Show and Tell

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the representation of Swedish Colonial History in the Historiska Museet, through the lenses of Swedish Exceptionalism and Nation Branding

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Course Code: MRSM15
Semester: Spring 2023
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Words: 21 264

Abstract

When looking from the outside, Sweden is an *exceptional* country, with a tradition of neutrality and no notable colonial past; but history paints a different picture. This thesis investigates the portrayal of Sweden and the impact of narratives of Swedish exceptionalism in the Historiska Museet in Stockholm, through the analysis of the depiction of Swedish colonial history and Human Rights discourses. While the nation-building nature of museums is well researched, the present study takes into consideration the concept of nation branding, thus focusing on the experience of the international public and the creation of the xenostereotype. The thesis adopts a multidisciplinary approach, conducting a visual analysis and a Critical Discourse Analysis of the exhibitions "Sveriges Historia" and "History Unfolds - a reflection". The results show the presence of contrasting narratives on colonialism and representation of the nation. While portrayals of negative or difficult sides of history are present in the exhibitions, the museum employs concepts of Swedish exceptionalism and Human Rights discourses in order to *show and tell* a grand narrative of Sweden as a continuity of success and progress.

Keywords: National museums, Swedish exceptionalism, Swedish colonialism, nation branding, uses of history, Critical Discourse Analysis, Human Rights, colonial history

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Andreas Tullberg, for believing in this project, supporting and pushing me during this last semester.

I would also like to thank my friends and family, near and far, for their help and support.
In particular, Amy, Cecilia, Ina, Julie, Matt, Türkü and Rachel: these two years would not have been the same without you, and I feel lucky to call you my friends.

I would like to thank Mimmi: I am happy I got to share the internship, the turkey and marriages with you. To Fredrik Thomasson, Ale Pålsson, and Victor Wilson, thank you for introducing me to St. Barthélemy and the colonial archive.

A big thank you goes to Halldór, for listening to my rants about this thesis, and everything else.

for Andrea

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1. Introduction

In 2014, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) included Sweden in the countries considered responsible for slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, and that could then be called to present reparations.[1] The concept of Swedish colonialism can be confusing at first: it clashes with both the contemporary image of Sweden as a strong supporter of Human Rights and anti-racist, socially progressive views, and untainted by "slavery and historical misdeeds".[2] As described by the scholar Gunlög Fur, it is almost an "unthinkable connection"[3], showing the impact of myths and self-representation on the perception of Sweden as exceptional. In this way, the "Swedish colonial amnesia"[4] has been directly challenged by CARICOM's claims.

However, this is not the only episode showing the importance of the perception and representation of Sweden in recent times. The *shock* expressed by the Swedish public and international media after the 2022 elections[5] might be a sign of a deeper shift in both the internal and external perception of Sweden, already put under stress by the Covid-19 pandemic. The current political situation calls for a close analysis of the role of knowledge creation and societal views of the nation, especially as there is a history of Sweden Democrats

[1] D. Dunkley-Malcom, 'CARICOM Reparations Commission Steps up Advocacy for Reparatory Justice', *Caricom today*, 09 July 2020. https://today.caricom.org/2020/07/03/caricom-reparations-commission-steps-up-advocacy-for-reparatory-justice/ (last accessed: 15 May 2023).

[2] F. Thomasson, 'The Caribbean Scorpion: The Saint-Barthélemy Archive and Swedish Colonial Amnesia'. *Small Axe*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2020, p. 63.

[3] G. Fur, 'Colonialism and Swedish History: unthinkable connections?' in M. Naum and J. M. Nordin (eds.) *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, New York, NY, Springer, 2013.

[4] Thomasson, 'The Caribbean Scorpion'.

[5] The 2022 elections saw a narrow win of the right-bloc coalition, that included also the far right, populist Sweden Democrats party (Sverigedemokraterna, SD). Born in the late 80s out of a Neo-nazi movement and only recently accepted in mainstream politics, SD got more than 20% of the total votes, the highest after the historically influential Social Democratic party. See N. Aylott, and N. Bolin, 'A new right: the Swedish parliamentary election of September 2022', *West European Politics*, vol. 46, n. 5, 2023.

politicians opposing “ideology” and “unfounded claims on our ancestors" in museums.[6] This brings to light the dichotomies existing in the space of the museum, as objective knowledge versus politicised knowledge, traditional versus contemporary, pro or anti status quo, making it the perfect starting point for this research project.

1.1 Research Problem, Aims and Research Questions

This thesis aims to identify and analyse the possible impacts of Swedish exceptionalism narratives through the depiction of Sweden’s colonial history and colonial responsibility from the 16th century onwards in the Historiska Museet. Furthermore, it will consider the role of Human Rights and Human Rights discourses in such representation.

Museums are framed in this thesis as *knowledge creating spaces,* important for the construction and the reproduction of ideas of the nation-state, its society and its position in the world. While most of the existing literature reflects on the connection between nation building and museums, the present study focuses more on the reproduction and the challenge of narratives based on Swedish exceptionalism through the concept of nation branding, thus focusing on the experience of the international public. This means also taking in consideration the confusion and the gaps that an international audience, not as knowledgeable of local and Swedish history, could encounter. What sides of history are shown in detail? What is presented to an outside viewer? How is this framed?

The museum analysed is the Historiska Museet (also known as the Swedish History Museum) in Stockholm. As a national museum, it has the potential and, to some extent, even the responsibility to reach a wider audience, and to present what could be considered as the national self-perception to foreign visitors. The analysis will focus on the exhibitions

[6] Quotes from A. Emilsson, et al, *Motion till riksdagen 2019/20:801 av Aron Emilsson m.fl. (SD),* Sveriges Riksdag website, 01 November 2019, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/motion/museifragor_H702801 (last accessed 22 May 2023). See also the reaction to the Norrköpings Stadsmuseet’s exposition on nazism in Sweden, or the Gothenburg Världskulturmuseet.

"Sveriges Historia" and "History Unfolds - a reflection", as they respectively present the history of Sweden and a reflection on the relationship between history and society.

The analysis of the somewhat *controversial* topic of colonialism brings to light the presence of contrasting histories and perceptions: Sweden is the perfect candidate for this analysis, as it is not usually considered a country influenced by colonial attitudes or with a relevant colonial history.[7] In this way, the research will focus mainly on the issues of presentation and representation, through the authoritative lens of a national museum, of topics that could be particularly problematic for the national and international understanding of the defining character of the nation. Human Rights are then framed as a possible discursive tool in the nation building and branding process.

The thesis will adopt a multidisciplinary approach, taking into consideration theoretical and scholarly concepts from the fields of museology, cultural studies, nationalism studies, history and Human Rights studies, analysing the materials through the methodological tools of Critical Discourse Analysis. This thesis will be guided by some main research questions:

- How is Swedish colonial history portrayed in the Swedish History Museum?
- Is it possible to recognise a narrative of Swedish exceptionalism in the museum? How does this frame the state and its history, in relation to the exceptionalist concepts used by the country in nation branding practices?
- What is the role of Human Rights-related discourses in the representation of the nation in the museum?

The scope of the thesis is limited to the exhibitions "Sveriges Historia" and "History Unfolds - a reflection", along with materials produced by the museum on those exhibitions, such as the website pages, the "History Unfolds" book and podcasts. Furthermore, while a short

[7] See Fur, 'Colonialism and Swedish History: unthinkable connections?'.

historical background will be presented, an in-depth exploration of Swedish colonial history and its current repercussions would be way beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.2 Sweden and Colonialism: Historical Background

Sweden's colonial endeavours include Cabo Corso in Ghana, New Sweden, the Caribbean colony St. Barthélemy, and the colonial treatment of Sápmi. The trading forts of Cabo Corso were founded by the Africa Company in 1650, and were involved in the trade of goods, such as gold and ivory, and of enslaved people. The colony was taken over by the Dutch in 1663. New Sweden was founded in 1638 in the territory between what are now Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey, and was similarly lost to the Dutch in 1655. While those two attempts were not particularly successful, in 1784 Sweden obtained by France the Caribbean island of St. Barthélémy, in exchange for trading rights in Gothenburg.[8] The island, while not ideal for plantations and agriculture, became an important free port, also involved in the trade of enslaved people. The colony was given back to France in 1879, because of its economic losses and after a failed referendum. Sweden also expanded towards the northern territories of Sápmi and the arctic region.[9] In the 17th century, the colonisation had two main purposes: to promote the physical presence of settlers, taking political control of a disputed area, and to exploit the resources present (ex. silver ore).[10] The exploitation of the land has continued for centuries: the contemporary role of the state and of international mining companies in the area has been criticised, for promoting colonial concepts (*terra nullius*) and not taking into account environmental and self-determination issues.[11]

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[8] A. Pålsson, *Our Side of the Water: Political Culture in the Swedish colony of St Barthélemy 1800–1825*., PhD. Diss. Department of History, Stockholm University, 2016, p. 52.

[9] M. Naum and J. M. Nordin, 'Introduction: Situating Scandinavian Colonialism', in M. Naum and J. M. Nordin (eds.) *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, Springer, New York, NY, 2013

[10] D. Lindmark, 'Colonial Encounters in Early Modern Sápmi', in M. Naum and J. M. Nordin (eds.) *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, Springer, New York, NY, 2013.

[11] M. Spangen, 'Without a trace? The Sámi in the Swedish history museum'. *Nordisk museologi*, no. 2, 2015, p. 29.

1.3 The National History Museum

The National History Museum was founded (as the Museum of National Antiquities) in 1866, with a focus on prehistory and early archaeology.[12] The museum presented the "development and progression of society and the nation"[13] in a chronological narrative of the evolution of the nation into its present state. In the 1920s, the museum started to collaborate with the Nordiska Museet. At first, each institution was to present a different part of Swedish History: the former would be responsible for history up to 1523, while the latter from 1523 to contemporary times.[14] The first permanent exhibition, titled "Ten thousand years in Sweden" was present in different forms at the museum from 1943 to 2002 and it can be considered as the predecessor of "Sveriges Historia". The newer permanent exhibition was opened in 2010, the year in which the museum acquired its current name.[15]

[12] R. Pettersson, 'The Museum of National Antiquities in Sweden and its national agenda: an overview of the 1900-1970 period.' *Great Narratives of the Past Traditions and Revisions in National Museums: Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus; European National Museums: Identity Politics; the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen; Paris 28 June–1 July & 25–26 November 2011*. No. 078, Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012, p. 229.

[13] J. Hegardt, 'Narrating a (New) Nation? Temporary exhibitions at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm; Sweden between 1990 and 2009.' *Great Narratives of the Past Traditions and Revisions in National Museums: Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus; European National Museums: Identity Politics; the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen; Paris 28 June–1 July & 25–26 November 2011*, n. 078, Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012.

[14] Hegardt, 'Narrating a (New) Nation?', p. 493.

[15] Hegardt, 'Narrating a (New) Nation?', p. 503.

2. Literature Review

In order to present a more cohesive and comprehensive account of the National History Museum, this chapter will take into account different scholarly voices regarding the role and the identity of museums and national museums. While doing so, this chapter will also include relevant works informing the background, the theoretical framework and the method of this thesis and relevant academic debates on the matter. Most of the literature touches on the processes of nation building and identity construction happening in national museums: while not directly the focus of this thesis, it is important to understand the phenomenon and to see how this affects the representation of the nation in national museums.

First of all, what is a national museum? This term does not indicate any specific type of museum, nor its characteristics. It could be an art museum, a natural history museum or an archaeological one. It could be in the capital city, or in any other place. A first step is the general definition of museum that the International Council of Museums has voted for on the 24th of August 2022:

> A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.[16]

Defining a national museum can be a bit trickier. According to M. Elizabeth Weiser, while visitors are likely to indicate different characteristics *ideally* defining which museums can be called national, museum officials and "insiders" tend to define them *operationally*. In their view, national museums are institutions funded by the national government or state, or they have been specifically designated as such.[17] Eunamus, an EU funded project studying

[16] ICOM website, 'Museum definition' https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/ (last accessed: 07 May 2023).
[17] M. E.Weiser, *Museum rhetoric: Building civic identity in national spaces*, University Park, PA, Penn State Press, 2017, p.21.

national museums active between 2010 and 2013, describes them as "institutionalized negotiations of national values that form a basis for national identity and cultural underpinnings for the operation of the state", in order to centre their variable cultural value and role.[18]

As indicated by Peter Aronsson, while museums were founded around the world as a response to the needs of colonialism and international politics, the relevance of national museums increased strongly in the years after 1870, with a revival after WWII, although with the added lens of postcolonial nationalism.[19] According to Weiser, national museums were the "outcomes of two phenomena [...] Enlightenment and empire.[20] National museums answered to the need of the state to define, categorise and reproduce an acceptable world view, through ideas of the self and of the other: as indicated by Eunamus, they were and are "cultural armaments".[21]

While it could be argued that in the literature, national museums are often described as tasked with the discussion and the presentation of national heritage and identity, they are not the only ones. It would be misleading and reductive not to include smaller, local and community museums in the wider network of institutions that conduct this work, even if on a different scale.[22] In the scope of this research project, a national museum was chosen because of its more clear role as negotiator of the national identity (and thus self-perception) through history, while also being more likely to be visited by foreign tourists, being situated in the capital city and having a recognised authority on the matter. A national museum is in this way more or less directly connected to both the *nation building* and *nation branding*

[18] P. Aronsson, et al., *National museums making history in a diverse Europe, Eunamus report no. 7*, Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012, p. 10.
[19] P. Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums: Exploring comparative approaches to the study of national museums' in S. Knell et al. (eds.), *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 31.
[20] Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, p. 23.
[21] P. Aronsson, et al., *National museums making history in a diverse Europe*, p. 11.
[22] E. Chapman, 'What Makes a Museum National? National Identities at Community Museums'. In P. Aronsson and M. Hillström (eds.) *NaMu; Making National Museums Program; Setting the Frames; 26-28 February; Norrköping; Sweden* (No. 022). Linköping University Electronic Press, 2007.

processes, as they can negotiate and work through the self-perception and in this way informing or reinforcing xenostereotypes.

The connection and tension between the two has been exemplified in the article "Producing history, (re)branding the nation: the case of an exhibition on the Danish Golden Age", by Ida Lunde Jørgensen and Mads Mordhorst.[23] By analysing how the same exhibition was curated both in Denmark and Sweden, they highlighted the role of museums in both nation building and nation branding, and how the same material can be curated in a way to express different narratives, often in order to present a "desirable and superior" image of the nation.[24] This shows the role of pre-existing, institutionalised myths, the challenges to produce the same myths in a different context, and renegotiate some older narratives, while balancing what could be considered as the current national identity and the nation brand portrayed outside of the nation.[25]

The same nature of the museum is deeply connected to the concepts of knowledge and power through authority, and how those two feed on and grow through each other. Aronsson, in his essay in the book *History Unfolds - Samtidskonst Möter Historia/Contemporary Art Meets History* (focusing on the role of museums in "creating values and norms"[26]) delineates a brief temporal line of authoritative sources in western culture. According to the Bible, "in the beginning was the word [...] thus the authoritative text was the mother of truth", and from that, indisputable knowledge; the Renaissance and later the Enlightenment instead brought forward the idea of the text as a tool of *Truth*. It was then in the systematic observation and organisation of the observed reality that knowledge could shine and be manifested, even if through the societal lens of each era. The organisation of knowledge was in this way also

[23] I. L. Jørgensen and M. Mordhorst, 'Producing history, (re)branding the nation: the case of an exhibition on the Danish Golden Age', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2022.
[24] Jørgensen and Mordhorst, 'Producing history, (re)branding the nation', p. 604.
[25] Jørgensen and Mordhorst, 'Producing history, (re)branding the nation', p. 616-617.
[26] P. Aronsson, 'Authorised Memory', in H. Larsson Pousette (ed.), *History Unfolds. Samtidskonst Möter Historia/Contemporary Art Meets History*, Stockholm, Historiska Museet, 2017, p. 175.

strongly intertwined with the role of those that made it possible: the elites and the collectors, who could at the same time legitimise their societal role.[27]

However, it is when the cabinets of curiosities or the private collections were opened to the wider public, united or repurposed, first as public museums, then as national museums, that their discursive and representing powers were brought to light. Museums became the stages for the creation and the re-creation of the nation and its identity. Weiser argues that the latter can be seen as a form of rhetorical action, especially as the national museum is seen as negotiating national values, and can claim this as its role as long as it presents a view of the national identity substantially agreed upon.[28] The museum and its visitors are furthermore a *discourse community*, creating a shared and collective historical identity - a process that follows the script of the imagining community as identified by Benedict Anderson.[29] In the second edition of *Imagined Communities*, the scholar indicates museums, alongside census and maps, as a tool used in order to let the citizens imagine the nation.[30] It is an encounter between the visitor/citizen and the objects exhibited, but it goes beyond their material characteristics.

