constructions of identity, and moral assignments in the publications from Swedish crime control institutions.

The essential qualities that give narratives their power are described by both Frank and Presser as: that narratives set out an integrated common sense, that narratives are about dynamic agency, and that narratives explain and therefore moralize (Frank, 2012; Presser, 2018). I will add a fourth quality in this paper: that narratives drive action. These capacities complement Presser’s

description of the regular features of a narratives, namely temporality, causality, action, conflict, transformation, meaning, situatedness, and things unsaid (Presser, 2018, p. 51).

The first quality, integrated common sense, focuses on the time ordered aspect of the narratives and involves the features of temporality, causality, and action (Presser, 2018). Ricoeur suggests that narratives shape the way people experience events in the world (Ricoeur, 1984). He claims that people understand time passing through narrative terms that place us in a middle, “which unite[s] beginning and end and endow[s] the interval between them with meaning” (Kermode, 1967, p. 190; Ricoeur, 1984). Narratives are also “thick with causal claims” (Wilson, 2003, p. 403) which look to explain events, actions, and the ways one thing follows another (Presser, 2018). Together, these create a common sense and logical reasoning that make the narrative very powerful.

The second quality of narratives, dynamic action, explores how narratives are used to describe shifting circumstances. This capacity involves conflict, or the “disruption of an internal state of equilibrium by an unplanned and often untoward event or chain of events” (Herman, 2004, p. 84). The most powerful narratives contain extreme reversals set against “a backdrop of highly structured patterns of belief and expectation” (Herman, 2004, p. 90; Nabi & Green, 2015). This dynamic action is seen in tales of ‘taking power back’ which build towards the climax of power being restored (Presser, 2018). Narratives that suggest society must be “stronger than the gangs,” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020p, 2021c) are a perfect example of this.

The third quality is explaining and moralizing. Narratives explain events that occur, give purpose and motivations to actors, and ascribe meaning to the way that actions affect other people. Hayden White describes the moralizing qualities of narratives by writing, “every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats” (White, 1980, p. 18). Often, this moralization is done implicitly through allusions and references to other powerful and well known stories (Polletta, 2008; Polletta & Callahan, 2017). These narratives “demonstrate moral claims indirectly by showing not stating, that things turn out well when one acts in a certain way, and not otherwise” (Harold, 2005, p. 176). The moralization of different types of action is deeply embedded in all writing on crime policy.

My addition to these three qualities is, that narratives drive action. This quality aligns with narrative criminology’s belief that stories *inspire* harmful action (Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Tutenges, 2019). The constitutive view of narratives is “interested in what stories do – specifically,

how they affect crime and other harm” (Presser, 2016, p. 139) and focuses on the way that narratives create the meaning that becomes the “essence of [harmful] action and of crime control” (Presser, 2016, p. 144). This perspective interprets actions taken in Swedish penal field as composed of narratives that tell stories about crime, criminal justice institutions, citizens, and criminals. This clears the way for justifying harm by shaping collective understandings of appropriate punishments and crime control strategies.

3.2. Theoretical Inspirations

Critical criminology stems from a critique of administrative and mainstream criminology’s complicity in the criminal legal system’s exercise of power and perpetuation of social inequality as well as a “dissatisfaction with the dominant law and order interests that determined the criminological agenda” (Mooney, 2012, p. 15). As a result, critical criminologists developed an explicitly activist position to avoid reifying the “oppressive relationships of class, age, gender, and ethnicity” (Young, 2002, p. 252). Presser suggests that narrative criminologists adopt a similar positionality by emphasizing the responsibility to “not only analyze stories, but also try to reconstruct them critically—in a way that resists domination and promotes social justice” (Presser & Sandberg, 2019, p. 139). This positionality remains an important tool that allows critical criminologists to make critiques of changing penal fields.

One of the main inspirations for this paper is the way Presser interprets Gottfredson and Hirschi’s “General Theory of Crime” as a narrative in her book, *Inside Story: How Narrative Drive Mass Harm*. To deconstruct the claims in the “General Theory of Crime” Presser uses the concept of rhetorical restraint, focusing on the way that technical stories, such as social theories, tend not to call themselves stories or be understood as such, because narrators avoid dramatic statements and use their social positioning to craft narratives as matters of fact (Presser, 2018, p. 109). Despite this muted rhetoric theory-stories contain the narrative capacities mentioned earlier and are able to communicate strong messages about big concerns with small rhetoric moves (Presser, 2018, p. 110). She explains this further, writing:

Often, though not always, theory-stories erase suffering. They generally avoid emotional terms. In criminological theories, the rhetoric is mild, but the drama is high inasmuch as people are bad or becoming so, to our peril.

Emotional terms are not used, although the plotline should, logically, stimulate (Presser, 2018, p. 110).

The concept of rhetorical restraint is central to my analysis because the Government Offices of Sweden do not frame the content of press releases, bills, reports and other documents as stories. The documents are filled with statements, theories, and retellings of events meant to be understood as a matter of fact or objective analysis. A critical perspective that recognizes this muted rhetoric as narrative allows this analysis to go past the text itself and also understand what is “not said” (Presser & Sandberg, 2019, p. 139).

Theories on political narratives are critical to analyzing the “A Safer Sweden” collection as Keeton describes the policymaking process as a social act steeped in narrative (Keeton, 2015). Boswell et al. stress “the potential for narratives to provide a coherent and compelling account of complex phenomena, in a way that can engender support and motivate action” (Boswell et al., 2011). This emphasis on action drives their three-pronged definition of policy narratives which shapes the levels upon which narratives will be analyzed in this paper. The three components of Boswell et al.’s definition of policy narratives are:

a set of claims about the policy problem that a policy intervention should address. This will typically involve claims about the nature and scale of the problem, including a delineation of the ‘target population’ at which interventions are directed.

a set of claims about what causes the problem and to what extent the problem could be controlled... Often, such causal stories imply attributing blame to specific factors or actors, for instance explaining the alleged failure of the integration of specific groups with reference to persisting cultural differences.

a set of claims about how policy interventions have affected, or are likely to affect, these policy problems. Policy narratives not only construct a specific reality, but also call for action upon this reality (Fischer and Forester 1993). Such calls will be based on more or less grounded

assumptions about how interventions will influence the dynamics of groups that are the targets of policy (Boswell et al., 2011, p. 5).

First, I identify actors in the narratives and how they become “target populations” or are included in collective identities. Next, I use the theories on narrative sequencing and plots to explore the “causal stories” about crime and crime control. Finally, I take a macro view at how the narratives fit into larger master narratives that “call for action...based on... assumptions” about crime and punishment (Boswell et al., 2011, p. 5).

3.2.1. Actors

The first level of this paper’s analysis are the actors and characters within the story. These characters are often recognizable, known friends and enemies that can be easily understood as protagonists and antagonists. Character polarization opens the door for a larger conversation about identity and inclusion. Cultural sociologist Phillip Smith uses the concept of binary codes, which he defines as moral boundaries created to allow for collective representations of self and the world, as the foundational blocks upon which narratives are built (Smith, 2005, p. 15). These are used to classify the world, defining the sacred and the profane, as well as what things are to be sought out or avoided (Smith, 2005). Presser writes about how culturally structured symbolic codes are used in narratives to assign friend or enemy labels and make judgements about who should and should not be included in society (Presser, 2018, p. 123). The construction of moral characters “affirm[s] and fortif[ies] a dichotomy between the civilized citizenry and antisocial other” and works to reify the criminal and noncriminal persons (Presser, 2018, p. 125).

On either side of the crime narrative is an identity statement. On one hand, the story of crime “is an identity vehicle for the good people among us” (Presser, 2018, p. 132) while on the other, it casts away the criminal as antisocial and beyond the scope of our concern. According to Presser, this modern story of criminals and their binary opposite, the civilized citizenry, “produce[s] widespread tolerance of penal harm” (Presser, 2018, p. 127). Since, the civilized citizenry has no reason to concern themselves with the criminal other outside the threat they pose, managing the threat through punitive segregation allows the so-called good people to “feel satisfied with the harm being done” (Presser, 2018, p. 129). The justification of the harm imposed by prison is possible because the otherization of the criminal functions to reduce the harm target.

Other narrative analysts have explored stories from a symbolic perspective. Dawson and Weinberg explore how narratives are used as “value-laden signposts” which can be used to “identify cultural and political enemies” (Dawson & Weinberg, 2020, p. 1). Similarly, nostalgia narratives can be used for identity building process “when [people] feel their identities, status, and/or attachments to a place are threatened” and these narratives “provide a means for constructing or framing identities that are positive” (Maly et al., 2013, p. 759). John Todd-Kvam’s work on penal populism in Norway demonstrates that government policies make calls to action based on how they construct identities of self and the criminal other. These identity constructing narratives not only influence how society interprets the political reality of crime, they are also “linked to tangible policy proposals that define the scope of punishment and how it is implemented” (Todd-Kvam, 2019). The use of narratives to construct enemies, mainly gangs, to be fought against and nostalgic collective identities to be protected is evident in Swedish crime policy.

3.2.2. *Plot*

Plots give narratives the time-ordered element that drives a story from beginning to end and from conflict to resolution. Presser writes that “narrative criminologists are analysts, who closely attend to plots and the characters that carry them along” (Presser, 2018, p. 44). Focusing on plots allows narratives to be broken down into their parts, which are events, actions, purposes, conflicts, and consequences (to name a few), to show how “one thing happens in consequence of another” (Frank, 2012, p. 25). This section will describe the many ways that plots develop, and narratives are sequenced.

By linking stories to goals and values, narratives become a sense-making form which indicates what actions should follow from the preceding story. Ricoeur explains that narratives link action with cognitive value systems, thus aligning actions with broad and abstract questions and purposes (Ricoeur, 1984). He writes, “The plot or narrative ... groups together and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematising the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole” (Ricoeur, 1984, p. x). This sequencing primes readers to connect stories about an increase in crime, to other stories that suggest harsher penalties as the natural response.

Many of these narratives involve some kind of conflict, or “a breach between ideal and real” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). In crime narratives this often takes the form of undesired crimes (or people) breaching the ideal world of a safe and secure society. These patterns, sequences and arcs, allow audiences to fill in blanks even when stories are incomplete, “every story, however seemingly ‘full,’ is constructed based on a set of events which *might have been included but were left out*” (White, 1980, p. 14; emphasis in original). Narrators use cultural cues to decide what parts of the narrative are either unnecessary or too taboo to mention (Prince, 1992). Because narratives are situated in fields of other narratives (Presser, 2018, p. 56) and “plots depend on other plots” (Polletta, 2006, p. 169), stories of crime prime audiences for stories of crime control to serve as a resolution or climactic action. At the same time, narratives about crime control solutions may not mention the crime problems that preceded them, but it is these untold stories of crime that give meaning to narratives of crime control solutions and heroic protagonists to which they refer.

Polletta’s work on narratives describes stories as “allusive” and explains that their conclusions are rarely explicit (Polletta, 2008). This is often done by drawing on other well-known stories. In many cases, simple references alone, usually to the story’s protagonists, can invoke powerful narratives because the reader already anticipates a specific outcome (Polletta & Callahan, 2017). Even though the purpose of the narrative is hidden, this allusion to the stories allows readers to know what should come next.

3.2.3. *Master Narratives*

Master narratives explore narratives' relationship to policy action. To do this, I draw on theories of the moralizing power of narratives and their ability to evoke and connect to other widely known stories. These theories highlight how narratives call for action based on a specific set of assumptions. The theory of master narratives, used by Halverson et al. to mean a “transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a certain culture” (Halverson et al., 2011, p. 14) is the primary concept applied. Master narratives are defined as “dominant stories” (Sandberg & Fondevila, 2020, p. 5) that are “directed from and ultimately constructed and reproduced as social reality by dominant institutions, agents and systems” (Snajdr, 2013, p. 234). Hochschild’s theory of deep stories, defined as stories that “feel-as-if” they are true and create normative feelings of what “everyone should” believe (Hochschild, 2016), is another way that the narratives are connected to larger criminological theories. The master narratives and deep stories create the assumptions and

ways of thinking necessary for criminal justice institutions to create moral justifications for punishing and imprisoning people. This links the narratives to the grand criminological theories discussed in the next section.

3.3. Constructivism

The critical narrative approach flips the criminological lens and studies the harm done by criminal justice institutions, rather than the harm done by individual law breakers. This perspective is based on the theoretical precedent set by George Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer that dissociates punishment from crime. They explain below why punishment must be viewed as an independent phenomenon rather than simply as a response to crime:

The bond, transparent or not, that is supposed to exist between crime and punishment prevents any insight into the independent significance of the history of penal systems. It must be broken. Punishment is neither a simple consequence of crime, nor the reverse side of crime, nor a mere means which is determined by an end to be achieved. Punishment must be understood as a social phenomenon freed from both its juristic concept and its social ends (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 1939, p. 5).

Rusche and Kirchheimer explain this break by dissecting the relationship between punishment practices and crime rates. A connection between crime and punishment would mean that high crime rates occur as the result of lenient punishments and implementing harsher punishments would lower crime rates. In their examination of statistics across multiple countries they found many trends, high crime rates and harsh punishments, stable crime rates and increasingly harsh punishment, stable penal policies and fluctuating crime rates, etc., but none that “support that view that crime rates are influenced by punitive practices” (Kramer, 2020, p. 137; Rusche & Kirchheimer, 1939).

By theoretically separating punishment from crime, this paper follows the tradition of constructivist scholars who reject that punishment is the inevitable reaction to crime. While Rusche and Kirchheimer’s work is almost a century old, their conclusions have been confirmed by scholars who have found similar disjunctures between crime rates and penal policies in the modern day (Kramer, 2020; Wacquant, 2010; Western, 2007). Christie’s work on the social construction of

crime and punishment explains how the industry of crime control has at its disposal, both an unlimited supply of raw materials, as acts that can be constructed as criminal are “in endless supply,” and an endless demand of people willing to pay for what they see as “security” (Christie, 2000, p. 1). He writes about the importance of “thought patterns and general theories” on the way people understand crime control and the power those thought patterns have to “clear the way for action” (Christie, 2000, p. 26). Christie also criticizes the belief based on natural law and reactive thinking that “if the criminal starts it and all the authorities can do is react, then, naturally, the volume of prisoners is caused by crime and reflects the crime situation. It is destiny, not choice” (Christie, 2000, p. 26). Like Rusche and Kirchheimer before him and many more after him, Christie disproves this link through a study of how what is considered to be a crime and the punishment tools used to control crime varies greatly across countries.

Hans von Hofer’s work on the political construction of punishment also demonstrates how prison populations and crime control strategies can vary significantly even in countries with similar crime trends and economic and social developments. His case study of the prison populations in Sweden, Finland and Holland explores the reasons why, between 1950 and 2000, Sweden’s prison population remained relatively stable, Finland’s decreased consistently and Holland’s followed a U shaped trend (von Hofer, 2003). His major findings were that the daily prison populations did not mirror the trends of registered criminality in any of those three countries, instead, “prisoner rates are to a great degree a function of criminal justice and social policies that either encourage or discourage the use of incarceration” (von Hofer, 2003, pp. 22–23).

In Sweden, changes in the prison population are driven by shifting views on imprisonment paired with a lack of political opposition to challenge the direction of movements in prison policy (von Hofer & Tham, 2013). In 2013, von Hofer and Tham wrote, “the vast majority of politicians and the public view the idea that there has been an increase in crime as an indisputable fact” (von Hofer & Tham, 2013). Even though von Hofer and Tham did not find evidence that the decision to expand Sweden’s prisons corresponded with any actual rise in crime, the ongoing use of ‘rise in crime’ narratives has important consequences for policy and demonstrates how powerful this narrative is. Through connecting these views on increased crime with Christie’s work on thought patterns, this paper explores ways that narratives of increased crime prime audiences for narratives that advocate for expansionist and tough on crime punishments to follow.

3.4. Cultures Of Control

David Garland's book, *Culture of Control* provides a detailed description of the political and social factors that define penal regimes. Garland defines penal-welfarism as a hybrid combination of the legal liberalist practices of due process with the correctionalist commitments to rehabilitation, welfare, and criminological expertise (Garland, 2002, p. 27). The rehabilitative ideal is correctionalism's "hegemonic, organizing principle, the intellectual framework and value system that bound together the whole structure" (Garland, 2002, p. 35). Correctionalist ideology and the institutions that subscribed to it understands crime as a social problem and a symptom of inequality. Through this perspective, which often views crime as the result of poverty and deprivation, the solution became understood as expanding prosperity and providing social welfare. In short, the correctionalist ideology "assumed the efficacy of criminal justice and the possibility of an individualized mode of crime reduction" (Garland, 2002, p. 44) through aiming to relieve individual suffering and improve social functioning. This system made use of individualized treatment, indeterminate sentences, and specialized institutions such as treatment programs, juvenile courts, parole, and probation, to put correctionalist ideas into practice.

An important component of penal welfarism is the social basis required for this type of system to function. The penal welfare system implicitly leans towards the 'no-fault approach' to crime, which according to Mary Douglas, depends on a network of insurance that can absorb losses as a group and maintain norms of collective responsibility (Douglas, 1994; Garland, 2002, p. 47). Garland claims that the maintenance of such norms is only possible against a material background of mutual trust and economic security. Additionally, several societal characteristics allow penal welfare institutions to be formed in specific historical moments. These are: a social democratic style of governance that has at least a social narrative of inclusion, a high degree of trust and perceived legitimacy in government institution's ability to effectively implement correctionalist practices, the active support of social and political elites, a lack of public criticism or demand for any specific alternatives from the general public, full employment or at least a high availability of work, and high informal social controls to keep crime rates low.

After the rejection of penal welfarism, a new era of crime control emerged, penal modernism, defined by a reliance on incarceration strategies focused on excluding and segregating offenders for the purpose of public safety. This new culture of crime control comes alongside changing functions of rehabilitation and probation programs, the rise of just deserts sentencing

frameworks, and a new relationship between offenders and society based on risk and fear. Garland describes this cultural change as:

A reworked pattern of cognitive assumptions, normative commitments, and emotional sensibilities... now inscribed in the field, motivating the actions of crime control agencies, giving new purpose and meaning to their practices, and altering the practical effects and symbolic significance of their conduct (Garland, 2002, p. 175).

Garland is not the only one to write about cultures of modern crime control, he is joined by scholars such as Loïc Wacquant, Ronald Kramer, and Vanessa Barker.

While Wacquant does not directly discuss narratives, his work on neoliberalism is premised on sociopolitical changes that can be identified through narratives. Since “neoliberalism” is a term that is overused and rarely defined, the definition of neoliberalism that will be used in this paper is explained by Wacquant in three parts; the political reengineering of the state, the rightward shift in the state priorities and actions, and the expansion of the state’s penal apparatus (Wacquant, 2012, p. 66). Wacquant’s work on the penalization of poverty and the deployment of penal institutions to solve problems created by social insecurity in the United States led to an exploration of the way the invisible hand of the labor market and the iron fist of the punitive state operate in tandem around the world (Wacquant, 2001b). These ideas all fall under the topic of “neoliberalism and statecrafting on a global scale” (Wacquant, 2012).

Kramer’s work on culture and crime finds that cultural factors play an important role in how and why states punish. He also claims that cultural norms are inherently punitive as cultures are often built on dichotomies that position desirable attributes in opposition to the other (Kramer, 2020, p. 154). This theory has important similarities to Barker and Pratt’s work on the relationship between crime control and Nordic cultures. Barker’s theory on “welfare nationalism” describes how punishment tools such as deportation, criminalization, and penalization are used to respond to social threats to order and to protect national identity, national sovereignty, and in the Nordic case, the nationalized welfare state (Barker, 2019, p. 7). Pratt’s work on Nordic exceptionalism looks at ways that cultural norms of egalitarianism, solidarity, and social security impact forms of punishment. Both of these theories are applied to the “A Safer Sweden” dataset and used to understand the impact of different cultures of crime control.

Chapter 4. Methods

As the last chapter introduced the theories foundational to this paper, this chapter describes the selection and application of its methodological tools. The chapter begins with a description of the data collected and how it was coded. Then it will discuss ethics, reflexivity and my positionality within the research field. The final section discusses the validity and limitations of my research.

4.1. Data

The data used for this research is a collection of publications from the Government Offices of Sweden under the label “A Safer Sweden” (*Ett Tryggare Sverige*). This collection is publicly available² on the Government Offices of Sweden website (regeringen.se) where updates about government actions are posted regularly. The webpage lists four focus areas for “A Safer Sweden.” These include 1) efforts against criminal networks, 2) efforts against drugs, 3) crime prevention measures and early intervention, and 4) the billion-krona investment in the police. This dataset does not include all publications from the Ministry of Justice or all changes to the Swedish penal code. Instead, this specifically curated subsection of government publications allows this paper to look at how the officially sanctioned narratives are used to suggest how safety and security should be understood and achieved.

“A Safer Sweden” includes several different types of government publications that have been used to both debate and craft crime policy. This sample includes 173 press releases, 49 referrals³ (to either legal councils or other related institutions), 25 bills,⁴ 24 committee directives,⁵ 20 memorandums,⁶ 19 assignments⁷, 18 articles, 15 public investigations,⁸ 13 fact sheets, 10

² The full collection can be found at <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/ett-tryggare-sverige/>

³ Referrals (*Remiss*) are documents about draft laws being submitted to either the law council (*Lagrådsremiss*) or a list of different government or private institutions that are either effected by or have expertise in the topic of the draft law.

⁴ Bills (*proposition*) are proposed legislation that have gone through the inquiry and referral process and are sent to the Parliament (*Riksdag*) for approval.

⁵ Committee Directives (*kommittédirektiv*) are the starting point for a government committee appointing a state inquiry to investigate a certain issue.

⁶ Ministry series and memoranda (*Departementsserien och promemorior*) are written about investigations within the Government Offices that are published in memoranda format or published in the Ministry Series (Ds).

⁷ Government Assignments (*Regeringsuppdrag*) a certain Government institution being instructed to analyze, evaluate, investigate, or do other research into a specific policy area.

⁸ State Public Investigations (*Statens offentliga utredningar*) are conducted by an appointed special investigator who investigates a certain issue and compiles the results in a report published in The Swedish Public Investigations, SOU.

debate articles, and 4 speeches. In total, the sample was 905 pages and approximately 452,000 words. The publication dates for the documents in this collection range from 2013 to March 2021. The methodology also included a limited snowball sampling off of the dataset. Certain reports, initiatives, and events were mentioned that required additional research. Also, certain publications included attachments and hyperlinks which were selectively chosen for further analysis.