As discussed by Simon Knell, the dialogue between historical objects and the visitors lead to the objectification of national memories. The anchoring of the nation itself to the museum materials is conducted through what the scholar describes as "act of memory rather than history", a concept taken from Pierre Nora's work.[31] According to Weiser, museums are public spaces not depicting *who we were*, but rather representing *who we are*, as a first step towards the definition and the development of *what we do now*.[32]

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[27] Aronsson, 'Authorised Memory', p. 179.
[28] Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, p. 22.
[29] M. E. Weiser, 'Individual Identity/Collective History. Personalizing Essence in the Museum' in A. Davis, and K. Smeds (eds.), *Visiting the visitor: an enquiry into the visitor business in museums*, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2016, pp. 39-40.
[30] B. Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, Verso, 1991.
[31] S. Knell, 'National museums and the national imagination' in S. Knell et al. (eds.), *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 11.
[32] Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, p. 5.

The objects exhibited, because of the curatorial lens, are then edited and manipulated in order to present a narrative throughout the museum. According to Aronsson, for instance, the type of national narrative is also dependent on the characteristics of the nation-state, as, in the case of Sweden, being one of "smaller states with a long nation-state history".[33] Being already in territorial decline by the time the first national museums were established meant that the focus was shifted on long time narratives on the same existence of the state and finding the necessary points of pride outside of power politics and through the progression of arts and sciences.[34] At the same time, as highlighted by Donald Preziosi in his essay "Myths of nationality", objects that could be considered as "relics of the past" already hold the promise of the present and the future of the nation, and of current, or maybe still unseen, glories.[35]

Objects are not only made to speak about the nation itself and its identity, but also in relation to the Other. This aspect is particularly noticeable in the emergence of ethnographic museums in the 18th and 19th centuries. By analysing an exhibition held in Stockholm in 1907 (the "Ethnographic and missionary exhibition" at the Academy of sciences) and contemporary accounts, Lotten Gustafsson Reinius[36] highlights the dual role of the objects in *exhibiting* both the Congolese and the Swedes. The former were portrayed through a religiously paternalistic and colonial lens, while the latter (as the nation) could be portrayed as "voluntaristic, benevolent, sophisticated, charitable, advanced and wise".[37] This positive national identity is then constructed and strengthened in the comparison with the colonial Other, their perceived primitiveness and the need for an external, western action to elevate them. Identity is constantly negotiated, to be presented and compared to someone else's and its perception.[38]

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[33] Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums', p. 47.
[34] Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums', p. 47.
[35] D. Preziosi, 'Myths of nationality' in S. Knell et al. (eds.), *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 60.
[36] L. Gustafsson Reinius, 'Exhibiting the Congo in Stockholm' in S. Knell et al. (eds.), *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, London, Routledge, 2011.
[37] Gustafsson Reinius, 'Exhibiting the Congo in Stockholm', p. 415.
[38] Weiser, 'Individual Identity/Collective History', p. 40.

The idea of a process of identity building through comparison, intrinsic in the act of meeting objects and knowledge creation in museums, could also be applied to the idea of a tourist coming from another country. They will bring their own identity and preconceptions, dialoguing with the materials and the space in order to construct their own identity through the comparison with the Other presented in the museum. This however is not something that concerns simply the time spent in the museum space, or the exhibition *per se*.

In the essay "Viewing the Museum through an Identity lens", John Falk discusses how the pre-entering and the post-visit narratives elaborated by the visitors relate to each other, and how the time frame for their elaboration should not be limited to the moment of the visit.[39] The scholar defines five to seven different categories[40] of visitors, according to the motivation for their visit to the museum, and argues that each visitor will have a different experience. The categories are understood as performatory roles, defining the whole experience according to the *identity-related needs* and pre-existing expectations that those visiting have on the exhibition.[41]

This conception of the relationship between visitors, identity and museums is not universally agreed upon. In the 2012 Eunamus report, while confirming the importance of the concept of "identity reinforcement"[42] and of museum narratives, it is stated that:

> Most visitors surveyed said they came to national museums for social reasons, for entertainment and education. They did not visit with the intention of developing, understanding or crystallising their national identities. They believed these museums were about history, not identity. Visitors have clear ideas about the purpose of national museums. Most agreed that national museums needed to serve the needs of both national and

[39] J. Falk, 'Viewing the Museum Experience through an Identity Lens', in A. Davis and K. Smeds (eds.), V*isiting the visitor: an enquiry into the visitor business in museums,* Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2016, p. 72-73.

[40] Five categories (explorers, facilitators, professional/hobbyists, experience seekers and rechargers) have been first identified, and utilised in existing literature. Falk proposed two extra categories, the respectful pilgrims and the affinity seekers, after having taken in consideration more varied types of museums (see Falk, p. 81).

[41] Falk, 'Viewing the Museum Experience through an Identity Lens', pp. 80-81, 84.

[42] P. Aronsson, et al., *National museums making history in a diverse Europe*, p. 29.

> international visitors but that by far their most important role was to present an "accurate" history of the nation.[43]

It could be argued that the concept of identity is in itself more complex than just the national identity: every person brings in themselves, and thus in the museum, different types of identities and pre-conceptions of themselves. As observed by Weiser, Falk's model is centred on the performance of certain roles by the visitors, on the interrelationship between the museum narrative of history and the polyphony of the audience's identities.[44]

Furthermore, it is also important to analyse critically the assumption that seems to divide, in the visitors' eyes, the representations of history and identity. In "Museum Rhetoric", Weiser starts from the Burkean concept of identification, in order to analyse the museum as in a rhetorical lens. This brings the scholar to put the "crafted aspect of the real" as the centre of her study: museums, by choosing what to exhibit and crafting how they are presented, have the effect of "turning life into *diction*" (sic).[45] The use of language and the same act of discussing reality and history, however, bring a necessary reduction, and a selection of what values and concepts to highlight. By trying to describe the world, museum institutions tend to shape it and present to the visitors a crafted perception.[46]

This view shows how relevant the concept of nation branding can be in a museum setting: the narratives depicted can inform the perception of a state, especially as national museums are inherently perceived to have a high level of authority. For example, according to Knell, it is possible to notice how essentialist discourses regarding the character and the qualities of each nation-state were morally legitimised and reproduced in the spaces and exhibitions of its national museum. Listing different examples, the scholar includes the "social morality" presented in Sweden as an historical anchoring to the nation's past.[47] Another example of

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[43] P. Aronsson, et al., *National museums making history in a diverse Europe,* p. 28.
[44] Weiser,'Individual Identity/Collective History', p. 43.
[45] Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric,* p. 9.
[46] Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric,* p. 9-10.
[47] Knell, 'National museums and the national imagination', p. 12.

museums shaping historical and national identity perception can come from the choice, over time, of what constitutes "national heritage", whether to focus on a classical, ancient past or, as in the case of Sweden and Hazelius's work, on peasant culture.[48]

Tony Bennett's seminal work *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* conducts a analysis of the *exhibitionary complex* as a means of constructing the visitor (also in a gendered dimension[49]) as "both subject and object to the knowledge it organizes".[50] In particular, the scholar draws from the Foucaldian study of the *power to punish* and the *carceral archipelago* and the Gramscian concept of the "ethical and educative function of the modern state".[51]

Through these theoretical lenses, museums and other institutions that focus on *showing and telling* to the public could then be seen as historically constructed as tools to build the citizens and discipline them. Cultural practices that were meant to morally and intellectually elevate the people could then be described as part of the Foucaldian governmental apparatus of power. Between the late eighteen and mid-nineteenth century, museums were then framed as leading the working class to self-improvement, parallel and juxtaposed to the transformation of the *power to punish* described by Foucault.[52] Both the *exhibitionary complex* and the *carceral archipelago*, argues Bennett, are concerned with issues of order and power, even though they have addressed these questions in different ways.

In the same decades, Bennett positions a notable variation in the arrangement of the structure of the museums, thus also influencing the meanings constructed in the exhibitions. The focus shifted from a principle of *rarity* to one of *representativeness*: while the private collections were supposed to amuse the élites, the museums as public spaces were directed towards the

[48] Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums', p. 50.
[49] See T. Bennett. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1995, pp. 30-32.
[50] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum.*
[51] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 63.
[52] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, pp. 22-23.

education and the instruction of the masses, often through historicised principles of display and the focus on the exemplary.[53] New development in different disciplines, such as history and biology, informed the classification and exhibition of the materials. This allowed for cultural and political national narratives to be inserted in longer historical and natural developmental series.

The focus on rhetorics of evolution and progress could then be used as a discursive tool in order to highlight and naturalise a western centric, imperialist order of things and people.[54] This was extremely clear in the shameful public display of racialised and *othered* bodies, both for "entertainment" and to highlight the distance of the expected audience from those considered in a lower position in the scale of progress.[55] The representation of *knowledge* was in such a way weaponised in order to naturalise the existing *power* structures: the museums became tools in order to "render power visible to the people and, at the same time, to represent to them that power as their own".[56]

The idea of museums as the catalyst for the construction and the self-improvement of the citizen, both through the contact with art and knowledge and with higher, more refined classes, can be seen as particularly present in the work of Artur Hazelius. As the Nordiska Museet's motto orders, one of the imperatives of the museum in its original form was to "Känn dig själv", *nosce te ipsum,* know thyself. This can be understood both in its more literal sense, to have knowledge of yourself, and through the more classically recognised one, to "know your place in comparison to the Gods". Gone the Gods, the nation-state could take their place: the role of the citizen could then be negotiated and re-designed in the museum, through the lens of patriotic love.

[53] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* p. 33, 39.
[54] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum,* p. 77.
[55] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum,* p. 83.
[56] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum,* p. 98.

Hazelius founded Skansen and the Nordiska Museet in the 1890s with a very specific intent: to wake up the Swedish folk, reforming the society into a "folk community", taking inspiration from earlier Romantic nationalistic ideals.[57] With the explicit invention of national traditions[58], suspended between the historical and the social relevance of the time, Hazelius intended to transform the public, from the mass to the folk, and redirect its pure love to its country, understood as both the physical locus and the "historical accumulation of good deeds".[59] This also had the objective of being a performance of, and an invitation towards, good society and patriotic love.[60]

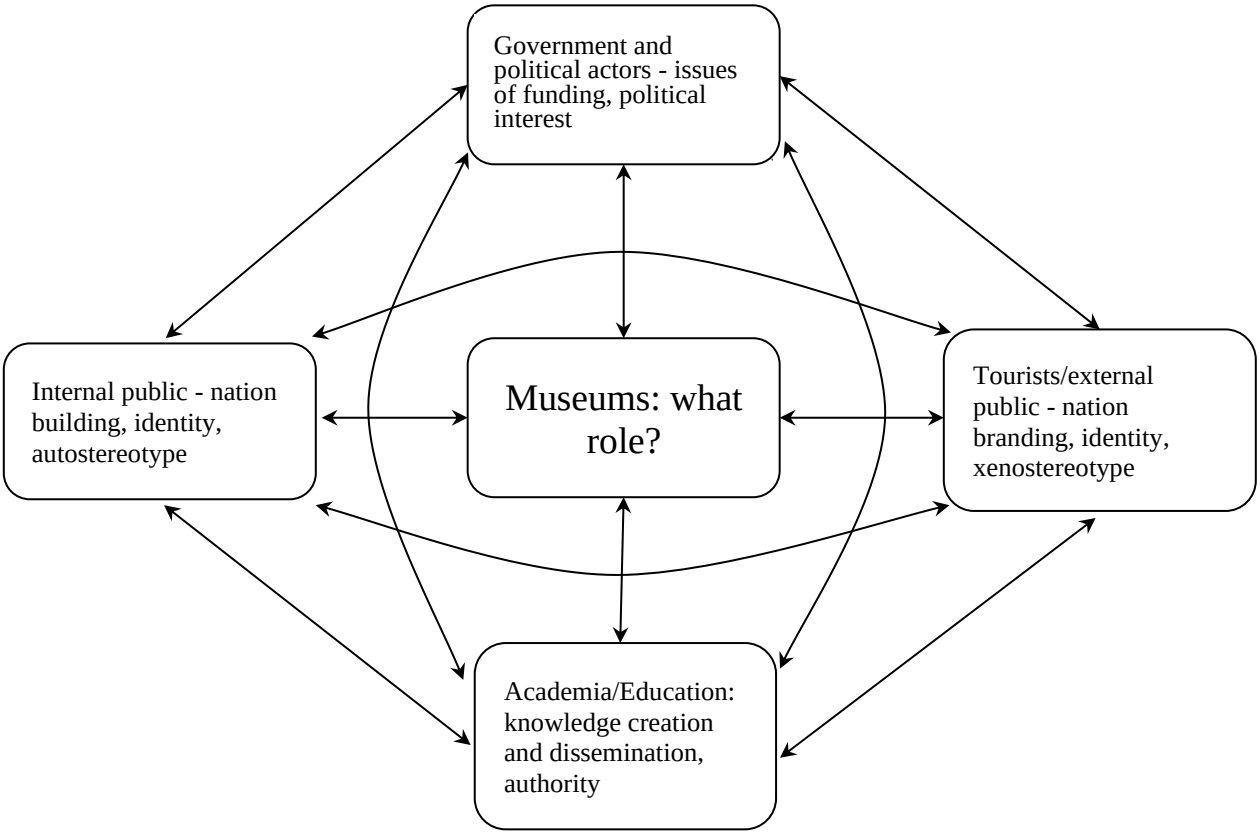
Women of good families and young ladies of the high society were considered as the pinnacle of the examples of the folk community, symbols of "love and heritage"[61], even in situations that would now be considered grotesque or downright offensive (see the misuse of Sámi garb and the presence of a "~~Lapp~~ Camp"[62] in Skansen). Furthermore, their presence had the effect of lending legitimacy and morality to the festivals and exhibitions, and exemplified the good national character.[63] They assumed a role similar to the working class women described by Bennett[64]: mediating the public space of the museum and of the fair, in order to give the other citizens the possibility to access *higher* knowledge (interestingly, not connected to the higher class, but to the "traditional" peasant life), be civilised and moulded through this encounter.

[57] M. Bäckström, 'Loading guns with patriotic love: Arthur Hazelius's attempts at Skansen to remake Swedish society' in S. Knell et al. (eds.), *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, London, Routledge, 2011, pp. 69-70.
[58] See E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), The *invention of tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.
[59] Bäckström, 'Loading guns with patriotic love', pp. 76-77.
[60] Bäckström, 'Loading guns with patriotic love', pp. 80.
[61] Bäckström, 'Loading guns with patriotic love', pp. 83.
[62] The word ~~"Lapp",~~ widely used to refer to the Sami in the past, is now commonly considered a slur (see C. G. Ojala, '"Encountering" the Other" in the North: Colonial histories in early modern northern Sweden', in M. Naum and & F. Ekengren (Eds.), *Facing Otherness in Early Modern Sweden: Travel, Migration and Material Transformations, 1500-1800*, Boydell & Brewer, 2018, p. 210). Striking the word seems like the best way to show both the historical use and context, while acknowledging the harmful history of the word.
[63] Bäckström, 'Loading guns with patriotic love', pp. 84.
[64] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 30-32.

3. Theory

Theoretical perspectives from different disciplines, such as nation branding, Swedish exceptionalism, new museology and uses of history, will be explored in this section.

Museums, and national museums in particular, do not exist in a vacuum, and are deeply embedded in and connected to the society in which they exist and act. In order to understand and frame this analysis more comprehensively, accounting for the relationships between museums and multiple actors and how these dynamics can affect the understanding and the meaning of their role, it could be useful to conceptualise them with a graph.



In particular, this thesis will focus on the relationship between the museums and the "outside", through tourists and foreign visitors. This gives the opportunity to analyse the impact of certain representations of Sweden through a lens of nation branding and intentional political action[65], opposed and complimentary to nation building directed towards the internal public. It is important to notice how this can be considered as a double process, touching at the same time the autostereotype and the xenostereotype of Sweden.

The relationship between the government and museums in the Nordic countries has usually been defined as at a metaphorical "arm's length"[66]. However, this means that the actual "distance" is constantly redefined through and subject to political scrutiny, as highlighted in the statement of the national association "Sveriges Museer" on the increasing political interference from the new government.[67] The discussion and the implementation of the 2017 Museum Law (*Museilagen* and *Kulturarvspropositionen*) brought to light the tensions between different conceptions of how values and knowledge can (or should) impact museums.[68] Changes of political direction on cultural work can also signify different levels of accessibility and inclusivity. An example can be found in the removal of the free entrance from state museums as part of the new budget for culture (up to the 3rd of January 2023, the Historiska was free entry, while currently the entrance ticket is 150kr).[69]

[65] See N. Glover, 'Imaging Community: Sweden in 'cultural propaganda' then and now', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 34 no. 3, 2009.
[66] Ardelius, G., *Respektera museernas oberoende och professionalitet*, Sveriges Museer [website], 14 February 2023, https://sverigesmuseer.se/debatt/respektera-museernas-oberoende-och-professionalitet/ (last accessed: 20 May 2023).
[67] Ardelius, *Respektera museernas oberoende och professionalitet*.
[68] M. Jansén and S. Nyman, 'Foreword', in H. Larsson Pousette (ed.), *History Unfolds. Samtidskonst Möter Historia / Contemporary Art Meets History,* Stockholm, Historiska Museet, 2017, pp. 9.
[69] L. Farran-Lee, and A. Adelai, 'Kulturbudgeten: Fri entré på museer tas bort', *Svt Nyheter*, 08 November 2022, https://www.svt.se/kultur/kulturbudgeten-tillbaka-pa-prepandemisk-niva (last accessed 22 May 2023).

3.1 Nation Branding and Mythmaking

Swedish. Open. Fair. Green. Equal. Queer. Smart. Chill.
On the blue background of the main page of the Study in Sweden website, these words keep on quickly replacing each other to complete the boldly yellow title “Live & learn the (---) way”.[70] The Study in Sweden organisation is a branch of the Swedish Institute, a government agency that “promotes interest and trust in Sweden around the world”[71], and its main target audience is international students who are studying or have an interest in pursuing their higher education in Sweden. The website could be easily the first contact and ambassador with the “Swedish way” for students from all over the world. While it admits that there is room for improvement in any society, the website highlights a series of extremely desirable traits found in Sweden and even turns some less positive stereotypes, like social aloofness, into a cheeky joke.

The Swedish Institute, founded in January 1945, has been described as one of the most influential actors in the nation branding and cultural diplomacy policies that Sweden has implemented since the end of the Second World War. It has been quite successful, as the yearly Anholt Nation Brands Index (NBI) reports suggests: Sweden has been steadily in the top 10 country brands in the last years and it could be easily indicated as one of the most recognizable and positive brands for decades.[72] However, this was not always the case. The founding of the Swedish Institute followed the so-called “America Inquiry" (1943-1944), to test the solidity of the relationship between the USA and Sweden. While the image of Sweden abroad had been strongly positive, as it was hailed as progressive and scientific in the years between the two wars, the concept of “Amoral Sweden" seemed to have a stronger grip on international audiences than it was desirable.[73]

[70] Study in Sweden [website], https://studyinsweden.se/ (last accessed: 22 May 2023).
[71] Swedish Institute [website], https://si.se/en/ (last accessed: 20 May 2023).
[72] Glover, ‘Imagining Community’, pp. 256-257.
[73] Glover, ‘Imagining Community’, pp. 246-24.

In “Imagining Community”, Nikolas Glover highlights the importance of the relationship between the autostereotypes and the xenostereotypes of Sweden, and how the use of these narratives can push an essentialist understanding of the country, its history and its population.[74] The process of creating and presenting what would later be described as “Brand Sweden" had the role of “organizing nationalism from without”[75]: after the war, being openly nationalistic did not seem like a feasible option, but it was still possible to construct an image relying on positive connotations. In this case, depictions of progressive politico-economic Sweden could bridge the gap and be considered neutral and uncontroversial enough to be presented to the international community, even if with strong essentialist undertones. Once again, it is important to note that “the construction of images of Sweden and Norden is a reflexive process, where self-images meet the gaze of the Other in a mutually reinforcing way”.[76]

Plain, old school propaganda seems to be out of fashion in most countries, and the same meaning of the word has changed during the years, to mostly negative and authoritarian connotations.[77] Cultural propaganda and nation branding have taken its role instead, with a liberal, market friendly twist. Nation branding focuses on producing and using positive images connected to the nation, in order to construct a recognizable and trustworthy brand. It essentially markets the state through characteristics that would differentiate the country among all others and highlight its strengths: a positive perception can lead to the consolidation or an increase of political and economic power. If taken in consideration critically, it can be particularly useful to understand what is the image that the state wants the international community to think about itself. It can also be understood as the process of constructing the xenostereotype (stereotype on the nation held by external parties), while at the same time reinforcing national myths, by informing the nation building process of what characteristics are both desirable and already present.

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[74] Glover, ‘Imagining Community’.

[75] Glover, ‘Imagining Community’, p. 255.

[76] J. Andersson and M. Hilson, ‘Images of Sweden and the Nordic countries’. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2009, p. 222.

[77] See J. Jarlbrink and F. Norén, ‘The rise and fall of ‘propaganda’ as a positive concept: a digital reading of Swedish parliamentary records, 1867–2019’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2022.

This process is not isolated, and it happens in close proximity with the reevaluation and reconstruction of the national identity for the internal public. The role of myths in the strengthening of the idea of a cohesive national identity as "the people" have been analysed by numerous scholars, but the academic literature is mostly dedicated to the study of the effects of myths inside the limits of the nation-state. However, as argued by Ida Lunde Jørgensen and Mads Mordhorst in the context of an exhibition on the Danish Golden Age:

> The circulation of national myths plays a central role both in nation-building within the domestic population and in the projection of the nation to the outside world – its nationbrand. We view nation-building, the socio-cognitive and political construction of the nation, and nation-branding as two related processes in the production and circulation of meanings that fulfill a people's need for national identity and serve to differentiate them from other nations. In doing so, we find it fruitful to combine nationalism studies with the concept of nation-branding.[78]

There are of course limits and issues connected to the use of such a strategy and to the possible pervasiveness of the concepts utilised. As highlighted by Kristín Loftsdóttir in her feminist and postcolonial critique of the Icelandic nation branding campaigns (as the famous "Inspired by Iceland"), there is the possibility to reinforce and strengthen preexisting problematic conceptions of the space, the people and the national identity.[79]

3.2 Swedish Exceptionalism

The "Brand Sweden" relies on multiple *exceptional* concepts. Sweden is progressive. Sweden is rational and scientific. Sweden has responsible, educated, accepting citizens. Sweden is anti-colonial. Sweden has a strong welfare system, with a specific attention towards human rights and equality. Sweden is anti-racist, and its voting habits seemed to confirm it. Sweden is feminist, and it even has a feminist foreign policy. Sweden has been

[78] Jørgensen and Mordhorst, 'Producing history, (re)branding the nation', p. 603.
[79] K. Loftsdóttir, 'The Exotic North: Gender, Nation Branding and Postcolonialism in Iceland', *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2015.

"up all night", while "the world's just waking up to the climate crisis"[80]. The "Swedish way" is *the way,* and thus is presented as an exceptional and aspirational model, even if it cannot be easily replicable by others, in virtue of its perceived uniqueness. But what does that mean? What happens when some of these claims are put to the test by specific circumstances?

The concept of *national exceptionalism* is a prevalent and widely present component of any sort of nationalism: as highlighted by David Jansson, "there is hardly a nation on Earth that doesn't think of itself as exceptional".[81] In the existing literature, it is mostly associated with the United States of America and the nationalistic belief system founded on *American exceptionalism.* This has different characteristics, but it is strongly based on the perception of the USA as the only superpower - while also revealing the anxiety produced by a possible fall from its status.

American exceptionalism does not only highlight the strength of the country in the international arena, or simply a series of differences when compared to other countries, but it also presents a normative (and comparative) aspect. The exceptionality of one particular country is then understood as the aspects that make it not only different, but "normatively superior".[82] Furthermore, the state cannot avoid its role, needing to be an example and a guide to others in order to fulfil its "destiny". It is then possible to identify two specific souls of exceptionalism: the exemplary and the missionary. While the first is defined by Jansson as "passive exceptionalism", the second is considered as "aggressive exceptionalism".[83]

The idea of an *exceptional state* is not only present in the USA, and through concepts such as manifest destiny; it can be also recognised in *Swedish exceptionalism*, central to the Swedish self-understanding, nation building and nation branding. This form of

[80] Study in Sweden, *The Swedish Way* [website] https://studyinsweden.se/moving-to-sweden/the-swedish-way/#theswedisheveryday (last accessed: 20 May 2023).
[81] D. Jansson, 'Deadly exceptionalisms, or, would you rather be crushed by a moral superpower or a military superpower?', *Political Geography*, vol. 64, 2018, p. 83.
[82] Jansson, 'Deadly exceptionalisms', p. 84.
[83] Jansson, 'Deadly exceptionalisms', p. 84.

exceptionalism is more recent than the American one, but not for that any less present and influential.

The concept of Swedish exceptionalism can be strongly linked to the idea of cultural diplomacy, small state "syndrome"/realism and nation branding. This is because it has been constructed and employed politically, to become one of the "myths" that inform both the xenostereotype and the autostereotype of the country. As highlighted by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition*, it is particularly important for nation-states to construct a perception of continuity with the past, through the political invention and strengthening of selected traditions.[84]

While it is composed of different themes, the strength of its existence mainly lies in the self-understanding of Sweden being a "moral superpower" among nations, a "world conscience", as wished by Swedish Prime Minister Per-Albin Hansson in 1945.[85] The concept of Sweden as a humanistic world power has stemmed from and has been supported by a specific political intent. It is important to notice how this does not lessen the impact or the importance of positive, progressive and just actions carried out by the Swedish state, nor does it imply the presence of a malignant and calculating political will to mock and deceive the citizens and the external spectators. The concept of exceptionalism focuses on the perception of these acts and their consequences, through the political and cultural framing of recurring narratives and discourses.

Sweden has been thus framed as exceptional also in an historical perspective. This has been possible also through a dismissive treatment of the nation's colonial past: its morality is then part of a continuity of a linear growth and the present role is *simply* the logical continuation of a long-standing project.[86] However, this brought to a dissonance between the constructed

[84] Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*.
[85] S. Simonsen, 'Swedish exceptionalism and the Sars-CoV2 pandemic crisis: Representations of crisis and national identity in the public sphere', *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy*, vol. 13 no. 3, 2022, p. 284.
[86] Thomasson, 'The Caribbean Scorpion', p. 63.

self-representation and identity, and the historical facts. As argued by Ale Pålsson in his analysis of the representation of St. Barthélemy in Swedish literature:

> From a Swedish perspective, however, the trauma is not loss of the empire, but the discovery of it. Within contemporary history, Sweden is considered primarily as an indirect actor in the colonial ventures of the major imperial powers [...]. What is lost recently is not a glorious empire, but instead a continual history of neutrality. Just as British colonial history has been internalized as an essential aspect of British identity, Swedish non-participation in colonialism and imperial politics is not viewed as a particular era of post-World War II history, but as an essential part of Swedish identity. Within this framework of Sweden as untainted by colonial guilt, the fact of Swedish colonialism is a nightmare.[87]

Swedish exceptionalism has a somewhat nebulous existence. If all the literature on the matter is to be trusted, it is currently dead, dying and thriving. Every decade or year presents some "dangers": from the end of the cold war to the 2015 migration *crisis*, from the handling of Covid19, to the Sweden Democrats' 20% of votes in the 2022 elections. It should be dead, maybe, but it does not know it and it keeps on flying.

3.3 New Museology and Decoloniality in Museums

As described previously, the role of museums has been constantly evolving, to answer the needs of contemporary society. Since the 70s and thanks to the perspectives of disciplines in the field of humanities and social sciences[88], a new concept of how museums should see themselves and relate to visitors and social change through their practices has emerged.

According to Max Ross, the "new museology" does not only include these new theoretical contributions, but also wider changes, hopefully leading museums to be more open and accessible: "the older atmosphere of exclusiveness and intellectual asceticism has largely

[87] A. Pålsson, 'The Nightmare Island: Representations of St. Barthélemy in Swedish Novels', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 95 no. 1, 2023, p. 58.
[88] Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, p. 1.

given way to a more democratic climate".[89] The scholar highlights also how this change has been influenced by economic forces and how the market could transform the museum to a place that "construed its users, not as citizens so much as customers, or consumers".[90]

The impact of new museology has led to what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill indicates as the "shift [...] from the modernist museum as a site of authority to the post museum as a site of mutuality", impacting also the view of how meanings are constructed in exhibitions.[91] Museums are not carriers of objective knowledge and truth, and recognising this also means critically taking into account their origins and the methods in which museums have been constructed as authority. The implementation of the tenets of new museology necessitates a deep and critical revision of the role and attitude of the professionals working on the other side of the museum. This also means the application of a different concept of ethics, as shown in the recent focus on an "appropriate museology".[92]

According to Hooper-Greenhill, one of the most relevant fields of contestation of the role of museums has been the analysis of its relationship with colonialism and the subsequent call for a post-colonial re-evaluation of its impact.[93] The need for a deconstruction of latent colonial structures is often limited to the important issue of repatriation of contested objects, human remains and even photographs, reconstituting the relationship that was truncated by their *acquisition* by an institutional actor. As described by Mary Bouquet, this is often constructed as a battle between the issue of authority through scientific knowledge and what is considered as "human decency".[94] However, decoloniality can include multiple practices.

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[89] M. Ross, 'Interpreting the new museology', Museum and society, vol. 2 no. 2, 2004, p. 84-85.
[90] Ross, 'Interpreting the new museology', p. 100.
[91] E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. xi, p. 152-153.
[92] See C. Kreps, 'Appropriate museology and the "new museum ethics". Honoring diversity' Nordisk Museologi, vol. 2, 2015, pp. 4-16. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5617/nm.3044
[93] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture,* p. xi.
[94] M. Bouquet, *Museums: A Visual Anthropology*, London, Berg, 2012, p.152.

The book *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums. A Guide with Global Examples* by Csilla Ariese and Magdalena Wróblewska brings forward examples of attempts at decoloniality in museums: it is particularly relevant as it maps how different institutions and museums have tried to address the "untangling the present-day colonial hooks from the museum"[95] around the world. It provides a thought-provoking theoretical guide, accessible not only by those working in similar fields and including practical examples of how this framework has been already applied.

In a series of essays, the two authors delineate "six aims of decolonizing", analysing different and unique approaches to the concept of decoloniality in museums. A uniform, standardised approach could not tackle effectively a pervasive issue such as the persistence of traces of colonialism. In their words, these aims are:

- **Creating visibility** - "The decision to make things visible or invisible in museums is always related to power"[96]
- **Increasing inclusivity** - "Inclusivity is the inclusion of non-museum voices, actors, or decisions into the workings of the museum"[97]
- **Decentering** - "Decentering is essentially an act of shifting the norm"[98]
- **Championing empathy** - "Empathy for other living beings is the key to better and more generous behavior"[99]
- **Improving transparency** - "Transparency requires openness and a willingness to tell more than simple stories; it is sharing contestations and debates"[100]

[95] C. Ariese and M. Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums. A Guide with Global Examples*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2022, p. 12
[96] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*, p. 21.
[97] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*, p. 37.
[98] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*, p. 57.
[99] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*, p. 67.
[100] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*, p. 81.