The collection on the Government Offices website provided a centralized way to download and translate a large amount of data on Swedish crime policy. Given a lack of accessibility, data prior to 2013 is not included. Searching for publications prior to 2013 or expanding the dataset to include all Ministry of Justice publications would not have been feasible for the time constraints and scope of this project. However, 2013 is a fitting starting point for this data as the two most robust analyses of Swedish crime policy used in this paper (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012; von Hofer & Tham, 2013) were published in 2012 and 2013 respectively and included comprehensive lists of changes to the penal code (see Figures 2 and 3 in Appendix).

Government documents were the best type of data to use for this paper because they provide historical continuity. Bills, press releases and other publications are not altered once published. Thus, they represent a snapshot of a moment in time that can “open a window into ... values, beliefs, preoccupations, and habits of mind that may be shared (or contested) among a given group” (Cashman, 2012, p. 182). Additionally, the bills included in the data could be used for direct comparison with Lappi-Seppälä, von Hofer, and Tham’s findings on policies that expanded or contracted Sweden’s penal power (see Figures 2 and 3).

I originally considered using data collected from other outlets. However, Kriminalvården would have provided a significantly smaller dataset and using newspapers would have required navigating different media outlets and filtering through a sea of articles to find the ones specifically related to my topic. Another important benefit to using this dataset was the analytical possibilities of being able to use a dataset specifically crafted by the institutions responsible for punishment. Qualitative researchers always run the risk of choosing an unbalanced or unrepresentative sample that could skew their dataset. However, as the collection of publications is chosen by Government institutions, their selective inclusion and omission of specific documents becomes another point of analysis. The fact that the Government chooses to discuss fighting gang crime as a measure to increase security instead, for example, domestic violence or drunken driving bears tremendous

significance. This made the dataset perfect for understanding how criminal justice institutions represent security, and the characters which threaten and protect it.

4.2 Coding

In this analysis I used a simple three step coding model. Given the large quantity of data, the process of reading and coding all 397 publications was conducted as efficiently as possible. Loosely following Glenn Bowen's model for document analysis that includes "skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32) I applied a similar process of skimming, descriptive coding, and categorizing. Everything published on the *regeringen.se* website is written in Swedish. There is an English language version of this website, *government.se*, but the "A Safer Sweden" collection on this site contains only 27 publications compared to the 397 published in Swedish. To translate the publications, I used Google Chrome's translate function that translated the Swedish text on each page. I printed the English version of the page to a PDF file so that I could read the publication in English, while still keeping the links to the Swedish versions of the texts. I referred back to original documents with the help of my Swedish colleagues both to work through poor translations and confirm overall accuracy.

Once the data was translated and downloaded, I began the first step in my coding process by skimming all the documents looking to identify "relevant passages" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). By marking up and highlighting quotes and passages that stood out as interesting or significant, I was looking to make the next step in the coding process more focused and deliberate. The next step was to conduct a descriptive coding for all the documents in the collection, looking for the who, what, where, when, how, and why of each document. This type of coding produced linkages between groups of related documents which proved important for the third phase of analysis.

In the final step of the coding process, I categorized the codes into a cohesive theoretical framework. Initially, I looked at which codes were most prevalent by using a spreadsheet to list all the codes in numerical order. Next, I tried to fit groups of codes into smaller categories such as, types of crimes, causes of crime, crime control programs, goals of crime control, and characters. Eventually, these became three levels of analysis, based on the three components of political narratives set out by Boswell et al.: actors, plots, and master narratives. When these components are applied, the level of actors fits well with Boswell's work on "target populations," plots with

“causal stories” and master narratives with actions and assumptions (Boswell et al., 2011, pp. 4–5). This framework provides a clear structure for answering the research questions.

Theories are also integrated at each individual level of analysis. At the level of actors, the work of Smith, Presser, and Polletta will be applied to understand how identities are being constructed by and through narratives. The concepts of binary codes and collective identity will analyze how targets of harm are either reduced and treated with indifference or constructed as one of us and treated with sympathy.

On the level of plots, narrative sequencing is used as a methodological tool to understand how narratives guide and motivate policy action. The focus on the time-ordered aspect of narratives opens a window into the cognitive impact of narratives and how they suggest causality. This is a way to methodologically bridge Ricoeur’s work on narrative sequencing with Christie’s criminological work on thought patterns.

Another important methodological component of plots is how they involve “things unsaid” (Presser, 2018). Polletta’s work on the “allusive” nature of narrative is used in this paper as a methodological tool that allows for reading in between the lines and considering what is omitted from narratives (Polletta, 2008). Recognizing allusions requires understanding that narratives are told within specific cultural contexts. Due to my lived experience in Sweden for two years and my attention to debates in the media, public, and political spheres about crime and criminal justice, I am able to identify many of the subtle allusions made against the background of public debates. Presser emphasizes that researchers “must take the contexts of storytelling into account. If they do not ... they risk making mistakes about what the story and its delivery mean” (Presser, 2010, p. 441). Therefore, my own positionality becomes another methodological tool for analyzing narratives and their cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the level of master narratives will be used as a methodological tool which links narratives to large-scale criminological analyses of shifts in penal policy. Through using Halverson et al.’s conception of master narratives, this paper is able to connect the narratives found in the data with the “preferred outcome” (Halverson et al., 2011, p. 21) defined by the master narrative. The theories posed by Smith and others will similarly investigate how the framing of narratives encourages specific types of action (Smith, 2005, p. 205). This is an important methodological tool in establishing how narratives constitute harmful action.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Given that this study interacts with publicly available documents published by government institutions and does not involve personal interactions with incarcerated individuals or employees of the criminal justice system, there are few ethical concerns with the research itself. Instead, the ethical consideration of this project is researcher reflexivity. Critical criminology emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and the researcher's ethical responsibility to consider the implications of the work they produce. The knowledge that criminologists produce about crime, prison, and other forms of crime control are more likely than any other social science to directly impact policy. As a result, I use narratives to deconstruct and challenge the epistemology of the government's writing on crime control. This paper will reflexively consider how the government's knowledge production and this analysis of it can be used to sponsor and legitimize harm causing policies.

4.3.1. *Standpoint & Reflexivity*

Critical criminology rejects the possibility that one can be a 'objective researcher' and asserts the importance of reflexivity and transparency with one's positionality as a researcher. It is thus important for me to discuss my positionality as a Black man born and raised in America, and the impact this identity has on my research and worldview. The critical perspective that I take on prisons and policing is unquestionably influenced by my own experiences and their similarities with those most vulnerable to penal harm. Consequently, I have developed a positionality, common in critical criminology, that seeks to represent the socially and economically marginalized (Becker, 1963) and oppose inequality and social exclusion. Howard Becker raises the reflexive question of bias, and discusses how studies of deviance inevitably take up the one-sided perspective of either the rule breaker or rule enforcer (Becker, 1963, p. 147). The perspective I develop is not a representative one but instead one that critically engages with the narratives told by rule enforcers to, "question ... the stated purposes of its institutions" (Young, 2002, p. 271). By independently studying punishment and using official Government publications as my empirical material, I avoid blind criticism and instead seek to measure the impact of policies against their stated outcomes.

4.4. Validity & Limitations

The validity of my research, or if my methodology is able to accurately measure the concept in question, is strengthened by the fact that my empirical material is directly sourced from the Swedish Government. The narratives used by Government institutions themselves are a more accurate way to measure changes in penal policy than narratives from media outlets or private citizens. The reliability of this study is confirmed through its use of publicly available data which allows for replication with other datasets from different time periods, different countries, or different criminal justice institutions. It also replicates the method recently used by John Todd-Kvam in his analysis of press releases and op-eds from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice (Todd-Kvam, 2019).

One of the main limitations of my methodological approach is its narrow scope. As mentioned earlier, the “A Safer Sweden” dataset only includes content related to increasing safety and security. This means that many types of crimes and sanctions were not often present in the data and thus could not be analyzed. For example, domestic violence and sexual crimes, as well as less severe sanctions, such as fines or mandated community service, were scarcely mentioned in the data. However, this omission has been noted in the discussion of the data and is the result of the government’s selectivity rather than the researcher’s decisions. While expanding the scope of the project to include more types of crimes and sanction was not feasible for this project, it presents an area for future research.

Another notable limitation is the role of migration policy and border controls in the expansion of penal power and the implementation of harm causing penal policies. The publications in this dataset are primarily from the Ministry of Justice and other ministries focused on internal affairs. That Barker has written an entire book on the Government’s decision to close the borders in 2015 suggests not only the scale of this analytical task, but also the importance of considering migration detention, asylum denial, and deportation as part of the expanding punitive arm of the Swedish welfare state.

The final, and arguably most significant, limitation of this research project is the use of translated material. While it is always ideal to analyze data in its original language, I have attempted to take the necessary precautions to ensure that the act of translation did not negatively affect the accuracy and validity of my work. As previously mentioned, I relied on the help of my Swedish colleagues to expand on, confirm, and reconsider the original translations. This assistance

was necessary for several reasons. First, as with the example of *trygghet*, some words can be translated in various ways and have different contextual meanings. The collaboration with my colleagues ensured that the translation was not accepted at face value, but also considered alternative definitions. Another example is words used to describe gangs and organized crime. These topics are always packed with deeper meaning, so I consulted with my colleagues about the significance of the increased use of “*gängkriminaliteten*” (gang crime) in favor of “*organiserad brottslighet*” (organized crime). I also wanted to ensure I correctly assessed the tone of the writing and any underlying implications of the word choice or other linguistics features.

To avoid the pitfalls of being an outside researcher without a full grasp on the Swedish language, I made it a point to defer to the expertise of Swedish criminologists and ground my findings in previous research. It is also important to note that research on penal harm should defer to the voices of those most affected by it, namely current and formerly incarcerated people and other targets of harm causing policies. The constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented accessibility to interviewees for this project. Thus, incorporating the voices of those targeted and affected by penal harm is a much-needed avenue for future research in Nordic criminology.

Chapter 5. Narratives In Swedish Penal Policy

This chapter presents the narratives found in the 397 publications from “A Safer Sweden” and analyzes how narratives told by criminal justice institutions set the stage for punitive interventions and justify the harms caused by imprisonment and other punishments. The first section in this chapter describes the actors in the narratives and how collective identity, protagonists, and enemies are constructed through character polarization. The next section analyzes the plots and sequencing of several main narratives. This discussion includes the crime problems presented and the proposed policy solutions that are represented by the authors as a response to those crime problems. The final section is an analysis of the six main master narratives that the “A Safer Sweden” narratives are nested within. This analysis shows the role narratives play in shaping thought patterns, assumptions, and moral justifications that legitimize forms of punishment.