- **Embracing vulnerability** - "Exposing weaknesses, doubts, and work-in-progress requires courage, but embracing such vulnerability leads to stronger, more inclusive institutions and individuals"[101]

The focus is here on the actions that the museums and those who are involved with them have to take: all the aims include active verbs and use broad terms, to indicate the possible diversity of approaches that the actors could choose.[102]

Another thought-provoking point brought up by the authors is the lack of evaluation of the actions and tactics chosen in each example: as those are highly context dependent and rely on specific pre-existing condition, it would be quite difficult and maybe even fruitless to compare different attempts by building a scale of effectiveness or, even worse, of goodness. The authors argue instead that the practice of decoloniality, no matter their scope or possible results, is inherently of vital importance for museums.[103] Richard Sandell argues that every museum, no matter its principal focus, has the responsibility to present and support Human Rights.[104] *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums* applies a similar concept to the issue of decoloniality: every museum could benefit from a decolonial approach, even those who do not have clear ties to the colonial system and times.

The theoretical framework will be particularly useful when taking into consideration both the exhibition and the *History Unfolds* book, as part of a wider context of deconstruction of both concepts of Swedishness and of identity. Furthermore, it can help to decode some of the changes and additions that the museum has applied to the original exhibition material. The decolonial process is then taken into consideration as a corpus of different actions, through different mediums, with different target audiences and different topics.

[101] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums,* p. 97.
[102] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums,* p. 14.
[103] Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums,* p. 14-15.
[104] R. Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights,* Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2017.

3.4 Human Rights and Uses of History in Museums

As highlighted by Sandell in *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, museums, along with heritage sites and galleries, are deeply entangled with Human Rights. By focusing on LGBTQ activism, the author shows how museums produce and disseminate narratives that can strongly impact the circulation, the recognition and the possibility of a realisation of Human Rights. This does not only happen through the exhibitions and the closed (yet public) place of the museum itself, but also through the social and open space of public debate and the media, by different actors and constituencies. The scholar argues that museums have the power to shape the political and moral background against which human rights are negotiated, and that they could be understood as having moral agency.[105]

It is particularly thought provoking that Sandell's book does not analyse museums and institutions that have a "specific human rights mandate"[106], or that specifically focus on marginalised groups or sites of conscience. It concludes however that every museum is responsible for the dissemination and the strengthening of human rights, for example through the presentation of positive portrayals of oppressed groups. Every role in the system of the museum is then conceptualised as having possible human rights implications.[107] This thesis takes a similar approach, as the Historiska Museet is a national history museum, and is not only dedicated to Human Rights or Human Rights violations.

The theoretical implications and findings of *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights* are in line with the concepts brought forward by new museology, the focus on human rights and social justice in appropriate museology, and the necessity for museums to be more than a repository for their collection. This calls to interact with their communities, "abandon monolithic visions of history"[108] and embrace the plurality of histories that an ever-changing and multicultural society presents. Problematizing the concept of museums as repositories of

[105] Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, p. 6-7.
[106] Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, p. 11.
[107] Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights, pp.* 135-136.
[108] Ross, 'Interpreting the new museology', p. 85

neutral knowledge is a first necessary step in order to understand the power of the narratives portrayed.

In order to frame how human rights and their violations are presented in the context of a history museum, the concept of *uses of history* is particularly relevant. The definition of uses of history comes from the field of history education and highlights the possibilities of history as a discursive tool "to create meaning and inspire action".[109] The focus is thus not on an ideal objective nature of the representation of *True History*, but rather on the communicative force that different historical narratives can have in different contexts on the formation of the historical culture and consciousness.[110]

Uses of history are omnipresent, particularly complex and context dependent concepts.[111] To organise and better identify them, this thesis will take in consideration the typology of uses of history as elaborated by Klas-Göran Karlsson. The scholar indicates different aims:

- **Scholarly-scientific use of history**: focus on the creation of new knowledge and the communication of new facts; based on professional standards and training and thus mainly used by professionals.
- **Existential use of history**: strongly connected to identity and memory; used by individuals to remember and anchor themselves in history; often employed in a private setting; an example can be seen in genealogy.
- **Moral use of history**: its aim is to represent and "bring to light immoral acts"[112] happened in the past, often previously hidden by the existing power structures.
- **Politico-pedagogical use of history**: mostly based on examples, metaphors and symbols, highlighting similarities between the past and the present to attain a political advantage.

[109] R. Thorp, 'How to develop historical consciousness through uses of history – A Swedish perspective', Historical Encounters: A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020, p. 52.
[110] Sjöland, M. (2015). The use of history in popular history magazines. A theoretical approach. Commercialised History: Popular History Magazines in Europe, pp. 224-225.
[111] Sjöland, 'The use of history in popular history magazines', p. 223.
[112] Sjöland, 'The use of history in popular history magazines', p. 227.

- **Commercial use of history**: present in different types of commercial artefacts and popular culture, driven by profit, it can influence the consumers' "view of history, but also of the present and the future".[113]
- **Ideological use of history**: coming mainly from cultural and political élites, it highlights the use of history "to gain control of public representation, to arrange historical elements into a dominant context of meaning".[114]
- **Non-use of history**: can be seen as a specific application of the ideological use; can be connected to a need for legitimacy that is based more on the contemporaneity rather than on historical and cultural heritage[115]

It is possible to notice how these categories are not mutually exclusive or detached from one another. As observed by Marianne Sjöland in her article on the representation of the Crusades in popular history, different uses can coexist and reinforce each other in the construction of meanings, even arguing that the commercial use requires legitimacy from other categories.[116]

It is also relevant to notice how the uses of history are employed in museums, and how this can highlight the role of the representation of history in nation branding. For instance, this can be noticed in the inclusion of Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann in the exhibition dedicated to the Danish golden age and the differences between the Swedish and Danish curatorial choices. In Denmark, the presence of the "foreign born, female artist" answered to the need for a re-evaluation of the Danish artistic heritage in the light of recent national identity and nation branding values. In Sweden, this gave the possibility to construct the nation as "a more open society for immigrants", through the comparison with "the narrative of the excluding Danes". While in both cases it is possible to recognise a moral use of history, by bringing to

[113] Sjöland, 'The use of history in popular history magazines', p. 228.
[114] K. G. Karlsson, 'Processing time–On the manifestations and activations of historical consciousness' in H. Bjerg, C. Lenz, and E. Thorstensen. (eds.) *Historicizing the Uses of the Past*, Bielefeld, Germany, Transcript Verlag, 2011, p. 139.
[115] This section is based on Karlsson, 'Processing time', p.137-140; Thorp,'How to develop historical consciousness through uses of history', p. 52; Sjöland, 'The use of history in popular history magazines', p. 225-228.
[116] Sjöland, 'The use of history in popular history magazines', p. 236-237.

light previous misdeeds, their outcomes were quite different, as they had to be adapted to the self-understanding and the context of each nation. This example also brings forward the possibility for the moral use of history as part of a nation branding: recognizing and bringing forward negative parts of history can also be a way to highlight the goodness and the progressiveness of the present.[117]

3.5 Critical Discourse Analysis as Theory

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the methods utilised in this thesis to analyse the museum and the exhibitions. However, it is important to recognize that it is not only an analytical tool, but it carries some important theoretical implications. These perspectives not only shape its application in the analysis, but they guide the whole research design and thus influence its outcome, especially when looking at the existing structures of power and their discursive reproduction.

The analysis method is *critical*, as its aim is to bring to light the "role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world"[118]: this means that it has to be situated in the social and political context, highlighting the relationship between discursive practices and power relations in society.[119] This critical character is not only applied to the analysis, but it needs to be taken into consideration when defining the role of the researcher, especially as it is understood as intrinsically political and focused on the emancipation of oppressed groups and social change.[120]

Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on the concept of discourse as a social practice, both *constituing* the social reality and *being constituted* by its practices in return. The idea of

[117] Jørgensen and Mordhorst, 'Producing history, (re)branding the nation'.
[118] M. Jørgensen and L. J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002, p. 63.
[119] T. A. van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton (eds.) The Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Malden, Mass., Blackwell Publishers, 2001, p. 353.
[120] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 64.

language-as-discourse is then seen as a form of action that shapes and is embedded within the social context.[121] In this light, it is clear why the relation between *power* and *knowledge* is central to this theoretical framework. *Social power* is then understood as the ability to exercise some degree of *control*: controlling knowledge and the reproduction of ideas and models can be particularly useful in sustaining the existing structures and normalising them through discursive tools.[122]

While museums are not necessarily the "power elites" usually examined, they are an authority, with the trust of the public and the possibility to reinforce or challenge different perspectives and discourses. As highlighted by Bennett, the past as represented in museums is a product of "present practices" that organise and present it in a particular frame.[123] In this way, they have an important part in the "role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance".[124] While it is impossible to know the intent behind the choice of words and topics in the museum, even if we could assume that it is positive, they can still act to uphold damaging or inaccurate ideas.[125]

[121] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 61-62.
[122] van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', p. 354-355.
[123] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 129.
[124] T. A.van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', *Discourse & society*, vol.4, no.2, 1993, p. 249.
[125] van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', p. 262.

4. Method

This thesis employs a multimethod, qualitative and critical approach to the data, utilising Critical Discourse Analysis and visual analysis, through the lenses of the themes and macro themes of Swedish exceptionalism narratives. A more holistic approach to the material, including the visual sphere[126], is useful in order to better grasp and describe the complexity of the communication in museums, while positioning the research in a lived and experienced space.

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis as Method

The main method of analysis of the data and of the discourses presented is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As introduced previously in the theoretical framework, Critical Discourse Analysis presents a strong focus on issues of power, knowledge and how social realities are shaped through the reproduction of discourses.[127] This makes CDA particularly applicable to the aims and research questions of this thesis, as it can help in individuating the impact of ideological narratives in the discursive construction of the nation and its representation.[128]

The analysis will employ Teun van Dijk's version of CDA, centring the relation between society and discourse as mediated by social cognition.[129] The analysis will also apply his conceptualisation of ideologies. Swedish exceptionalism, as argued by Jansson, can be understood as a derivative of nationalistic ideologies, and it is in itself "an ideology that acts to obscure the ways in which the states in question harm people inside and outside their borders".[130]

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[126] Jørgensen and Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 61.
[127] van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', p. 258
[128] R. De Cillia, M. Reisigl, and R. Wodak, 'The discursive construction of national identities', *Discourse & society*, vol.10, no. 2, 1999, pp. 149-173.; van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', p. 361.
[129] van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', 251.
[130] Jansson, 'Deadly exceptionalisms', p. 90.

According to van Dijk, ideologies are

> general systems of basic ideas shared by the members of a social group, ideas that will influence their interpretation of social events and situations and control their discourse and other social practices as group members.[131]

In this way, narratives and discourses of Swedish exceptionalism could be seen as a form of social cognition, as "beliefs shared by and distributed over (the minds of) group members"[132], relevant to both the identity and the interests of the group, mediating the understanding of social practices and events.[133] Taking into consideration the concept of *nation branding*, this could also be applied to groups not included in the "group Sweden", in this case tourists visiting the museum. As the existence of a shared knowledge in the community is one of the necessary conditions for the existence of an ideology[134], the role of the museum for knowledge creation and dissemination is particularly relevant. According to this framework, ideologies tend to inform mental representations of basic characteristics of the group, such as identity, goals, norms and values.[135]

Van Dijk notes that the presence of an ideology does not mean that every individual in the group believes in it in the same way, nor applies it in the same way.[136] It would be quite naive to think that every visitor walking through the doors of the National History Museum is a staunch believer in Swedish exceptionalist narratives, or they will accept a-critically the content presented.[137] However, the framing of Swedish exceptionalism as an ideology here is useful to understand both the confusion in front of contrasting information and the discursive role of the national museum as presenting the self-image of the nation.

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[131] van Dijk, T. A., 'Discourse and Ideology', in T. A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse Studies: a multidisciplinary introduction*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, 2011, p. 380.
[132] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', p. 382.
[133] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', pp. 383, 386-387.
[134] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', p. 385.
[135] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', pp. 386, 395-396.
[136] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', p. 383.
[137] The lack of agency and the possibility of resistance of individuals as a consequence of the concept of "power as abuse" in van Dijk's CDA approach has been criticised by other scholars (see Jørgensen and Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 91).

Furthermore, as it will be presented later in this chapter, it will be used to identify meanings relating to the expression of ideological schemas/narratives in discourse, by identifying recurring themes to compare to the exhibition material.

The analysis will be guided by the "ideological square" presented by van Dijk, relating to the *positive self-presentation* ("Emphasize our good things, De-emphasize our bad things") and the *negative other-presentation* ("Emphasize their bad things, De-emphasize their good things").[138]
In order to do so, the analysis will mostly focus on the semantic structures and visual structures present in the material, highlighting the presence of a positive or a negative self-presentation of the nation-state and of the Other in the context of Sweden's colonial history and present. Some of the elements taken into particular consideration during the analysis will be: the *level of description* (lower in the case of *Our* negative things); the *granularity* (more vague description of *Our* negative things); the presence of *implications* (implied meanings not explicitly expressed in the text); the *agency* (de-emphasizing *Our* agency or responsibility for negative events).[139]

4.2 Themes from Swedish Exceptionalism as Methodological Framework

Adopting a constructivist perspective, Hilde Eliassen Restad describes American exceptionalism as a belief system, informing the self-understanding of the country and creating the "ideational framework through which American citizens and leaders see the world".[140] It is then possible to recognise how extensive the impact of such a narrative on the national identity of a state be and, thus, how it could influence the actions of an "exceptional

[138] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', p. 396-397.
[139] Van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', p. 397-398.
[140] H. E. Restad, *American Exceptionalism: An idea that made a nation and remade the world*, London, Routledge, 2014 (accessed online on Google books), p. 13.

country" in different areas of policy, along with its perception.[141] In the theoretical lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis, the reproduction of discourses and ideologies through language is a societal means of production, creating subjects and social realities as its manifestations.[142] This highlights the importance of the knowledge-making processes and actors, and the power that lies in narratives and myths for the reproduction and the strengthening of the power status quo.

In order to analyse the narratives present in the Swedish History Museum, this thesis will take into consideration the themes presented in the literature about Swedish exceptionalism and nation branding. It is first of all possible to recognize two main narratives as represented in the "Brand Sweden": Sweden as a moral superpower and Progressive Sweden. From these, it is possible to delineate different themes:

- **Sweden as a moral superpower**: Sweden's role as "world's conscience"
- **Sweden as a neutral, non-aligned, peaceful state**: based on historical exceptionalism; strengthened by the role during the cold war; "the uninterrupted peace [...] had nurtured a 'sense of apartness', a persistent belief that Sweden could escape the conflicts and travails that other countries had to endure"[143]. It can also be framed as selfish and cynical (as Amoral Sweden).
- **Sweden as anticolonial and without a colonial past**: support to the decolonial process, role at the UN as the most appropriate country to work with countries in the Global South[144]; lack of a colonial history and complicity in the transatlantic slave trade.
- **Sweden supports Human Rights** - Human rights defenders both at home and abroad, through active foreign policy (see for example the feminist foreign policy and

[141] Jansson, 'Deadly exceptionalisms', p. 84

[142] S. Jäger, 'Discourse and knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis', in Wodak, R. and Meyer M., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London, SAGE Publications, Ltd, 2001.

[143] Glover, 'Imagining Community', p. 250.

[144] A. Tullberg, *"We Are in the Congo Now": Sweden and the Trinity of Peacekeeping during the Congo Crisis 1960 - 1964*. PhD Diss., Lunds Universitet, 2012, pp. 74-76.

the prominence in the UN General Assembly); Humanitarian aid and Human Rights presented as part of Sweden's brand.

- **Sweden as the Folkhem**: role of the Swedish and Nordic welfare model, with a trustworthy government that focuses on the welfare of the citizens; high levels of trust in the government. It can also include the myth of heterogeneity and consensus.
- **Sweden as modern, progressive and scientific**: Sweden as a rational actor and leading the way in social and scientific progress; attention to nature and the climate; figure of the genius-entrepreneur.

Starting from these themes and taking also in account a more historical perspective, it is possible to recognise the presence of more general, opposing macrothemes and narratives:

- Continuity vs rupture
- Cultural vs political Sweden (*nation*-state vs nation-*state*)
- Progressive vs Amoral Sweden
- Humanitarian/Human Rights supporter vs egoistic
- Swedishness vs the "Other"

The themes will guide the analysis of the material: by providing a theoretical and methodological framework, they will be useful to identify the presence of narratives of Swedish exceptionalism in the exhibitions and analyse them.

4.3 Visual Analysis

Museums are not only composed of captions and panels, pictures and artefacts, and neither are those separate entities. It is important to remember that museums also use visual and spatial means of communication, in order to convey more or less explicitly ideas and narratives regarding the subject of the exhibition. An essential component of the whole experience are not only the spaces that they inhabit and in which they were developed, but also their interaction with the movement of those visiting the museum. Architectural and layout choices can also influence the way in which information is perceived and naturalised.

The analysis should not stop at *what* is there, but it should also holistically take into account *how* it is positioned in a physical space.

In order to better frame the museum and the narratives presented there, this thesis will also adopt a visual and spatial approach, following the example of the study on the portrayal of Sámi people in the Historiska Museet by Marte Spangen, titled "Without a trace? The Sámi in the Swedish history museum".[145] The analysis will be based on the pictures and videos taken at the museum and complemented by both audio and textual notes observing and documenting the visit. The previously mentioned literature on the construction of meanings and rhetoric in museums will also be used as a theoretical framework informing the analysis, along with concepts from visual methodologies. Those include in particular the interplay between textual and visual technologies (such as captions and panels) and the technologies of layout (spatial organisation, visitor routes, decorations).[146]

4.4 Description of the Data

As primary data, this thesis will analyse materials from the Historiska Museet in Stockholm. The materials are of different nature, but are primarily part of, or regarding, current and past exhibitions. In particular, the exhibition "Sveriges Historia" or "History of Sweden"[147] is taken into consideration, as its clear intent is to present a narration of the events of the last thousand years in the geographic area that is now Sweden, and thus the meanings and narratives presented with it. Another important exhibition is the "History Unfolds - A reflection"[148], as it takes from the start a more critical approach to the connection between history and society.

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[145] Spangen, 'Without a trace?'.

[146] G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001, p. 175-180

[147] Historiska Museet, *History of Sweden* [website], https://historiska.se/utstallningar/history-of-sweden/ (last accessed: 19 May 2023).

[148] Historiska Museet, *History Unfolds - a reflection* [website], https://historiska.se/utstallningar/history-unfolds-a-reflection/ (last accessed: 19 May 2023).

It is important to place the analysis and the data in a very specific context and timeframe, as museums, clearly "living and breathing creatures", can change and modify their content over time. What is analysed will probably be different in one, ten, twenty years, and it is now different from what it was one, ten, twenty years ago. This is also particularly relevant in this text, as it was possible to notice in the "Sveriges Historia" exhibition some signs indicating that it is currently under renovations, hoping not to have caused too much of a disturbance to the visitors. Furthermore, while the main body of the exhibition is from 2009, it has been possible to notice some differences between visits in 2019, 2022 and 2023, such as the presence of a touch screen stand on the Sámi and Sápmi, or the panels on the history of women's sexuality.

The renovation unfortunately meant that the exhibition "History Unfolding - a reflection" was not available anymore to the public. Thanks to the help of Jenny Marchi, graphic designer for the Museum, I was able to obtain the book published on occasion of the art exhibition and the *temporary* reflection room.[149] The book, titled *History Unfolds. Contemporary Art Meets History*, includes a series of essays on the exhibition, highlighting certain manufacts and connecting them in a wider narrative that goes beyond the geographical and ideological limitations that could have affected their previous categorization. It is a fascinating insight in a usually hidden space and positions the museum as an aware and active in deconstructing and analysing the ways in which knowledge has been produced in the past. Differently from the main exhibition, it tries to address openly more difficult questions regarding Swedish history and the political role of historical narratives and ideas of the national self.

The data collected *in loco* in March 2023 has also been complemented by the official website of the museum, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the way Swedish colonial history is handled and conceptualised in the Historiska Museet and to understand which

[149] While the "History Unfolds" exhibition was supposed to be temporary and only last between 2016 and 2017, it was available to the public way longer than that. I had the opportunity to visit it both in August 2019 and September 2023, when I took the picture of the text "Swedish colonies and global trade".

narratives have been carried out in other texts. This is in line with Sandell's observation of how audiences are now not only necessarily those who physically set foot in the exhibitions or in the galleries: websites and participatory media experiences are becoming increasingly important for what he defines as "diffused audiences".[150] As this thesis takes in consideration also the relationship between a national museum and a foreign audience, it has been a methodological choice to mainly take into consideration materials and sources in English, rather than in Swedish.

4.4.1 Handling of the Data

To facilitate the analysis and the accessibility of the main data, I created a database in Google sheets. This revealed itself to be quite necessary, considering the amount of data collected (192 pictures) and the possibility that they could repeat themselves, as taken over the span of a couple of days. Metadata was assigned to each picture and video, to better divide them according to specific characteristics. These include "objective" information such as the room in which they were taken or the type of data that they present. While doing so, some useful thematic metadata has been assigned to each picture as a first general analysis and coding of the materials. Examples of thematic metadata are "Colonialism", "Slavery", "Women and Gender issues", "Minorities" and "Human Rights/Human Rights violations".

In this regard, it is important not to underestimate the effect of the choices made while constructing the database. The coding is obviously arbitrary and mostly done to make further analysis easier, but it is still important to consider the effects of the different choices done while building the database and filling it. A database and its metadata are not "objective", nor are they simply a box in which to put pictures and data in: a critical and reflexive viewpoint is necessary.

[150] Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights,* p. 20-21.

4.5 Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

Critical Discourse Analysis encourages the writer/researcher to explain their position on the matter analysed, exposing possible bias and ethical issues, as analysis does not happen in a vacuum.[151] Reflexivity is particularly important in this method, as it can be easily criticised for not being objective, and thus *scientific*, enough. The variety of outcomes connected to the subjective view of the researcher and the limitations of the data collected and analysed are not necessarily a negative consequence of the method, but rather a reflection of its interpretive and constructivist approach to knowledge creation.

It is then important to reflect on the positionality of the author. This research is rooted in my own experience with the Historiska Museet. I visited it for the first time in August 2019, while on a "on the road" family vacation, before my Erasmus semester at Linnaeus University in Växjö. My knowledge of Swedish history was to some extent limited, and even more so on its colonial history. My experience in the museum was extremely positive, and I appreciated in particular the self-awareness that it seemed to display. When I visited the museum a second time in September 2022, after having read and researched about the topic, it did not have the same effect (even if I did enjoy my visit). Furthermore, I spent the first semester of the second year as an intern in the SweCarCol project (Swedish Caribbean Colonialism 1784-1878), that focuses on creating the first comprehensive digital archive on Swedish colonialism, in particular on St. Barthélemy. My approach is then strongly influenced by my position as both an outsider and an insider in regard to both Sweden and its colonial history. This includes a rather normative personal judgement on the need for a better understanding and representation of any colonial history, especially as part of national history and through the lenses of social justice.

[151] van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis' p. 252.

5. Analysis

This research will conduct the analysis of the exhibitions in a twofold manner.
First of all, in order to ground the analysis of the exhibitions of the Historiska Museet in a physical space, there will be a description and analysis of the space and its visual attributes. In order to frame the exhibition through the lens of the audience, the description will follow the expected visit path.
In a second part, the analysis will focus on the themes and narratives regarding Swedish colonial history present in two of the exhibitions, both current and past, of the museum. The first taken in consideration is the "History of Sweden", while the second is "History Unfolds - a reflection".

The analysis will be informed and guided by the theoretical concepts previously presented, along with the methodological insights of Critical Discourse Analysis. The macrothemes of Swedish exceptionalism (ex. progressive vs amoral Sweden), along with the metadata, will allow a first coding of the data. It will then be possible to identify the main narratives present in the depiction of Swedish colonialism and divide the material accordingly. The theoretical framework, (including the themes of Swedish exceptionalism, Karlsson's uses of history, Ariese and Wróblewska's aims of decolonisation and van Dijk's ideological square) will be then applied to analyse the discourse and content of the texts. The concepts will be highlighted as they appear in the material. This will bring to light the presence or the absence of a narrative of Swedish exceptionalism and its discursive employment in the construction of a grand narrative of Swedish History.

While the visual analysis will be conducted mostly in a chronological order, mirroring the exhibition, the analysis of the written materials will be presented thematically. Pictures of the exhibition and of the panels analysed are present alongside the analysis.

5.1 Description of Museum and Visual Analysis

The exhibition "Sveriges Historia" is on the first floor of the Historiska Museet. It covers the history of Sweden and its changing territories from the lower Middle Ages onwards. The visitor can access the exhibition by going up the stairs on the side of the Piraeus Lion, traditionally constructed into a symbol of masculine conquest. During the art exhibition "History Unfolds", the lion was enveloped in a colourful, soft, crocheted onesie, asking the visitor to reconsider their stances on history and the depiction of power.[152] At the end of the first flight of stairs, a monitor shows the different shapes and sizes of Sweden through the centuries. As the visitors reach the first floor, darkness and a distinctly mediaeval music welcome them to the exhibition.

Century after century, one room after the other, different sections describe historical events, present artwork and artefacts in a chronological order. Each century is presented by a bigger panel, with a map highlighting the geographical extension of the Swedish kingdom during those years. Each panel presents a poem by "Jonas Jarl Skute, Dramatist", and a text by "Dick Harrison, Professor of History".[153] Here comes the first question: who are they? Why is it particularly relevant to the exhibition to know and see repeated the names of those who wrote the captions? To an outside observer, their titles might say more than their names, especially as they are not introduced in any other way. Authority is implicit in the setting of the museum: one can suppose that someone competent wrote the captions and the explanations even without knowing who they are. However, this can be seen as grounding the exhibition in a scholarly-scientific use of history on multiple levels, highlighting the scientific value of the panels in accurately representing history *as it is* and the power relation between expert narratives and the audience.

[152]F. Svanberg, 'Unfolding the Collection', in H. Larsson Pousette (ed.), *History Unfolds. Samtidskonst Möter Historia / Contemporary Art Meets History*, Stockholm, Historiska Museet, 2017, p. 98.
[153] Picture 1.

The panels present a map of the Scandinavian peninsula and the Baltic region. The extension of Sweden in each century is directly compared and juxtaposed to the current outline of the Swedish land and of its provinces. These highlight the concept of a changing nation in time and space, while softly naturalising the same boundaries in a *natural, chronological* progression to the present. The tension between the past and the future, and the importance of the creation of a perceived continuity, is particularly relevant in the field of the studies of nationalism, as it does not only apply to the physical limits of the state, but also to its population.

Picture 1

The outline of the museum exhibition follows a temporal line, suggesting the walk towards a progressive and better future. This impression is strengthened by the lighting in the exhibition. The lights start quite dim in the first rooms (up to the 16th century) and they get brighter when arriving at the *Golden Age* of the Swedish empire in the 17th century.

In that room, the floor is covered with a map of Sweden from the era. While the 17th century was a century of wars and violence, this is not directly depicted in the exhibition: a gunner uniform is hung on the wall, on which soldiers carrying the wounded king are depicted. The portrait of the greats of the Swedish court, such as the queen Christina and the influential statesmen Axel Oxenstierna, and the mention of long-lasting institutions founded in the century seem to also include the non-military reasons why the kingdom could become relevant as a European power.

Picture 2

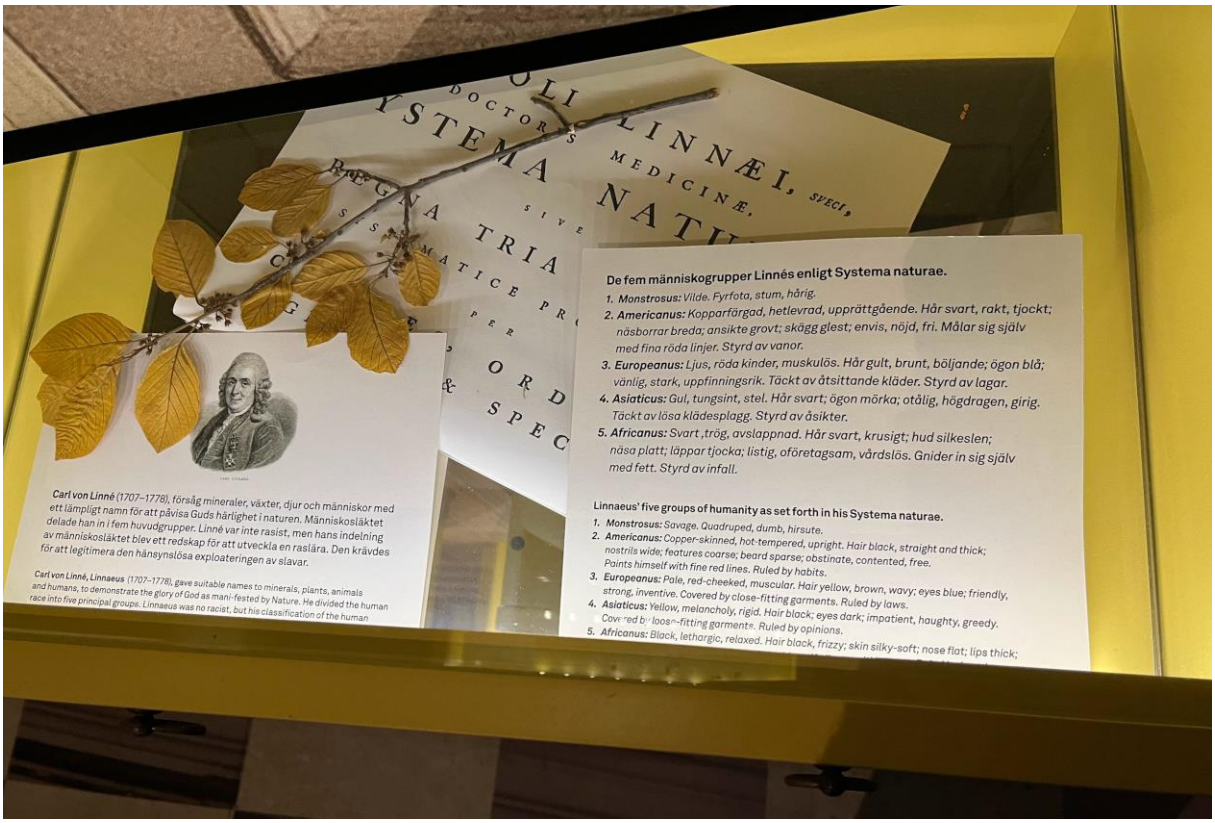
While the 17th century is mostly focused on the growing political and military power of the Swedish kingdom, the part of the room dedicated to the 18th century seems to replicate a nobleman's cabinet of curiosities, with little drawers dedicated to the scientists of the Royal Academy of Sciences.[154] Progressive-scientific Sweden is taking its first steps. In the middle of the room, another cabinet "blocks" the flow of the exhibition, showing the products of colonies far away and the ugly side of those new luxuries. While coming from the part of the room dedicated to the 17th century, following the expected temporal flow of the exhibition, the visitors first encounter that "stopping block": it is well lighted and positioned at the centre of the space, standing out and interrupting the peace of the *studiolo*.

In order to look at the drawers dedicated to the Royal Academy of Science, the visitor has to turn their back to the colonial issue. At a first glance, progressive Sweden almost seems to make the visitor forget colonial and racist issues. While they are present *somewhere else*, they are not in sight. However, this does not necessarily apply to the texts present in the captions: in the drawer dedicated to Carl Linnaeus, a piece of paper informs the reader of the outright racist views that the scientist expressed in his writings.[155] This includes "scientifically" dividing humanity in different racially based groups, indicating specific essentialist characteristics related to personality and capabilities. As mentioned in another panel dedicated to scientific advancements of the era, pseudoscientific white supremacist views had an important role in justifying and pushing for the expansion of western colonialism and racism. The inclusion of such a topic in a space that is not conceived to bring to the light "negative" concepts can be seen as a positive action by the museum. Human Rights make their appearance in the normal, scientific progress of history, even putting in discussion the figure of what could be described as a national hero and source of pride.