5.1. Actors

5.1.1. *Gangs*

The character most present ($n=128$) in this collection is the gang criminal (*gängkriminella*). This is expected as the “A Safer Sweden,” collection is used mainly to discuss the government’s efforts to stop gang crime with the 34 Point Program. The three elements, character polarization, objects of struggle, and powers of action, which Smith uses to define narrative genres are used to analyze the characters and narratives within the “A Safer Sweden” dataset. The narratives involving gangs and organized crime use extreme character polarization. In statements such as, “organized crime is a serious threat to democratic society” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016d) and “we can show that society is stronger than gangs” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021c) the gang members are constructed as outsiders, pitted against the rest of society. Additionally, the object of struggle in narratives involving gangs extends past the national level and paints the gang problem as a cross border struggle. This is done in two ways. First, by constructing gangs as international organizations involved in drug trade with countries in South America, arms smuggling from the Balkans and other transnational criminal enterprises (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020q). Additionally, the implicit and explicit framing of gang criminals as foreigners functions to further distinguish their actions. Discussion of gang crime is

notorious for its coded language and muted racial inferences (Wang, 2018). In Sweden, the gang criminal is typically imagined as a dark-skinned, Muslim, immigrant or refugee from either the Middle East or Africa. This stereotype is reified by the 34 Point Plan's emphasis on policing border areas and including "more effective controls to foreigner's right to residence" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020d) in the expanded powers given to police. Finally, their "powers of action," to use Smith's terminology, is elevated, as gang crime is described to have "system-threatening elements" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016d).

Framing gang criminals through strong character polarization, global objects of struggle and elevated powers of action, serves two purposes for crime control institutions. First, the strong character polarization and the elevated powers of action allow gangs to be constructed as a strong enemy that must be fought against. Furthermore, by constructing gang criminals as either foreigners, or outside antagonists working against society, a harsher less comfortable form of punishment for this group becomes acceptable. Both the allusion to combat and more austere punishment are present in statements like the following, "an exceptional offensive is being carried out, Operation Rimfrost, with the aim of reducing violence, seizing weapons and drugs and putting gang criminals behind bars" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i). This type of language, using military terms and punitive phrases, clear the way for the reader to see gang members as the enemy and justify the increased punitive action taken against them.

5.1.2. Ordinary People

Another character constructed in stories of crime and punishment is "ordinary people." They are constructed as the binary opposite of the criminal. While criminals are constructed as antisocial, outsiders, and evil-doers, positive values are ascribed onto ordinary people illustrating them as law-abiding, honest, innocent people. The ordinary people character lends its well to tragic narratives. It is easy to turn the ordinary people into the pitied object of struggle, the innocent victim who is hurt by the "evil doing of others" (Smith, 2005, p. 25). The character is often evoked in rise in crime narratives, with statements like "this affects honest people so we cannot have it" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019e) and "ordinary people suffer" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a). These statements emphasize the negative impact of crime on collective feelings of safety and security.

This polarizing identity construction is uncharacteristic of the solidaristic assumptions at the foundation of the welfare sanction. Instead of understanding others as “just like us” (Smith, 2005, p. 25) this narrative creates a clear distinction between ordinary people and criminals. This contradicts the narratives about “orphans of the Swedish people’s home” (Pratt, 2008a, p. 130) which constructs criminals as ordinary people, thereby allowing law-breakers to be sanctioned in ways that facilitate reintegration. The narrative constructing ordinary people as irreconcilably different from criminal, sets that foundation for penal policies that combat, fight against, and punish those who break laws. The collective identity that excludes the criminal is an important part of justifying the penal harm that they will be subjected to.

The construction of criminals as immigrants and foreigners reserves the “ordinary people” label for ethnic Swedes. Pratt points out that the Swedish word, *likhet*, is translated to mean both sameness and equality. While this may help promote solidarity in a homogenous nation, the flip side is that as Sweden becomes more diverse, the link between sameness and equality can mean a link between difference and inequality. However, there are narratives in the dataset that discuss “ordinary people living in socially disadvantaged areas” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020m) which leaves the door open for marginalized and racialized people to be included in the national narrative, as long as they distinguish themselves from gang members and criminals.

5.1.3. Society

One of the main constructions of “society” (n=49) is as a protagonist who must respond to crime. A common narrative is that “society must react” (n=16) to crimes and people that commit them (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019h). The types of reactions include, looking at ways to “sharpen society’s reaction” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018) to certain crimes, stating that “society must look extremely strictly at such crimes” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019c), and stating that “society’s reaction must be clear” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b) to the people committing crimes.

In addition to describing what society must *do* in response to crime, the narratives also construct what society must *be*. In certain discussions of how society should respond to crime, moral values and characteristics are placed on society. The publications include statements that “the whole society must show determination and perseverance” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a) and “continue to be uncompromising” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021f) in the fight

against crime. Another reads, “society must be strong enough to protect people from everything from everyday crime to serious organized crime and terrorism” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019d). The connection between strength and crime control efforts is one of the main ways moral values were assigned to the government’s discussion of crime control.

The final way society was described as an actor is through the execution of tangible crime control responsibilities. In many narratives describing new punishment techniques or crime control capabilities, the word “society” is used in place of the names of specific crime control institutions. For example, a press release describes the purpose of the youth monitoring (*ungdomsövervakning*) program as being to “give society more and better opportunities to intervene against young people who have committed crimes” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a). Similarly, other publications discuss “sharpening society’s tools against crime” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a) and increasing “society’s ability to handle [explosive goods]” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019l). Rather than using the names of specific institutions such as the police, the courts, or even ‘the government’ as a general term, these documents discuss “society’s work to reduce crime and increase security” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019m).

Making society, rather than criminal justice institutions, the protagonist in crime control narratives can be seen as a way of building collective identity. Constructing crime control as a function of or a responsibility of “society” further reinforces the construction of the criminal as a foreign enemy or an outside other. Quotes like, “gang crime is a serious societal problem that must be fought from all sides of society” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i) support the assertion that gangs as a threat to *all* of society. The other side of this narrative is one that calls for “the whole society [to stand] up” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019k) and “contribute to the fight against crime.” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021f). It also is a way to create an inclusive identity based on collective shared values while simultaneously ascribing those values to the work of criminal justice institutions, in a way that assumes the “good character” of the crime control agent (Presser, 2018, p. 129).

5.1.4. *Young People*

Another character found in the dataset is young people (n=26). In publications about sanctions and gangs, young people are discussed as both the target for punitive policies and as the victims of other criminals. Narratives about how young people should be punished and the extent

of their involvement in crime reconstruct the juvenile from a vulnerable person in need of protection to a threat to adults. It is important to note that the definition of a “juvenile,” who by reason of their youth is subject to a different and often more lenient set of judicial rules, is a sociolegal construction that has no worldwide scientific, political, or legal consensus on what a juvenile is or at what age someone ceases to be one (Wang, 2018, p. 197). As Foucault’s writes, “the delinquent is an institutional production” (Foucault, 1995, p. 301). In this dataset, young people refers to anyone under 21 years of age, as the Swedish penal code formerly had special provisions for people 18 to 20, and currently has them for those under 18.

The driving narrative behind the construction of young people in this collection is the idea that they are becoming increasingly involved in crime. This belief is described here:

police and intelligence services testify that the recruitment of young people into crime has increased... we have seen several examples in recent years where children as young as 10-11 years old have committed serious robberies. By then, it has already gone too far” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021c).

In response to the increased involvement of young people in crime, several crime control solutions are proposed. One of the responses constructs young people as victims and imposes “stricter penalties... for those who involve young people in crime” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020f) to “break recruitment of children into criminal gangs” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021c). Other solutions construct young people as a threat warranting increased control and punishment. In the case of youth monitoring (*ungdomsövervakning*), the state established a new penalty that, “is significantly intrusive with regard to the seriousness of the crime and the young person’s previous criminality” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017c) and provides a “clear reaction from society that helps them stop committing crime” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016d).

Another solution that increased the penalties for young people was abolishing the penalty rebate for young adults that reduced the sentence length of people aged 18 to 20. This change resulted from the belief that “in the sentencing of some cases, too much consideration is given to the defendants age at the expense of the starting point being how serious the crime was” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020k) and that “society’s response to young people who commit serious crime is too limited” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020k). Abolishing the penalty rebate made it “possible to impose the same punishment as for other adult offenders e.g.

imprisonment for life” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020k). This is the most explicit way that young people are reconstructed as a threat to justify harsher forms of punishment. Wang writes, “in order for [the juvenile] to be effectively managed through confinement, they must first be juridically folded into the domain of adulthood, and the jurisdiction of criminal law must expand to include them... at the precise moment they are being branded for exclusion” (Wang, 2018, pp. 210–211).

The institutionally constructed nature of the ‘juvenile delinquent’ becomes even more stark with discrepancies regarding whether or not youth crime is actually increasing. Minister of the Interior Morgan Johansson made this statement:

Take juvenile delinquency. Yes, we all believe that the robberies where young people rob other young people are abominable... But we must also be able to state that the number of young people prosecuted for crime has decreased by more than 30 percent in ten years. And the number of young people who are cared for in hospitals due to being exposed to violence has decreased by 50 percent at the same time. So when it comes to robberies, it may be a limited group of young people who commit those crimes, and it does not have to be a sign of an increase in juvenile delinquency in general (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020e).

This contradiction suggests that if juvenile delinquency is generally trending downward, increased punishments must be justified through other reasons. The publications’ descriptions of the “limited group of young people who commit those crimes” are full of deeply racialized and class-based allusions to immigrants and Muslims which construct threatening urban⁹ young people. Narratives about “at risk” children (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020b) falling into “a criminal lifestyle,” being recruited into gangs, or being in a home where there are honor-related issues (*hedersproblematik*) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019g) are used to justify interventions without the consent of the children or their parents (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019g). In these discussions of “at risk” children committing crimes, young people are constructed as a possible threat that must be managed through different types of state intervention. By describing

⁹ In Sweden, the word *förort*, which is translated as “suburb” is often used to refer to racialized ghetto areas. Since this word is only used in once in the dataset, I have chosen to use the word “urban” in this paper because it allows for more generalization and continuity with other criminological literature.

young people's involvement in crime with "signifiers of blackness [as well as immigrants and Muslims in the Swedish case] that draw on highly sensationalized images of street gangs, inner city violence, and so forth... rather than being seen as vulnerable, the (racialized) juvenile was constructed as a *predator*" (Wang, 2018, p. 196,204).

5.2. PLOTS

The crime control narratives in the data are understood as ways that crime control institutions tell stories about themselves and their functions in society. To do this, the institutions describe a crime problem followed by a specific action intended to address that problem. This section discusses both components of these narratives by first illustrating which crime problems receive the most attention, then describing the ways that crime control institutions construct their actions as necessary solutions to these problems.

5.2.1. *Crime Problems*

The general narrative at the foundation of all the major narratives in this collection is the 'rise in crime' narrative which suggests that crime has increased in Sweden over recent years. It is usually emotionally flat, using matter-of-fact, bureaucratic language in statements such as, "in recent years the number of cases of lethal force where firearms have been used has increased especially in connection with conflicts in criminal networks" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017d). However, data pulled from 2019 onwards shows an emotional element, with statements like "firearms violence in criminal settings has developed in a worrying way" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019f) and "gang crime is a serious societal problem that must be fought from all sides of society" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i). Narratives evoking worry, fear, and threat lend themselves to themes of a society in descent and the need to struggle against the evil doing of others which are often paired with heroic narratives of protagonists fighting against crime.

A common crime problem presented is serious crime (n=43). It is significant that not all types of egregious crime are categorized as "serious" in these documents. The government has described serious crimes to be aggravated assault, aggravated robbery, aggravated extortion, aggravated unlawful coercion, serious unlawful threat, as well as gun crimes and violations of permits for weapons and explosive materials (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016c). It is not a coincidence

that the serious crime category only includes gang-related crime and omits other crimes that could be considered serious such as domestic violence or sex crimes.