[154] See picture 3.
[155] Picture 4.


KUNGLIGA VETENSKAPSAKADEMIEN
Akademien bidrog till att förvandla Sverige
från stormakt till vetenskapsnation.
Möt sex ledamöter!
THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
The Academy helped to transform Sweden
from a great power to a scientific nation.
Meet six of its members!

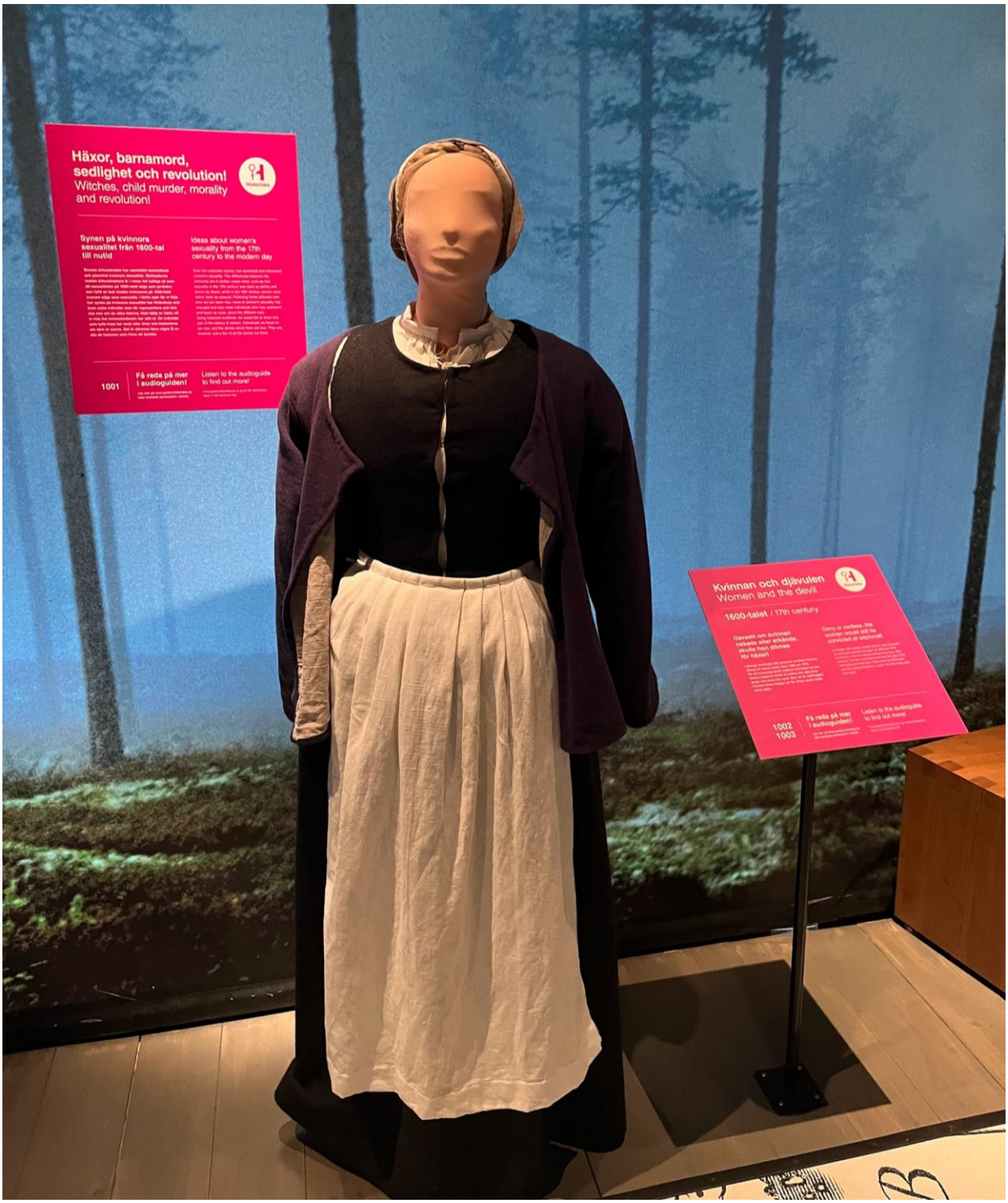
Picture 3



Picture 4

The role of the museum in pointing out Rights related issues is clear in the inclusion of hot pink panels describing the changing societal views on women and women's sexuality. From the witch hunts of the 17th century[156], to the shame connected to having a child out of wedlock, to the introduction of the pill in the 20th century, women's history is constructed and presented as part of national history. For example, a panel describing the progression of women's rights in Sweden is present in the room dedicated to the 19th century. While the path on women's sexuality has been a later addition, some of Sweden's minorities, such as the Roma, have been also included in the general exhibition, although to different degrees.

[156] See picture 5.


Häxor, barnamord, sedlighet och revolution!
Witches, child murder, morality and revolution!
Synen på kvinnors sexualitet från 1600-tal till nutid
Ideas about women's sexuality from the 17th century to the modern day
1001
Få reda på mer i audioguiden!
Listen to the audioguide to find out more!
Kvinnan och djävulen
Women and the devil
1600-talet / 17th century
Oavsett om kvinnan nekade eller erkände, skulle hon dömas för häxeri
1002
1003
Få reda på mer i audioguiden!
Listen to the audioguide to find out more!

Picture 5

In the room dedicated to the 20th century, the general focus is on the image of Sweden as the Folkhem. This is visible in the exhibition space: white chairs and white wall-like panels with stylized windows are suspended over the artefacts and the captions, positioned in low cases, creating an imagined and idealised home of the people.[157] This includes also the visitors, at least for the time in which they are in the room. Contrasting with the comfort of this picture, an orange red wall of glass divides this section from the side dedicated to the 19th century. On it, the names of places that have seen particular violence and horrors during the 20th century: among them are Guernica, Treblinka and Hanoi.[158]

Picture 6

[157] Picture 6.
[158] Picture 7.

Picture 7

On the floor of the entire exhibition, a timeline records different royal weddings and coronations, along with some events of international significance. This list, while it includes a quote by Goethe questioning whether someone who does not enjoy music could deserve to be called a man, does not reference in any way the presence of Swedish colonies, nor the abolition of slavery in 1847. It however references the colonial presence of other countries and highlights the division of territories between the colonising countries.

It was possible to observe a similar effect in the "History Unfolds" exhibition as in the earlier centuries of the "Sveriges Historia" exhibition: the objects were presented on a dark background, in a dimly lit room, and highlighted by strategically positioned lights. The exhibition presented different objects and topics, questioning the use of history in the past

and its perception. The artefacts in the room spanned from the historically incorrect mannequin of a statuesque Wagnerian soprano, with horned helmet, Viking adjacent clothing and white supremacist appeal, to the painting of the national hero Linnaeus in Sámi traditional clothes. The captions, in light colours, were positioned on the glass dividing the artefacts from the audience. The concept of "unfolding history" can suggest how to read this choice: both the artefacts and descriptions are physically taken out of the darkness and put under the light, to be finally seen properly.
In this way, the museum then takes the role of the bridge between lesser-known histories and modern sensibilities and audiences, metaphorically taking the both of them out of the dark and to interrogate the visitors on the meaning of history and its construction.

5.2 Text Analysis

To analyse the material through Critical Discourse Analysis, the focus will mostly be on the semantic structures and formal structures of the text, as indicated by van Dick in "Discourse and Ideology".

The analysis will start by delineating the macro-semantics present in the corpus of text analysed, highlighting the main themes and narratives. According to the scholar, the choice of wider discourse topics (as semantic macrostructures) and topics change is particularly relevant in the control of the context of the discourse, as are the local meanings, form and style of the text. [159] In the data collected, it was possible to identify three main themes, that have been connected to three different views of Sweden in the context of colonialism:

Theme//Narrative

1. *Colonialism as success//Sweden as a great power*
2. *Colonialism as a global economic system//Sweden as an accomplice in the system*
3. *Colonialism as shame//Sweden as responsible*

[159] van Dijk 'Critical Discourse Analysis' pp. 356-357.

These three themes will guide the analysis of the exhibition material, focusing particularly on the 17th and 18th century in the "Sveriges Historia" exhibition, along with data from the "History Unfolds - a reflection" exhibition. The discourse analysis will mainly focus on the semantic meanings, specifically on the way agency, implicit and indirect meanings of the text confirm and counter Swedish exceptionalist narratives. The presence of contrasting narratives will also be highlighted, taking into account the concept of ideology as described by Van Dijk.[160] It is important to notice how the three macro semantics do not exclude each other: one text can present more intersecting themes at the same time. Furthermore, while some themes can present elements of one narrative, they could be analysed in another section in order to highlight more relevant insights.

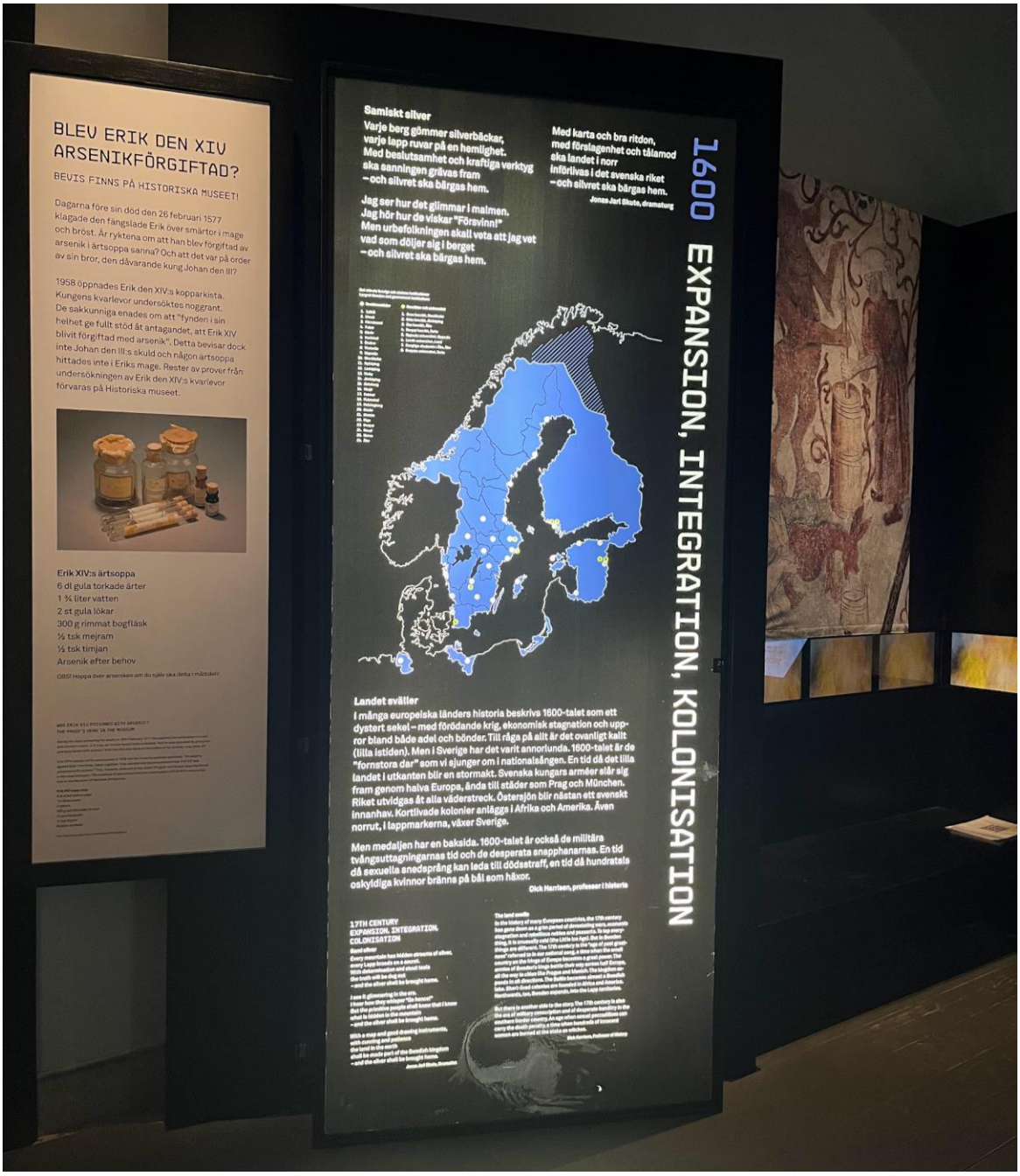
5.2.1 Colonialism as success//Sweden as a great power

One of the most relevant instances in which colonial issues are presented is the 17th century: known as the Stormaktstiden, the era of great power of the Swedish empire, it coincided with its maximum territorial expansion. It also cemented the role of a seemingly remote kingdom in European politics and power struggles, as the importance of the role taken on by the Vasa sovereigns during the Thirty Years' War can testify. Sweden was ready to make itself known to the world. This included, as unfortunately common for centuries, colonial ambitions and plans.

As observed by Aronsson, the transformation of the Swedish empire into a "small, modernist state in the early twentieth century"[161] came with the need for a change in the representation of the nation. This also meant a re-evaluation of what could be considered a point of strength and glory in changing times: the value of the nation was better described through "the working of the land and its long continuity"[162] than ethnic communities or the reproduction of history in itself. The need for cohesion, especially in the light of the introduction of the

[160] Van Dijk, 'Discourse and ideology'.
[161] Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums', p. 43.
[162] Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums', p. 43.

welfare state, was answered by shifting the focus on the concept of historical and ideological continuity, and not lingering on the loss of territories and greater imperial plans.[163]



Picture 8

[163] Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums', p. 47.