Violent crime (n=79) also includes several different types of crimes related to gangs. The most commonly referenced types of violent crimes are crimes involving explosive or flammable materials (n=50) and shootings (n=20). Weapons crimes also are often connected to smuggling and international organized crime and used to justify stronger borders and increasing the powers of Customs police (n=7). Many of these crimes also involve narratives of vulnerable areas (n=23) or border areas (n=19) which leads to these communities becoming the target of increased surveillance. Violence is often described as taking place “in criminal environments” or between gangs. However, in order to construct the violence within networks as set in public places, endangering ordinary people:

Violence in criminal contexts has changed during the 2000s. The number of shootings has increased significantly and many have taken place in public places. The increase in shootings can largely be attributed to conflicts between criminal groups. In recent years, these conflicts have also led to an increased tendency to use explosive goods. The number of explosions in Sweden in recent years is unparalleled in modern times (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021e).

There are also discussions of “open street sale” of drugs (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019n), an allusion to racialized ghettos and the breakdown of public order. The framing of gang violence also includes a narrative about premeditation and planning. The claim that “not a single planned murder in Malmö in recent years... has not been preceded by information between gang members in encrypted form” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019o) justifies the deployment of more intrusive surveillance techniques (see below) to address this problem.

The narrative of honor-related issues or *hedersproblematik* (n=10) includes discussions of female genital mutilation, child marriage, and honor-related violence and oppression (*hedersrelaterat våld och förtryck*). These discussions are built on the foundation of extreme character polarization and “deep, cultural resentment” (Kramer, 2020, p. 137). Honor-related violence functions very similarly to narratives involving sex crimes, especially those involving children, which construct perpetrators as evil, backwards, or sick. However, honor-related issues

ascribe these values to communities of immigrants from lesser developed countries in African or the Middle East (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 45). Von Hofer and Tham describe this as “an expression of a foreign culture and a lack of equality between the sexes” as way to provoke public outrage... in a country with perhaps the strongest policy of gender equality in the world” (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 45). This allusion towards immigrant cultures and gender, is also one of the few times gender is present in the data. Criminals are strictly constructed as men and boys, so women are only present as victims or people threatened by crime.

5.2.2. State Solutions

Several types of state action were proposed or discussed in the 397 government publications in the “A Safer Sweden” collection. Each is categorized according to what is done and who it is done by. Often, articles contained multiple narratives discussing several solutions.

‘Tough on crime’ narratives involve discussions of specific types of harsh punishments and punitive ways of speaking about criminals. Narratives about punishment ($n=64$) discuss confirmed or proposed penalty increases such as the introduction of longer prison sentences, harsher fines and other sanctions. There are also discussions of mandatory sentencing guidelines that either add to minimum penalties, increase the maximum penalty, or increase penalties from a fine to time in prison. These changes are used as a solution for a wide range of problems including gang crimes, serious crimes, possession of weapons and explosives, violence against Blue Light Personnel, and economic crimes. Ways of speaking about the problem in emotionally rousing ways such as “carrying out very offensive operations” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020n) and “intensifying the fight against gang violence” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i) are also part of this narrative. Other examples involve talking about criminals in punitive terms uncharacteristic of a penal regime that strives for rehabilitation and humane punishment. Calls for “locking gang criminals behind bars” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i) and for police to “tirelessly hunt down these criminals day and night” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020n) are strong examples of this contradiction.

Two main narratives make up this paper’s concept of ‘Swedish expansionism.’ The first are narratives of the “great expansion” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020e) of the Swedish police force ($n=16$), often used when discussing the 34 Point Program. This policy is discussed as

a solution that will increase security and strengthen the fight against gang crime. Minister of the Interior Morgan Johansson said:

The single most important investment to increase security in Sweden is more police officers on streets and squares, and more police officers who can solve crimes” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i)

This narrative shares similarities with Smith’s romantic genre, speaking in a heroic way about the state “gathering forces” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019k) to drive out the criminal evil-doers. Like the typical romantic narrative, the expansion of police is presented as a necessary step to protect the ordinary people in society and “increase security.”

The second narrative in the ‘Swedish expansionism’ concept is increasing police power (n=32) to surveille, search, and seize. This umbrella narrative holds several unique solutions underneath it, such as making it easier for police to conduct house searches for weapons, increasing the ability of Customs and Border police to intervene against smuggling, giving police more ability to plant wiretaps and conduct secret surveillance, and making it easier for them to confiscate cars, money, property and watches. The expanded power is framed as a way to give police more efficient tools to fight against and crime and increase security.

Narratives discussing conditional release and parole (n=23) focus on increasing the difficulty of incarcerated people qualifying for conditional release and making it easier for people to be returned to prison while on conditional release, parole, or probation. These narratives are framed as measures that reduce recidivism and help prisoners reintegrate into society by placing stricter obligations on people while they are in prison and increasing restrictions and surveillance once they leave prison. They include prohibiting conditionally released people from living in certain areas, namely places determined to be where drugs sales are common, where other criminals live, or near certain victims of crime. These control narratives are often paired with narratives about using foot shackles (n=14) to electronically monitor a released person’s location. Additionally, probation officers are given increased abilities to force released people to take drug tests and the supervision period is extended from one year to three, with violations during this period resulting in the released person’s return to prison.

Prevention narratives (n=44) represent a wide range of crime reduction strategies. The data identifies three main types of prevention strategies: deterrents, social services and coercive

interventions. Deterrent narratives focus on breaking recruitment into gangs and reducing incentives to become involved in crime, measures to make life harder for criminals, such as more searches and harsher punishments are understood as ways to deter potential crime. These narratives often involve Brå (Crime Prevention Council) and speak of crime prevention in a very broad sense.

The social service narratives focus on non-punitive interventions that can help prevent people from becoming involved in crime. There is a focus on some of the social factors that influence crime, including poverty, segregation, and discrimination. These narratives discuss schools, welfare initiatives, parenting, living conditions, and other ways to reduce so-called risk factors for crime. “Vulnerable areas” are often the setting of these conversations and often include the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Gender Equality.

Finally, intervention narratives involve ways the state can step in to take action against an individual for the sake of preventing their involvement in crime. This can be done in several ways. The first is through intervening against juveniles deemed to be at-risk of becoming involved in crime without the consent of their parents or guardians. The youth monitoring (*ungdomsövervakning*) sanctions are examples of this type of coercive intervention. Another type of intervention is aimed at giving gang members a “way out” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015d) of the criminal lifestyle through defector programs and the “call-ins” (Nilsson, 2021) that are part of the Gang Violence Intervention (GVI) approach. This type of state intervention is done under the threat of penalty for non-compliance. The final method of coercive intervention is for the sake of preventing recidivism. As mentioned earlier, these parole and probation programs have the stated purpose of preventing the people under their surveillance from returning to criminal environments by deploying a web of regulations to punish those who do not comply with restrictions.

The access ban narrative (n=5) is another response within the umbrella of prevention and intervention narratives. These narratives discuss banning people convicted of certain crimes related to gang activity, from publicly accessible places such as libraries, swimming pools, and retail stores as a measure against organized crime. This measure is related to the postal ban, which was proposed in response to weapons smuggling. In this mundane narrative there is no inflammatory language, instead the measures taken by police are framed as rather straight-forward and logical responses to crime.

5.3. Master Narratives

As mentioned earlier, the concept of master narratives is one of many that explores macro-level cultural narratives that explain and simplify the world (Sandberg et al., 2019). A master narratives functions as “a schema that is totalizing; it not only explains reality and knowledge but also orders them” (Sandberg et al., 2019, p. 4) These stories become internalized in the ways people comprehend the world, in stories individuals and institutions tell about themselves, and in collective identities (Sandberg et al., 2019, p. 4). This concept is integral to this paper because of the way master narratives can legitimize crime control strategies and punishment techniques. Their application in this paper helps to recognize the way that every narrative has “a preferred outcome” (Halverson et al., 2011, p. 21) and understand the ways that master narratives are able to “‘make normal’ both ideology and action on the broadest and most pervasive levels and spheres of society” (Snajdr, 2013, p. 230).

5.3.1. Correctionalism

The correctionalist master narrative is a general story that suggests crime can be reduced through individualized programs focused on treatment and rehabilitation. Since the “A Safer Sweden” collection does not contain data prior to 2013, there were very few correctionalist narratives identified in the dataset. As a result, the narratives discussed here are pulled from previous literature, speeches, and articles about Swedish prison policy. It is important to understand how the narratives that fit into this master narrative served as a cultural backdrop that shaped previous crime control strategies. This starting point makes it easier to recognize how the narratives found in the “A Safer Sweden” collection represent changing beliefs, assumptions, and understandings of crime and control that encourage specific types of policy action. The few correctionalist narratives in the dataset are discussed in the Competing and Subordinated Master Narratives section (see below) to demonstrate how they are used as a tool to soften rhetoric.

Much of the work on correctionalist master narrative comes from Garland’s description of penal-welfarism as Pratt’s theory of Nordic exceptionalism follows almost step by step from the characteristics Garland lists. The defining feature of the correctionalist master narrative is rehabilitation, which has an almost all consuming influence on the story (Garland, 2002, p. 35). In Sweden, the most prominent correctionalist narrative is that prisoners are the “orphaned children of the people’s home” (Pratt, 2008a, 2020). In the early years of the Swedish penal system, strongly

influenced by the Lutheran Church, incarcerated people were referred to as “protectees” (Pratt, 2020). While Sweden is now a more secular society, one cannot help but note the similarities between the moral point of the orphaned child narrative and the biblical story of the prodigal son; that regardless of one’s wrongdoings, these people are capable of redemption and deserving of mercy. Because prisoners were still understood as inherent members of society, attitudes towards them were less punitive. This idea is supported by Balvig (2015) and Lappi-Seppälä (2012) who found that the stronger one’s social ties are to the convicted, the less supportive they will be of harsh punishments (Balvig et al., 2015; Lappi-Seppälä, 2012). It also follows Christie’s logic that the more one knows about a person, the less likely it becomes that their actions will be seen as criminal.

This rehabilitative ethos influenced both rhetoric and policy decisions. Former Director-General of Kriminalvården, Nils Öberg, said in a 2013 interview with *The Guardian*, “Prison is not for punishment in Sweden. We get people into better shape” (James, 2013). These ideas came with the principle that the negative impact of prison on a person's life should be minimal and that there should be a strong emphasis on job training and educational programs to improve a person’s life and well-being:

“[Correctionalism] encouraged the view that engaging in criminal behavior was somewhat beyond the control of individuals, but that the underlying causes of crime could be addressed through rehabilitative interventions. If the cause of crime was some sort of emotional disturbance for example then this could be addressed through treatment. If low levels of education and poverty were drivers of crime, the solution lay in devising punishments that equipped individuals with skillsets that would allow them to become socially productive. Such course of action were perceived as worthwhile, at least in part, because the labor market was in a position to absorb workers” (Kramer, 2020, p. 141).

This job training aspect has the best outcomes in Keynesian economic systems with close to full employment and work available “even for unskilled or unreliable individuals” (Garland, 2002, p. 49).

Finally, the correctionalist master narrative, at least to a certain extent, recognizes the harmful effects of incarceration and attempts to minimize them. One of the basic principles of most

European penal systems throughout the 20th century was using prison as a last resort (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2011). In Sweden, this ideal prompted attempts to normalize prison conditions and develop alternatives to incarceration. Proponents of the Nordic exceptionalism thesis often discuss the relationship between Swedish prison staff and the incarcerated persons. The uniforms officers wear lack the paramilitary appearance that is commonplace in American prisons and the staff and inmates often eat together in the same dining halls (Pratt, 2020). Additionally, open prisons are one of the best examples of attempts at normalization. While these only make up 18 of the 84 prison facilities in the country (Kriminalvården, 2019, p. 36), the low security open prisons that allow inmates to travel outside regularly, for work, groceries, approved leave or other reasons, are a pillar of correctionalist efforts to aid incarcerated people's reintegration into society.

5.3.2. Situational Crime Prevention & Deterrence

The situational crime prevention master narrative suggests that crime is the result of opportunities created by lack of order and can be prevented through 'target hardening' and increased surveillance. The deterrence master narrative suggests that the increase in the severity and certainty of punishment for certain crimes will deter and dissuade potential future offenders. As discussed in the last chapter, crime prevention narratives are one of the main narratives present in this dataset and they often intersect with narratives on deterrence. While the former shapes how people understand the causes of crime, the latter is focused on solutions to discuss those crimes.

The situational crime prevention master narrative is part of the larger movement in mainstream criminology towards rational choice theory, which also includes the routine activities theory and broken windows policing theories (Kramer, 2020, p. 16). Situational crime prevention suggests that crime is a result of opportunities for crime being present in people's daily routines and physical spaces (Kramer, 2020). The solutions that follow suggest that crime prevention can be achieved through solutions such as, locks on automobile steering columns, attendants in parking lots, and monitoring city streets with CCTV (Garland, 2002, p. 129; Kramer, 2020, p. 142).

Many of the solutions posed in prevention and intervention narratives fall under the situational prevention master narrative. One such narrative discusses solutions such as "installing more outdoor lighting in exposed places" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019q) and strict controls preventing people on parole and probation from being "in places where drug sales are common or where other criminals are staying or living" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020c).

Other narratives are more explicit, as a letter about the 2017 National Crime Prevention Program discusses how measures “can be directed at both individuals who are at risk of committing and have committed crimes , as well as occasions and situations where crimes are likely to occur” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017a). According to Kramer and Garland, these approaches disregard the motivations and root causes of law breaking (Kramer, 2020, p. 142). Instead, they only seek to make it harder for people to commit crimes, which in turns makes it easier to punish those who do.

An example of deterrence narratives is found in Malmö’s deadly violence prevention program “Stop Shooting” (*Sluta Skjut*). This program is based on a combination of prevention narratives and deterrence narratives. More specifically, it is described as an American “focused deterrence” strategy called Gang Violence Intervention (GVI) which operates on the belief that “the majority of all serious crime in a society can be linked to a few individuals” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021d). In an article discussing the initiative, the deterrence and prevention narratives are expressed very clearly:

To reduce violence, society must direct its resources towards these individuals [who are responsible for violence] and the groups to which they belong. Society sends a clear message to the violent groups that violence must end and that acts of violence have consequences (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021d).

In this case, instead of the cause of crime being dimly lit streets or unattended parking lots, the cause is a specific group of people. This strategy of focused deterrence involves the interplay between gang narratives and prevention narratives by blaming the problem on one specific and easily identifiable enemy who is then criminalized heavily. This vilification lends support to tough on crime narratives. In the construction of the crime problem and specifically the gang crime problem, immigrants and racialized people are stigmatized and criminalized or as Wacquant writes, “mutate[d] into a ‘suitable enemy’ – to use Nils Christie’s (1986) expression – at once a symbol of and target for all social anxieties” (Wacquant, 2016, p. 219).

Deterrence narratives are a significant marker of cultural change in the penal field and the movement away from the principles of Nordic exceptionalism. Kramer explains the inherent contradictions between deterrence narratives and rehabilitation narratives. He writes, “the

insistence on deterrence is entirely irrational if we take the goal of punishment to be crime reduction or the reintegration of offenders,” instead deterrence efforts “place a cultural premium upon making sure that benefits do not follow from criminal offending” (Kramer, 2020, p. 138). These deterrence narratives arise in the dataset through discussions of “reducing incentives to commit crimes” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020h) and by making it “easier to seize property, watches, cars, and cash from criminals” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020m). These are meant to deliver a “concrete ultimatum in a language criminals understand” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021d) by which they mean harsher penalties and longer prison sentences. As it is impossible to focus on both deterrence and rehabilitation, it seems that deterrence has become the dominant narrative among the authors of Swedish crime policy.¹⁰

5.3.3. *Just Deserts*

The ‘just deserts’ master narrative is a general story that suggests punishments should be proportional to crimes and that the offender deserves to experience the harms associated with their punishment. While this has long been a common principle in many penal regimes, it runs contrary to the traditional European principle of prison as a last resort (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2011; von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 46). This master narrative appears often in publications about the youth monitoring sanction. These publications discuss the need for a “juvenile sanction that is sufficiently intrusive with regard to the seriousness of the crime” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017c). In other areas, including conditional release and several types of gang crimes, the penal provisions were written in “consideration of the general criminal law principles on proportionality and equivalence” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015c). As is the case in the following quote, the principle of proportionality is almost always used to justify an increase in the severity of punishments:

To reduce crime and increase security, we need to step up our efforts against criminal networks. The criminal law framework must therefore be tightened. It must be effective and reflect the seriousness of the crime (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020g).

¹⁰ Official narratives about rehabilitation are likely still present in publications from Kriminalvården. Since they do not have control on the flow of people into their facilities their practices or at least the way they talk about them are less likely to shift with the punitive political winds.

The idea of proportionality in punishment taps into the widely known “an eye for an eye” narrative, a deep story that is found in biblical stories and laws of ancient civilizations. This rationale is also seen in the use of the Swedish phrase, “*sätta hårt mot hårt*” which is translated to mean “put hard against hard” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020m). In their work on punishment in Sweden, von Hofer and Tham discuss the impact that proportionality has on penal sanctions. They write that, “the old liberal idea that punishment and penal law should be viewed as a last resort (*ultima ratio*), once other measures have been exhausted without producing an effect (Träskman, 2009), is increasingly losing its political value” and being replaced by ideologies that emphasize “retribution in the guise of ‘just deserts’” (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 46). Not only does this master narrative legitimize longer punishments, it also makes it more difficult to criticize sanctions based on empirical evaluations of their effectiveness since “the idea of just deserts is a purely *legal doctrine*” (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 47). Since the emergence of this principle in Swedish penal policy in 1989, there has been a significant decrease in legislation involving the contraction of penal measures (see Figure 3). This understanding of punishment makes expanding penal law, “further sharpening of punishments as a means of crime control” and providing more tools and resources to police, courts, and prisons, the simplest and most standard way of addressing crime problems in Sweden (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 49).

5.3.4. *Neoliberalism*

The neoliberalism master narrative is a general story that shifts the responsibility for crime to justify using penal responses to social problems and suggests punitive interventions in marginalized communities as a way to increase security. In this section the narratives pulled from “A Safer Sweden” will be put in conversation with Wacquant’s (2012) definition of neoliberalism (see above) (Wacquant, 2012). While Barker challenges the idea that Sweden’s punitive turn is a neoliberal import from the West, I argue that the new configuration of the Swedish penal field demonstrates undeniably neoliberal characteristics. Sweden’s strong commitment to the welfare state, even on the far right, is certainly a deviation from the traditional understanding of neoliberalism as the dismantling of the welfare state and the political submission to the free market. Furthermore, by using Wacquant’s three-pronged definition of neoliberalism as the expansion of the state’s penal apparatus, the rightward shift in state priorities and actions, and the political reengineering of the state, certain changes to the Swedish field of crime control can be understood as neoliberal.

As described in the “Swedish expansionism” narratives, the government is attempting to reinforce all parts of its judiciary since, “as the police get more resources, the pressure on other steps of the legal chain increases” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021b). Thus, Sweden is expanding the size and budgets of penal institutions at every level by increasing resources for the Coast Guard, private security guards (*Ordningstvakt*), Prosecutors Offices, Courts, Kriminalvården, and the Migration Agency. This type of “bolstering and broadening of the penal sector of the bureaucratic field” (Wacquant, 2012, p. 75) is an example of how “the massive investments in the state’s punitive capacities – especially its criminal justice system – need to be understood as an inevitable aspect of neoliberalism” (Kramer, 2020, p. 170; Wacquant, 2010).

These expansions and investments are specifically directed at the so-called vulnerable areas in Swedish society. Narratives that discuss needing “a strong police presence in vulnerable areas... where it is needed most” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020o) suggest a move towards the “penal management of poverty and insecurity” (Wacquant, 2016, p. 216). Much has been written about the function of police and other criminal justice institutions in marginalized communities, including the paradox of over and under policing (Forman Jr., 2017, p. 35), the management and confinement of social problems (Feeley & Simon, 1992, p. 455), and the penal regulation of social insecurity and the punishment of poverty (Wacquant, 2001a, 2001b, 2009). The penal management of poverty is integral to Wacquant’s definition of neoliberalism:

If one saturates neighbourhoods of social exclusion with police officers without improving the life chances and employment options of its residents, one is sure to increase arrests and penal sentences and thus, in the end, the incarcerated population (Wacquant, 2001b, p. 408).

The relationship between these narratives supports the neoliberal expansion of penal power and the reversal of the traditional European penal value of correctionalism. The “growth and glorification of the penal wing of the state” (Wacquant, 2014, p. 73) in vulnerable areas inevitably becomes a way to increase surveillance and control over marginalized populations.

The next significant neoliberal shift is seen in the changing goals and purposes of the state’s crime control functions. Reversing the traditional welfare state narrative that the state should provide social security and support for all citizens, the publications urge individuals to take responsibility for their actions and emphasize the responsibility of parents to “give their child a

good upbringing and counteract risky behaviors” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021c). These individual responsibility narratives are seen in statements such as:

Research shows that there are many different risk factors for crime... both associated with the individual themselves and with different social contexts such as the family, school, the local community, and the circle of friends (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020a).

[A]n individual is always responsible for his actions and always has a choice (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a).

Wacquant describes these types of narratives as “the trope of individual responsibility” (Wacquant, 2012, p. 72) which both motivates punitive crime control responses and serves as “the cultural grease that smooths out the function of the neoliberal state” (Kramer, 2020, p. 157). These narratives play the crucial role of changing the cause of crime from social conditions such as poverty and poor education to the poor decision making and self-control of individuals, their families, and their communities. Research on the concept of responsabilization explores how states blame the competency of poor and immigrant parents for crime as a way to justify punitive intervention (Fernandez, 2018; Johansen & Jensen, 2017). Wacquant describes this type of process as the tilting of state priorities and actions from the “protective (feminine and collectivizing)” Left hand of the state to the “disciplinary (masculine and individualizing)” Right hand (Wacquant, 2012, p. 73)

The final neoliberal shift found in the data is the redirection of the welfare state towards crime control, changing the way citizens understand *trygghet*. After several economic recessions and Sweden’s entrance into the EU, the state’s ability to provide economic security has declined (Barker, 2019, pp. 7–8). As a result, the welfare state now works to fulfill its function of providing *trygghet* in the form of policing and physical security. Statements such as, “the single most important investment to increase security in Sweden is more police officers on streets and squares, and more police officers who can solve crimes” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019i) demonstrate the ways the government tries to provide security through ‘tough on crime’ narratives. In a 2020 debate article from the Minister of Justice, Morgan Johansson describes the broad work needed to strengthen security in Sweden. The security increasing measures discussed include “longer monitoring periods [for those on parole and probation], increased opportunities to decide

on participation in relapse prevention activities, increased opportunities for drug tests and greater opportunities to [return conditionally released persons to prison] in the event of negligence” as well as mentions of expanding the prison and probation service by building “a new large prison in Trelleborg” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020i) and another in Östersund as “the total number of prison years the courts sentence each year, the so-called prison mass ... increased sharply in recent years and is approaching record levels” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020i). These changes are an excellent example of what Wacquant calls the reengineering and redeployment of the state but a long way from the Nils Öberg’s 2014 claim that the best way to enhance safety and security in the long term is by “reducing prison numbers to a minimum” (Öberg, 2014).