One of the most distinctive and well-known characteristics of Sweden is its neutrality. However, the part of the exhibition on the 17th century does not seem to shy away from focusing on the lost power and military success, highlighting both wider phenomena and individual actors. Here the main panel introducing the room will be taken into consideration.[164] The century is presented as particularly difficult for the rest of Europe:

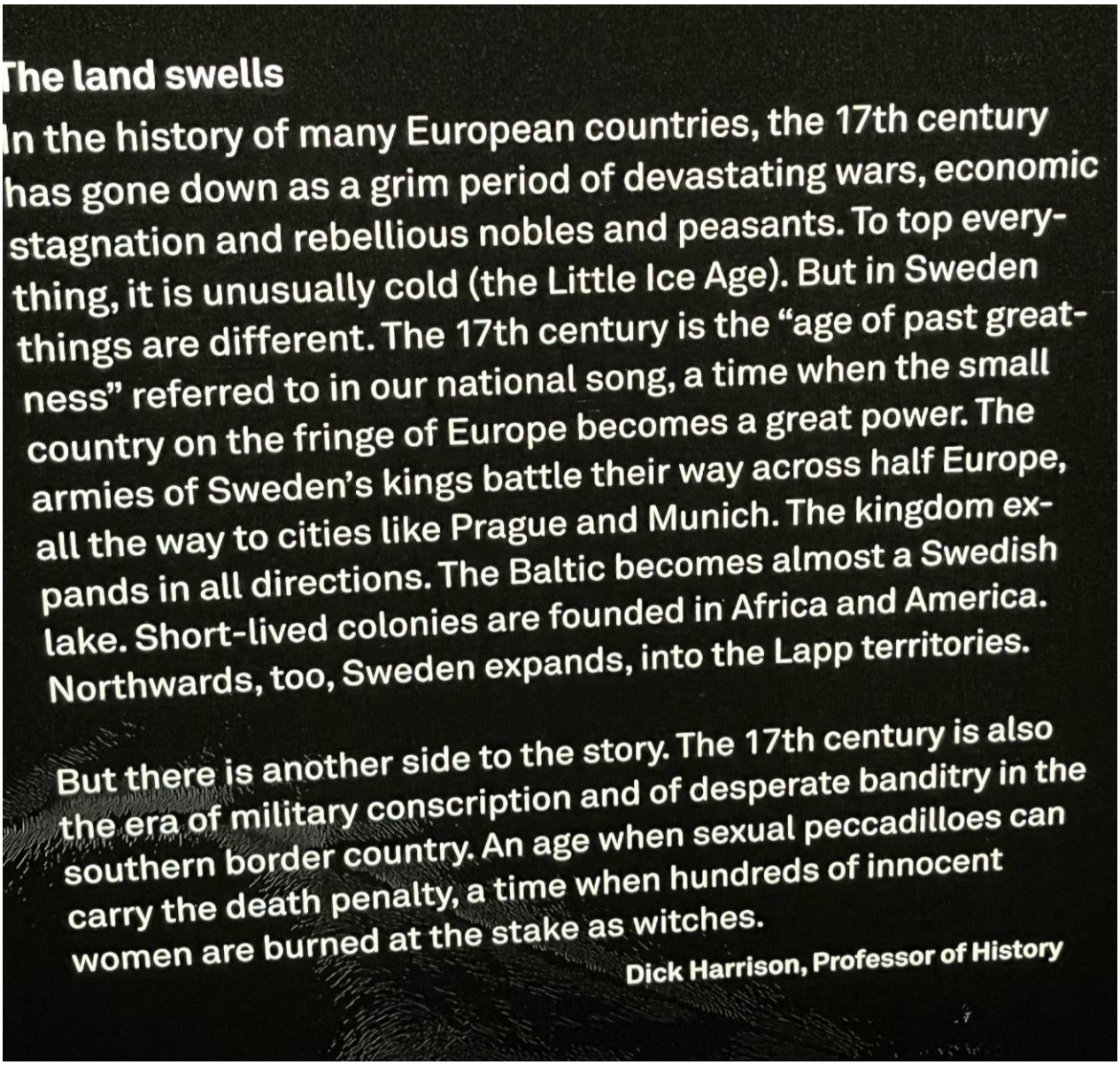
> In the history of many European countries, the 17th century has gone down as a grim period of devastating wars, economic stagnation and rebellious nobles and peasants. To top everything, it is unusually cold (the Little Ice Age).[165]

At the same time, Sweden is presented as in a particularly positive light:

> But in Sweden things are different. The 17th century is the "age of past greatness" referred to in our national song, a time when the small country on the fringe of Europe becomes a great power.[166]

Sweden's accomplishments in the 17th century, in comparison with other European countries, are depicted as exceptional, as it is possible to see in the sentence "but in Sweden things are different". The panel, while defining the "age of past greatness", indicates that this moniker is present in "our national song": it is then indicated as a founding moment for the state and how this exceptional history is meant to be re-presented in the nation, even centuries later. This also highlights the importance of the discursive construction of the concepts of us/them in an ideological light. The voice of the text positions itself and the audience as part of the nation-state, signalling the membership to the in-group by mentioning a marker of identification (the national anthem).

[164] Picture 8.
[165] Picture 9.
[166] Picture 9.



Picture 9

It is also mentioned that the 17th century was not only a time of success and glory in Sweden:

> But there is another side to the story. The 17th century is also the era of military conscription and of desperate banditry in the southern border country. An age when sexual peccadilloes can carry the death penalty, a time when hundreds of innocent women are burned at the stake as witches.[167]

[167] Picture 9.

This reflects the contrasting themes of exceptional/amoral Sweden, but this representation of exceptionalism is not based on the progressive stereotype that is usually present. The text tells openly of the shortcomings and the violence of the century on Swedish land, even if with a lower level of description than the military successes previously described. In comparison, it is then the military and colonial history that are presented with a positive meaning, while violence against the citizens is the negative counterpart. The victims and the violence of Sweden's expansionist plans are not explicitly included in the "another side of the story". However, while the role of the state and king as those holding power and agency is highlighted in the military context, here the agent is hidden, as for example indicated by the passive verb "are burned".[168]

This can also be seen as an example of moral use of history, as it brings a negative past into the light and forward counter narratives to the general success story of the nation in the 17th century. Yet, at the same time it implicitly supports a positive view of the present. The view of a negative, amoral past is often used to compare it to the progressive future of Sweden. Here the myths of Swedish exceptionalism can be seen as implicitly presented through the contrast with the "side" of history presented. In time, neutrality won over conscription, unity and the welfare state over banditry in the southern lands, progressive ideas over punishments for not better defined "sexual peccadilloes" and gender equality over the persecution of "innocent women".

As it is possible to see from the title "The land swells" (sic), Sweden's exceptional success is strongly connected to the idea of territorial expansion. The century is described as "a time when the small country on the fringe of Europe becomes a great power". This brings forward both the meaning of territory and of political power: the image of the *small country* is juxtaposed to the *great power*, and in this way, it highlights the importance and the size of the feat, thus reinforcing its exceptionality. Furthermore, the geographical positioning "on the fringe of Europe" accentuates the contrast between Sweden and the other European

[168] In another caption on witch hunts, however, the role of the government and the need for a stronger control through religion is mentioned.

countries, and positions Sweden as the "Other" that becomes, by its own virtue and valour, "a great power" and thus part of the main group.

The concept of *Sweden as a great power* is explained and argued with two main examples: military power in continental Europe and power by expanding outside of the national territories. Colonial plans are then included as an important part of this glorious time. The agency is given to the Swedish kingdom: "the armies of Sweden's kings battle their way", "the kingdom expands in all directions". Hyperboles and metaphors rhetorically highlight the positive value of these actions, as it is possible to see in the expressions "in all directions" and "the Baltic becomes almost a Swedish lake". The metaphor can resonate both with the Swedish public and with the tourists, as marketing materials often mention the impressive number of lakes present in the Swedish landscape. The importance of territorial conquests can be also seen in the *Sveriges Historia* page on the Historiska website, although the focus is not on the agency of the state. "Finland became Swedish" is one of the titles dividing the English version of the text in paragraphs (while the Swedish page simply lists centuries in a chronological order).[169]

In the panel, it is also indicated how Sweden expanded "northwards…into the ~~Lapp~~ territories". While the general mood of the phrase seems to simply enumerate another success, the wording indicates (while in a possibly offensive way), the character of the expansion, contrasting with other wording. On the website, however, the colonial nature of Sweden's conquest of Sápmi is stated clearly:

> During the same time the state also colonised the Saami territories (Sápmi) within Sweden. [...] The Swedish state's colonisation of Lappland was not only an economic affair: Saami culture came under heavy pressure at the same time.[170]

[169] Historiska Museet, *History of Sweden* [website], https://historiska.se/utstallningar/history-of-sweden/ (last accessed: 19/05/2023)
[170] Historiska Museet, *History of Sweden* [website], https://historiska.se/utstallningar/history-of-sweden/ (last accessed: 19/05/2023).

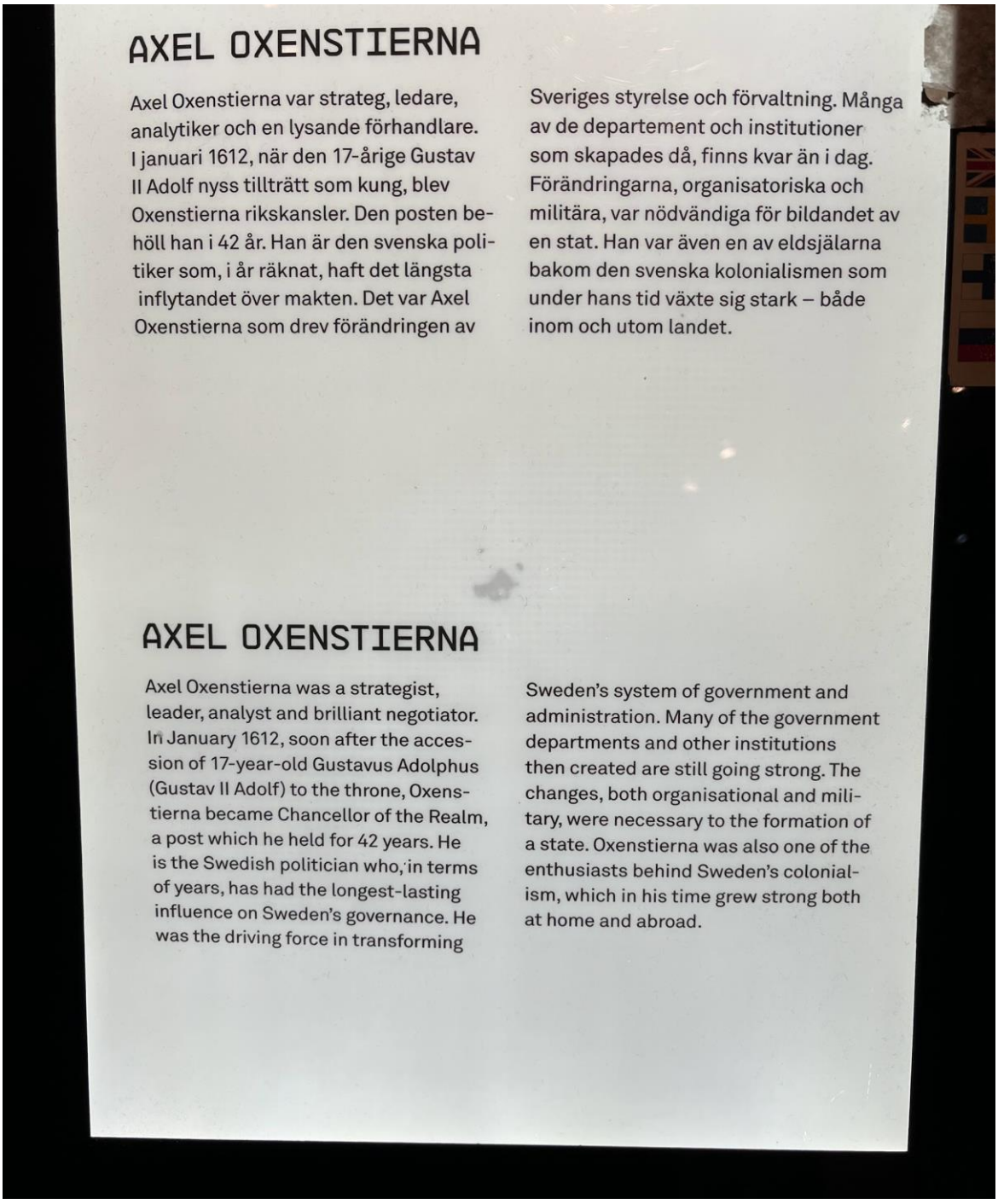
While the responsibility and agency of the state in both the economic and cultural repercussions of Sápmi is presented, the narrative of "internal colonialism" is repeated and implied by highlighting how the Sámi territories are and were "within Sweden".

A similar narrative is shown in the panel dedicated to Axel Oxenstierna, positioned near his portrait and a game asking to find out which of the institutions founded by him are still existing today.[171] The man is described in an extremely positive light, through a process of positive denomination: "Axel Oxenstierna was a strategist, leader, analyst and brilliant negotiator". It is possible to notice how his figure embodies the construction of continuity, through the description of his long-lasting legacy in government and administration. The use of an expression of necessity in "the changes, both organisational and military, were necessary to the formation of a state" cements and naturalises his role as one of the creators of the Swedish state as we know it today.

Oxenstierna is then revealed as "one of the enthusiasts behind Sweden's colonialism, which in his time grew strong both at home and abroad". The statesman is presented to the visitors as a positive actor and exceptional in his own right. His strategic mind is highly regarded and constructed as an authority: colonialism is then presented as another of the necessary actions he was supporting. Furthermore, it highlights how the outcome of the colonial plans was highly successful, while naturalising the colonisation of Sápmi (as it is presented as already "home").

Colonialism is then presented as a natural step in the way of Sweden's achievement of greatness, without showing any critics or doubts. When describing the downsides of the century, colonial issues are not included. The voice taken in consideration reflects the power structures, and no counter narrative is provided.

[171] Picture 10.



AXEL OXENSTIERNA

Axel Oxenstierna var strateg, ledare, analytiker och en lysande förhandlare. I januari 1612, när den 17-årige Gustav II Adolf nyss tillträtt som kung, blev Oxenstierna rikskansler. Den posten behöll han i 42 år. Han är den svenska politiker som, i år räknat, haft det längsta inflytandet över makten. Det var Axel Oxenstierna som drev förändringen av Sveriges styrelse och förvaltning. Många av de departement och institutioner som skapades då, finns kvar än i dag. Förändringarna, organisatoriska och militära, var nödvändiga för bildandet av en stat. Han var även en av eldsjälarna bakom den svenska kolonialismen som under hans tid växte sig stark – både inom och utom landet.

AXEL OXENSTIERNA

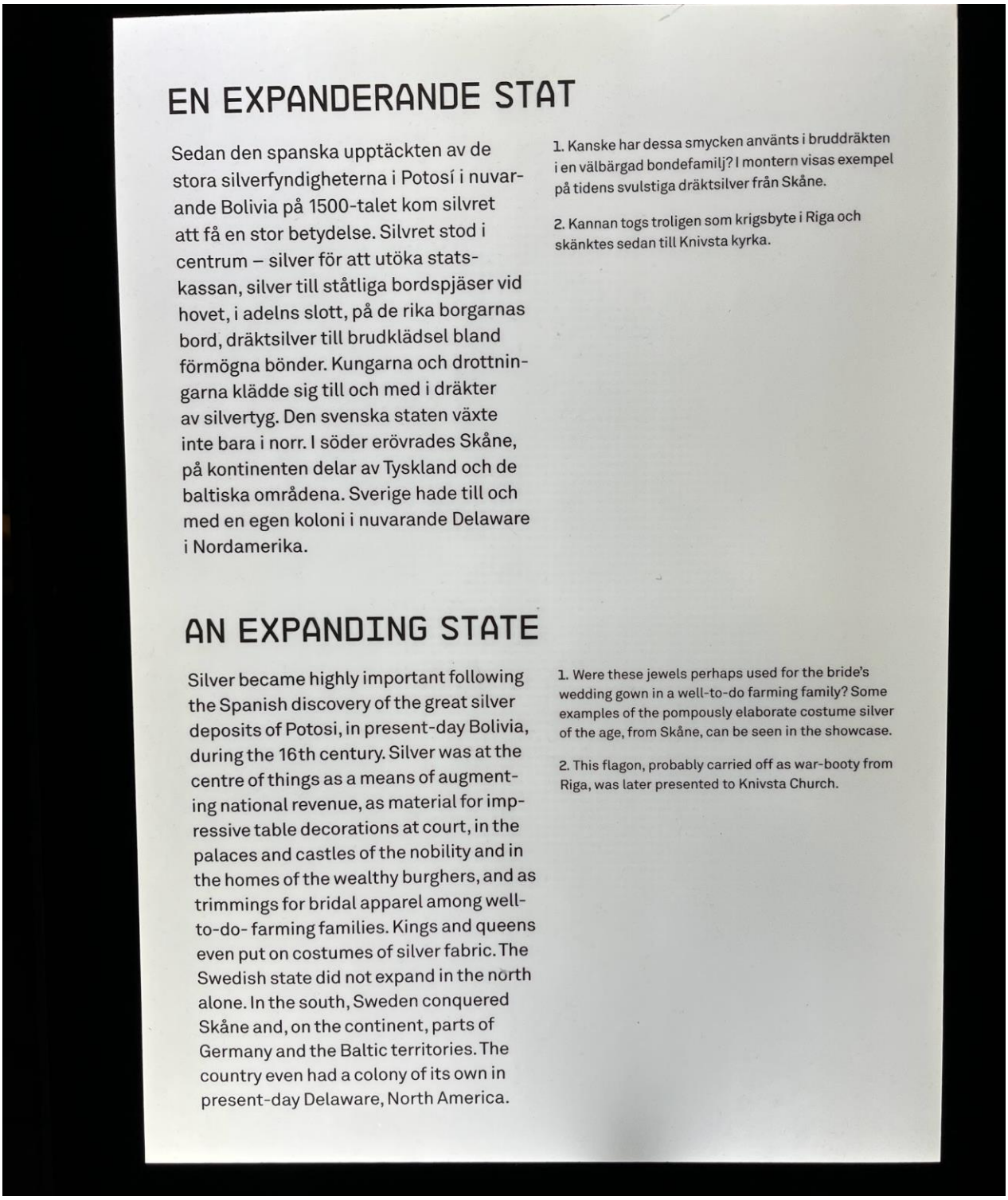
Axel Oxenstierna was a strategist, leader, analyst and brilliant negotiator. In January 1612, soon after the accession of 17-year-old Gustavus Adolphus (Gustav II Adolf) to the throne, Oxenstierna became Chancellor of the Realm, a post which he held for 42 years. He is the Swedish politician who, in terms of years, has had the longest-lasting influence on Sweden's governance. He was the driving force in transforming Sweden's system of government and administration. Many of the government departments and other institutions then created are still going strong. The changes, both organisational and military, were necessary to the formation of a state. Oxenstierna was also one of the enthusiasts behind Sweden's colonialism, which in his time grew strong both at home and abroad.