5.3.5. *Jeopardy*

The jeopardy master narrative involves the suggestion that increased focus on crime control is necessary to secure the future of the welfare state and protect national sovereignty. In Garland’s discussion the shift from penal-welfarism to penal-modernism, he describes the reactionary claim that “rehabilitative practices jeopardize cherished liberal democratic values” (Garland, 2002, p. 70) which he terms the jeopardy thesis. In the case of Sweden, the values under threat are those of the welfare state. Narratives from the “A Safer Sweden” show the welfare state is threatened in two different ways. The first is through the exploitation of welfare benefits and the second is through a threat to security, the foundational provision of the welfare state. Both of these problems are linked to gang crime, which allows them to be solved through the expansion of penal power. Barker’s work on welfare nationalism is used to explain how this expansion can be seen as a way to protect the welfare state and strengthen national sovereignty.

Narratives about the welfare state (n=15) often discuss ways to prevent criminals from exploiting welfare systems. Quotes such as, “We never intend to accept that our welfare systems are exploited by criminals who both exploit people and [profit from] society's resources” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020j) suggest that criminals, gangs and other undeserving people are illegally taking money and other benefits that are meant for the collective welfare of law-abiding Swedes. Other articles claim that “criminals are constantly looking for ways to milk money that is intended for our common welfare” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020m) and suggest measures that “prevent grants and benefits from falling into the hands of criminals” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015b). Narratives about increasing efforts to combat welfare

crime also explicitly blame this type of crime on gangs, with the Minister of Justice stating, “we have to look at this type of criminality as the organized crime that it truly is” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017b).

The other way the welfare state is threatened is through threats to its founding principle, *trygghet*. While narratives about insecurity or *otrygghet* are used far less than security, the fact that they are associated with crime, fear and drugs in this dataset is telling. Hermansson’s work on *otrygghet* finds the term is often used to discuss the public’s fear of crime and the increased political focus on order and control (Hermansson, 2019b, p. 48). Mentions of insecurity in the dataset often invoke narratives of border areas and border control (n=19). Statements like, “we can never accept that, for example, theft gangs and gang criminals use mobility across borders to commit crimes, therefore the police also need to be given new powers in border areas” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020d) suggest that insecurity is caused by the “threat from abroad of... ‘serious international organized crime’” (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 46). Additionally, discussions of giving police “the ability to control foreigner’s right to residence and fight crime in this type of area” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020d) connect crime and insecurity to illegal immigration and segregated areas with a large number of immigrants.

Barker’s theory of welfare nationalism suggests the welfare state is, first and foremost, a national project and as a result “people not fully fused into the national narrative of belonging, such as ethnic minorities, foreign nationals, noncitizens, perceived others, and strangers” (Barker, 2019, p. 13) are most vulnerable to facing exclusionary punishments. While Barker’s work is mainly on penal power at the border, narratives about welfare exploitation and gang crimes demonstrate how the “invisible borders” that racialized people embody become a way for the government to penalize, regulate, and exclude undesirable people through racialized internal border controls (Khosravi, 2010, p. 99). Linking welfare crime to organized crime invokes the well-known trope of undeserving welfare recipients (Wacquant, 2002, p. 60), while narratives about border areas and gang crime demonstrate how “state authorities nowadays are preoccupied with the production of (in)security from racially constructed and perceived threats” (Schclarek Mulinari & Keskinen, 2020, p. 5).

As threats to the welfare state become linked with gang crimes and outside threats, ‘Swedish expansionism’ becomes a method of protecting national sovereignty (Barker, 2013, p. 118, 2019, p. 7; von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 46) The 34 Point Program involves narratives about

strengthening control at both the EU's external and Sweden's internal borders and discusses making it easier to deport people who've committed crimes. Since the constructed threats to the welfare state can be managed through strength and increased sovereignty, Barker's theories agree with von Hofer and Tham's claim that "the "notoriously diffuse and illusive phenomenon [of organized crime] constitutes a perfect motivation for expanding penal and procedural law and the powers of the police" (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 46).

5.3.6. Supplementary and Subordinated Master Narratives

The role of supplementary and subordinated master narratives is integral to my concept of 'Swedish expansionism.' As mentioned in the section on correctionalism, there were some narratives in this dataset reminiscent of a penal system defined by the principles of Nordic exceptionalism. However, it is clear that these narratives no longer hold a dominant or hegemonic place in the field of Swedish penal policy. This section examines how specific master narratives are used to supplement 'Swedish expansionism' in order to frame crime control responses through the lens of the benevolent and generous welfare state.

The 'social factors' master narrative suggests that crime is the result of social problems, mainly poverty, marginalization, and exclusion. There are several references, especially in publications related to prevention or involving the Ministries of Gender Equality and Social Affairs, to the role that inequality, poverty, segregation, and discrimination play in causing crime. For example, proposed reforms related to segregation read:

More and more people can be considered financially vulnerable in Sweden. We also see increased segregation between different areas in one and the same municipality in terms of crime and perceived security, unemployment, school results, overcrowding, community service and participation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016a).

However, since this is a subordinated narrative, it is often used as a softening technique to cushion the blow of the more commonly used punitive narratives. Alluding to these social perspectives on crime is a way of making the welfare state's interventions seem benevolent (Scharff Smith & Ugelvik, 2017). Below are two examples of social factors used alongside individual responsibility and tough on crime narratives:

[I]t is true that an individual is always responsible for his actions and always has a choice, but it is also true that social vulnerability is a breeding ground for crime (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a).

The trend toward increased gang crime has not happened overnight. It is the result of increased class divisions and reduced equality over decades, but also of the fact that society did not put hard against hard against emerging criminal groups (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020m).

These narratives comprise another example of the duality of the welfare state. On one hand, they discuss the need to address inequality and on the other, they implement targeted punitive policies that increase inequality.

The welfare master narrative involves stories of a strong, generous welfare state providing services and support to solve problems and ensure the well-being of all citizens. Crime prevention discussions often mention of using welfare initiatives, such as increasing investments in schools and social services, to address the social factors that lead to crime. While narratives about investing in welfare-based solutions to reducing crime are present, they are again used in a supplementary position:

In the coming years' state budgets, therefore, all other expenditure increases need to be tested against more resources for welfare and security in the country. Again, welfare and crime, that's where our focus is, that's where everyone's focus needs to be (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019j).

Welfare and security, that's what our mission boils down to. Strong welfare, strong police, strong preventive measures, a strong society (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019j).

Again, these narratives are either paired with or overpowered by punitive crime control initiatives. Some publications discuss the need for “both long-term welfare initiatives and strong measures against crime” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016b). However, this example shows a sentence about “targeted social initiatives” to prevent gang recruitment, “investments in schools in vulnerable areas,” and better social services on evenings and weekends, sandwiched between discussions of increasing penalties for “virtually all” crimes committed by gang members, expanding surveillance opportunities and capabilities, increasing detention opportunities, and

faster prosecutions of gang criminals (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020e). While talk of using welfare to support community responses to crime has not disappeared, it is clear it has taken a backseat.

The best example of a true nod towards rehabilitation in this dataset is the gang defector program. These narratives discuss providing support and resources for programs that help people who want to leave a gang and move away from a “criminal lifestyle” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015a). In 2019, the government created a National Defector Program, presented as an initiative that benefits the entire society by supporting former gang members in helping them find treatment, training, and work (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019p). This narrative competes with tough on crime narratives that describe attacking, combatting, and fighting against gang crime. However, the two narratives are not incompatible and are used together in the Gang Violence Intervention strategy. This is exemplified in this newspaper description of its implementation in Malmö:

Sluta Skjut has been based around so-called ‘call-ins’, in which known gang members on probation are asked to attend meetings, where law enforcement officials warn them that if shootings and explosions continue, they and the groups around them will be subject to intense focus from police (Nilsson, 2021).

In this strategy, the call-ins and defector programs are offered to people involved in gangs while the threat of prison follows close behind. Again, this could be a way to legitimize or soften the punitive sanctions because the Government can claim that gang members were offered a way out and notified of the consequences of their non-compliance. This is similar to sociologist Victor Rios’ writing on the failure of California police officers’ attempt to use both “hard-handed” and “soft-handed” techniques to connect with at-risk youth. Of the boys Rios followed in his ethnography, none of them changed their lifestyle in response to police interventions or threats of punishment but most were willing to alter their identity in exchange for jobs and economic opportunity (Rios, 2017, p. 92). What Rios demonstrates, that the call-ins programs and their conditional punishments miss, is that these gang members are not refusing to participate in society altogether, they are simply refusing to participate “in the subservient positions to which they are

relegated” (Rios, 2017, p. 92). Thus, a defector program that does not address the marginalization that drives people to gangs in the first place only papers over the cracks at the root of this problem.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Presser's "general narrative logic of harm" helps to structure the findings of this paper. In this framework, polarized narratives, criminalization and tropes of individual responsibility function to reduce harm targets. On the other hand, the specific ways that sequenced narratives shape assumptions and thought patterns create the belief that 'Swedish expansionism' is not only logical and necessary but also natural and unavoidable. The results section on actors shows how harm targets are reduced through character polarization that pits society against gangs and young people, who are constructed as foreigners and outsiders to justify their removal from society. The section on plots demonstrates the ability of narrative sequencing to create understandings of crime control that suggest expansionist solutions. Narrative about crime and individual responsibility create the causality need to justify punitive interventions. Finally, master narratives influence both components of Presser's harm logic by the shaping assumptions and beliefs about crime control that encourage specific policy responses. The correctionalist ideas about minimizing the harmful impact of prison are replaced with deterrence and just deserts master narratives that create the beliefs that criminals deserve to be punished and that punishment serves a deterrent purpose. Additionally, the situational prevention, neoliberal, and jeopardy master narratives all connect crime with specific subsections of the population to ensure the most marginalized people in society become the targets of harm-causing penal policies.

The narratives found in the "A Safer Sweden" collection confirm what many already claim, that the principles of Nordic exceptionalism do not represent current Swedish penal policies. In his second attempt at justifying the Nordic exceptionalism thesis, Pratt uses Lappi-Seppälä's claim that "when Nordic prison conditions and practices are examined against the US, the Nordics come from another Penal Planet" (Lappi-Seppälä, 2019; Pratt, 2020, p. 24). I believe much is lost in Pratt's analysis that constantly looks at Swedish prisons through a relative lens. The extremist nature of American prison policy serves as a foil against which any other country's penal policy appears tame and reasonable. Rather than accepting Nordic penal systems as exceptional simply because they are not American, 'Swedish exceptionalism' urges people to consider the direction of the current moment. The concept emphasizes that, while it is on a smaller pace and scale, Sweden is following the same pattern of penal growth as American and Britain and is adopting many of the same beliefs and assumptions.

It is important to look internally at the changes in Swedish policy regardless of how it compares to other countries. The statistical comparisons show only a small part of this story. Examining at narratives allows for an analysis of the beliefs, assumptions, and social conditions that drive the country's view of punishment. The "A Safer Sweden" collection shows that the narratives about rehabilitation and treatment that were the foundation of the welfare sanction have been replaced by narratives that emphasize security and control. This shift is best described by Garland, who writes:

Criminal justice was shaped by the politics of social democracy, and its ideal were re-integrative ideals of an inclusive welfare state society. And if its actual practices fell far short of those ideals, as they typically did, they could at least be criticized by reference to these ideals and reformed in ways that lessened the gap. Today, welfare state institutions still play a supporting role in economic and social life, just as penal-welfare institutions still underpin criminal justice. But that solidarity project no longer dominates the rhetoric of policy or the logic of decision making. The high ideals of solidarity have been eclipsed by the more basic imperatives of security, economy, and control (Garland, 2002, p. 199).

These new ideals are visible in many of the narratives discussed in this paper. 'Swedish exceptionalism' is brought on by an increased emphasis on security and control as well as the use of imprisonment for segregation and public safety, rather than for rehabilitation.

The concept of 'Swedish expansionism' is my description of Sweden's penal growth within its unique cultural context. The ideals of rehabilitation and solidarity have not completely disappeared, but they serve significantly different functions. Intervention and prevention narratives, as well as symbolic mentions of welfare, social problems, and rehabilitation, give policies with an expansionist and punitive function the generous image of the welfare state and the assumed benevolence of its interventions. Thus, the identity building power of narratives is used to balance the function of the policies with the appearance.

This paper's focus on narrative sequencing allows it to deconstruct these documents to understand motivations and purposes, and highlight what is symbolic, what is hidden, and what is assumed. The goals of expanded penal power, increased security and use of carceral solutions are

decorated with relics of a welfarist past as the polices function to target racialized others constructed as enemies and outsiders. The power of narratives to construct thought patterns and cognitive systems is another important insight gained from narrative sequencing. Master narratives such as proportionality, deterrence, and just deserts create compelling arguments that are difficult to oppose and that can have a long-lasting impact on the way punishments are carried out.

While I believe that the lens of comparison used by Pratt is skewed, it is important to keep this discussion perspective. It is certainly true that the rest of the world can learn a lot from Swedish criminal justice institutions. Yet, this conclusion does not negate the fact that there are many reasons to be concerned with the current direction of Swedish crime control strategies. The movement towards embracing ‘tough on crime’ politics and using punitive solutions to address social problems brings serious consequences, especially when paired with continued increases in inequality and segregation. While this threat must be taken seriously, Sweden’s movement towards punitivism is not irreversible (though the harm caused by these policies, especially related to migration detention and deportation, almost certainly is). The historically ambivalent nature of Swedish penal policy demonstrates that it is possible for the tide to turn and for incarceration rates to drop once again. But this is not guaranteed.

This is also not a claim that a return to the nostalgic days of correctionalism is the answer to Sweden’s problems. As Barker powerfully describes, a welfare oriented penal system that is repressive and exclusive towards those who do not fit into the national narrative is still deeply problematic and harmful. Reversing Sweden’s punitive turn requires a rebuilding of solidarity projects and narratives that promote inclusion and equality rather than insecurity and criminalization. This is no small task, especially as far right populists in Sweden and across the world spread racist anti-immigrant rhetoric. It will not be easy, but it *is* possible. As Loïc Wacquant often states, “the advent of the penal state is not destiny,” (Wacquant, 2001a, 2001b).

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Chapter 8. Appendix

Figure 1. A graph of the number of prisoners in Sweden, per 100,000 people, from 1921 to 2011 (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, p. 33)

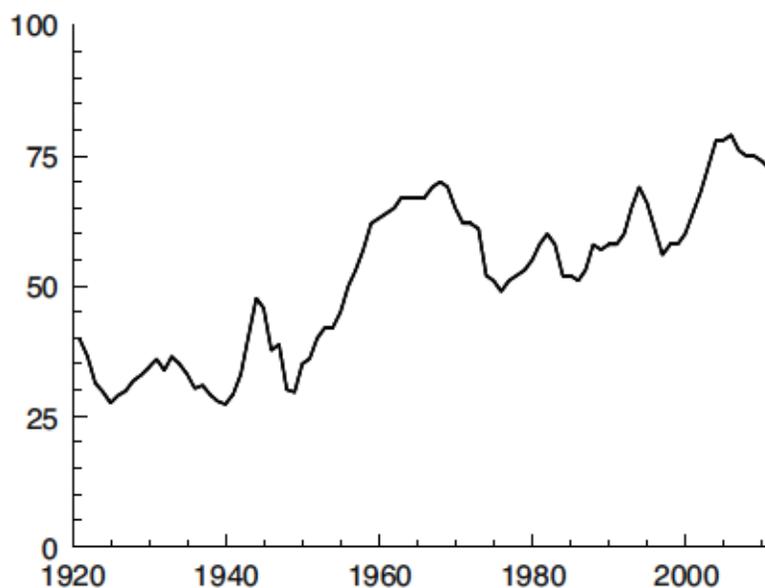


Figure 3.1 Number of prisoners, including remand prisoners, per 100,000 population, 1921–2011. Stock data

Source: Official Swedish Criminal Justice Statistics, compiled by the authors.

Figure 2. Lappi-Seppälä's list of Swedish law reforms and their effects on the use of prison in Sweden (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007, pp. 246–247).

TABLE 2
Rough (and Subjective) Estimation of the Effects on Prisoner Rates:
Sweden

Effects	Law Reforms Tending to Increase or Decrease Prison Use
+	1968 Serious drug offenses maximum 2 years to > 4 years
+	1969 Serious drug offenses maximum 4 years to > 6 years
–	1970 Decriminalizing moral offenses (including abortion)
+	1972 Serious drug offenses maximum 6 years to > 10 years
–	1972 Nonprosecution of minor property offenses expanded
–	1973 Discount rules for time served in remand
–	1974 Revocation of parole restricted
+	1975 Stiffer penalties for economic crime
–	1976 Breaking and entering defined as ordinary theft (and not aggravated theft)
	1977 Plan: new sanction system based on proportionality
–	1977 Decriminalization of public drunkenness
+	1978 Stiffer penalties for child pornography
–	1979 Experiment on contractual treatment
+	1980 Stiffer penalties for child pornography
–	1980 Extending probation as an alternative to imprisonment
–	1980 Restrictions on the use of imprisonment for juveniles under 21
+	1980 Increased penalties for receiving stolen goods
–	1981 Preventive detention abolished
–	1982 Minimum time before parole 3 months to > 2 months, revocation of parole
+	1981 Domestic violence under public prosecution
– –	1983 Release on parole after one-half
–	1983 Fine default abolished
+	1984 Stiffer penalties for sex crimes and broader definition of rape
+	1985 Stiffer penalties for economic crime
+ +	1985 Stiffer penalties for drug offenses
+	1985 Stiffer penalties for video violence
	1986 Plan: prison committee (SOU 1988:13–15): Overall reduction of penalty levels
–	1988 Contractual treatment stabilized
+	1988 Stiffer penalties for domestic violence
+	1988 Consumption of drugs criminalized
?	1989 Sentencing reform (neoclassicism)
–	1990 Experiment on community service
–	1990 Drunk driving limit from 0.5 to 0.2 per thousand; restrictions for imprisonment
+	1993 Stiffer penalties for several violence and sexual offenses
+	1993 Stiffer penalties for drug offenses, doping criminalization
+ +	1994 Aggravated drunk driving 1.2 to > 1.0 per thousand; increased maximum penalty and use of imprisonment
– –	1994 Experiment with electronic monitoring
+	1998 New (residential) juvenile penalty
+	1998 Criminalization of the possession of child pornography

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Effects	Law Reforms Tending to Increase or Decrease Prison Use
++	1998 Increased penalties for crimes against women ("women's peace package")
+	1998 Criminalization of the use of prostitution services
- - -	1999 Electronic monitoring for enforcement of maximum 3-month prison sentences
- - -	1999 Community service, extension and stabilization
+++	1999 Release on parole after two-thirds, minimum time to be served 1 month
-	2001 Experiment on electronic monitoring in parole phase
- -	2005 Electronic monitoring expanded up to 6 months; the parole experiment stabilized

Figure 3. Von Hofer and Tham's list of expansions and contractions of penal law from 1968 to 2011 (von Hofer & Tham, 2013, pp. 47–48).

Table 3.3 Expansion and contraction of penal law 1968–2011 and type of government

Government	Expansion of penal law	Contraction of penal law
1968–1976 Social democratic	1968:7 Drugs 1971:10 Tax fraud 1971:99 Aircraft hijacking 1972:67 Drugs 1972:96 Gambling 1973:37 Terrorism 1973:115 Temporary arrest 1975/76:82 Debtor crimes	1970:125 Pornography 1972:138 Military arrest 1972:138 Death penalty in war 1974:20 Prison regime 1974:70 Abortion 1975/76:42 Recidivism 1975/76:42 Theft and robbery 1975/76:113 Drunkenness 1976/77:104 Conversion of fines 1978/79:212 Youth prison abolished 1980/81:1 Prison regime 1980/81:44 Prison two weeks 1981/82:153 Parole 1980/81:46 Internment abolished
1976–1982 Centre-right	1978/79:62 Prison regime 1980/81:46 Drugs 1980/81:108 Environmental crime 1981/82:43 Battery of women 1981/82:85 Economic crime 1981/82:187 Pornography	

Continued

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Government	Expansion of penal law	Contraction of penal law
1982–1991 Social democratic	1982/83:141 Drugs 1983/84:135 Prison regime 1983/84:105 Sex crimes 1984/85:116 Pornography 1987/88:71 Consumption of drugs 1987/88:120 Recidivism 1987/88:137 Battery of women	1982/83:85 Half time parole 1982/83:90 Conversion of fines 1986/87:106 Contract treatment 1986/87:112 Pre-trial detention 1989/90:2 Drink-driving
1991–1994 Centre-right	1991/92:35 Sex with children 1992/93:4 Parole 1992/93:141 Assault, threats etc. 1992/93:142 Consumption of drugs 1993/94:44 Drink-driving 1993/94:101 Hate crimes	1991/92:109 Community service 1993/94:184 Electronic supervision
1994–2006 Social democratic	1996/97:135 Witness threats etc. 1997/98:55 Abuse of women 1997/98:55 Buying sex 1997/98:96 Parole 1997/98:97 Criminal records etc. 1998/99:43 Drugs while driving 1999/00:109 Insider trading 1999/00:124 Smuggling 2001/02:124 Trafficking, sex. 2002/03:138 Graffiti 2004/05:45 Rape 2005/06:177 Special powers	2001/02:126 Restorative justice 2004/05:34 Electronic supervision
2006–2012 Centre-right	2007/08:97 Drink-driving 2007/08:163 Special powers 2008/09:118 Murder 2008/09:141 Grooming 2009/10:50 Statue of limitation 2009/10:70 Child pornography 2009/10:105 Drug testing children 2009/10:147 Serious violent crimes 2009/10:152 Trafficking 2010/11:45 Stalking 2010/11:77 Buying sex	2009/10:191 Criminal records

Figure 4. Graphs of the Swedish prison population and prison population rate per 100,000 from 2000 to 2018 (World Prison Brief, 2016).