Picture 10

5.2.2 Colonialism as a global economic system//Sweden as an accomplice in the system

In the caption titled "An expanding state"[172], positioned near elaborate silver jewels from Skane and a flagon ("probably carried off as a war booty from Riga"), the importance of silver from the 16th century is highlighted. The relevance of the metal is then used as an introduction and context to the Swedish territorial gains, thus setting the expansion to be understood as a rational and natural choice. The expansion in the north is not necessarily the focus of the caption, as it is only mentioned to show how "the Swedish state did not expand in the south alone", but also in Skane and some territories on the Baltic. By indicating the country "even had a colony of its own in present-day Delaware, North America", the text reprises the theme of colonial success, while at the same time not including the colony in Cabo Corso, Ghana, now also known as the "Swedish gold coast", even though they were both "short lived" and involved with trade companies. However, it also shows proudly ("*even* had a colony *of its own*") the willing participation of Sweden in the colonial system. The presence of these terms seems to disprove the myth of non-coloniality in order to frame Sweden as a successful country.

[172] Picture 11.



EN EXPANDERANDE STAT

Sedan den spanska upptäckten av de stora silverfyndigheterna i Potosí i nuvarande Bolivia på 1500-talet kom silvret att få en stor betydelse. Silvret stod i centrum – silver för att utöka statskassan, silver till ståtliga bordspjäser vid hovet, i adelns slott, på de rika borgarnas bord, dräktsilver till brudklädsel bland förmögna bönder. Kungarna och drottningarna klädde sig till och med i dräkter av silvertyg. Den svenska staten växte inte bara i norr. I söder erövrades Skåne, på kontinenten delar av Tyskland och de baltiska områdena. Sverige hade till och med en egen koloni i nuvarande Delaware i Nordamerika.

1. Kanske har dessa smycken använts i bruddräkten i en välbärgad bondefamilj? I montern visas exempel på tidens svulstiga dräktsilver från Skåne.

2. Kannan togs troligen som krigsbyte i Riga och skänktes sedan till Knivsta kyrka.

AN EXPANDING STATE

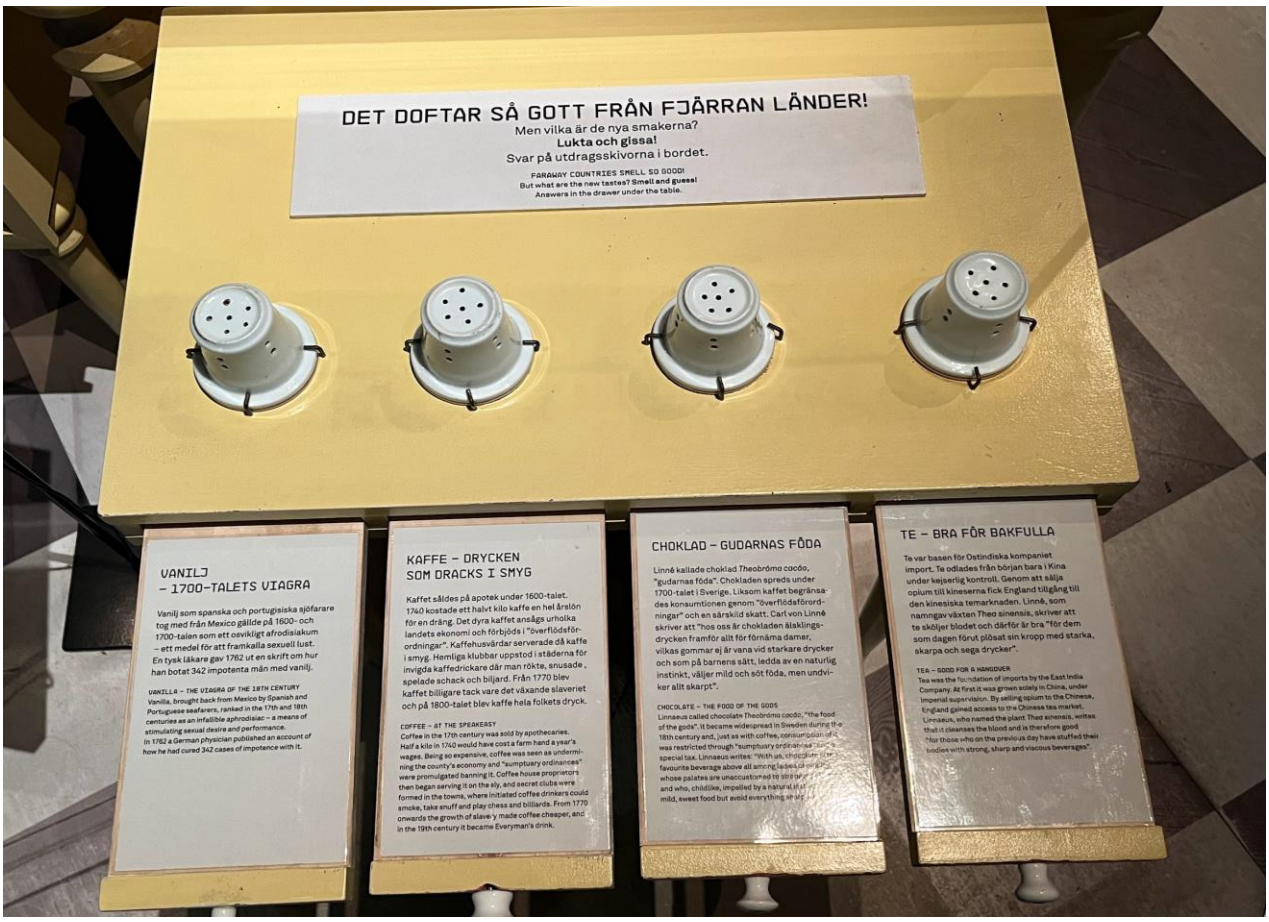
Silver became highly important following the Spanish discovery of the great silver deposits of Potosi, in present-day Bolivia, during the 16th century. Silver was at the centre of things as a means of augmenting national revenue, as material for impressive table decorations at court, in the palaces and castles of the nobility and in the homes of the wealthy burghers, and as trimmings for bridal apparel among well-to-do- farming families. Kings and queens even put on costumes of silver fabric. The Swedish state did not expand in the north alone. In the south, Sweden conquered Skåne and, on the continent, parts of Germany and the Baltic territories. The country even had a colony of its own in present-day Delaware, North America.

1. Were these jewels perhaps used for the bride's wedding gown in a well-to-do farming family? Some examples of the pompously elaborate costume silver of the age, from Skåne, can be seen in the showcase.

2. This flagon, probably carried off as war-booty from Riga, was later presented to Knivsta Church.

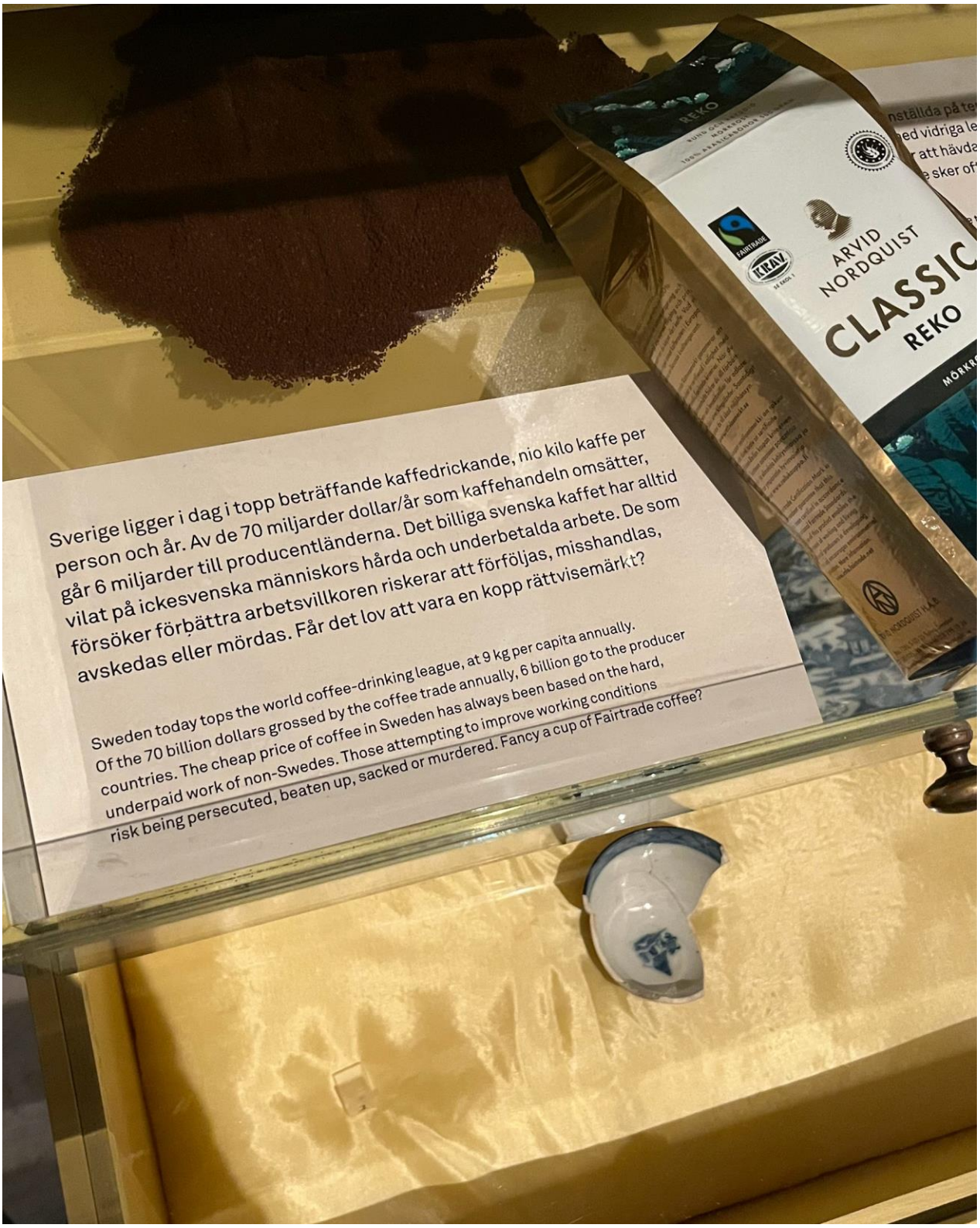
Picture 11

Moving on to the 18th century, the colonial theme is more present in the exhibition, and the theme of economy is particularly clear. From the presence of an olfactive game, asking to recognise new and exciting smells coming from the colonies, titled "Faraway countries smell so good!", to the inclusion of contemporary issues such as the working conditions of those employed in the coffee and chocolate industries.[173] In this last case, the power imbalance between Sweden and other rich countries and the "producer countries" is made clear, along with the moral responsibility intrinsic in the consumers' choice: "The cheap price of coffee in Sweden has always been based on the hard underpaid work of non-Swedes. [...] Fancy a cup of fairtrade coffee?".[174]



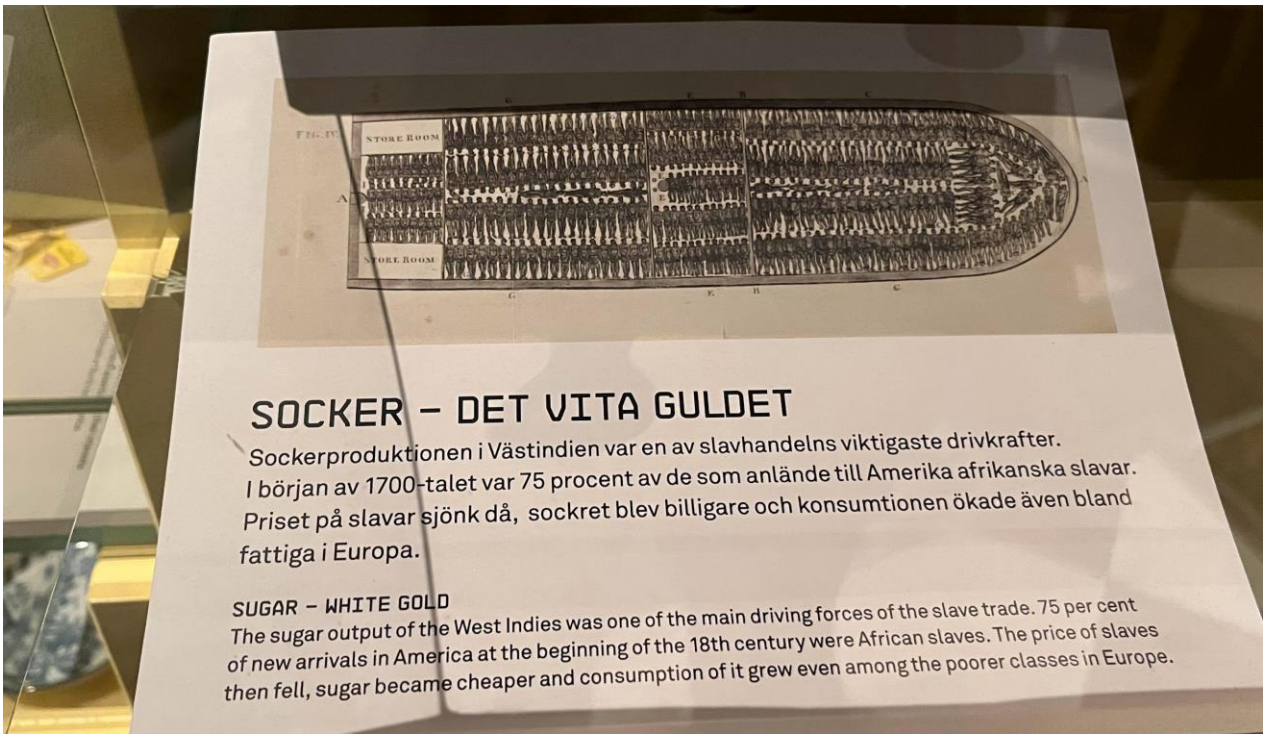
Picture 12

[173] Pictures 12, 13.
[174] Picture 13.


Sverige ligger i dag i topp beträffande kaffedrickande, nio kilo kaffe per person och år. Av de 70 miljarder dollar/år som kaffehandeln omsätter, går 6 miljarder till producentländerna. Det billiga svenska kaffet har alltid vilat på ickesvenska människors hårda och underbetalda arbete. De som försöker förbättra arbetsvillkoren riskerar att förföljas, misshandlas, avskedas eller mördas. Får det lov att vara en kopp rättvisemärkt?
Sweden today tops the world coffee-drinking league, at 9 kg per capita annually. Of the 70 billion dollars grossed by the coffee trade annually, 6 billion go to the producer countries. The cheap price of coffee in Sweden has always been based on the hard, underpaid work of non-Swedes. Those attempting to improve working conditions risk being persecuted, beaten up, sacked or murdered. Fancy a cup of Fairtrade coffee?
REKO
ARVID NORDQUIST
CLASSIC
REKO
FAIRTRADE
KRAV

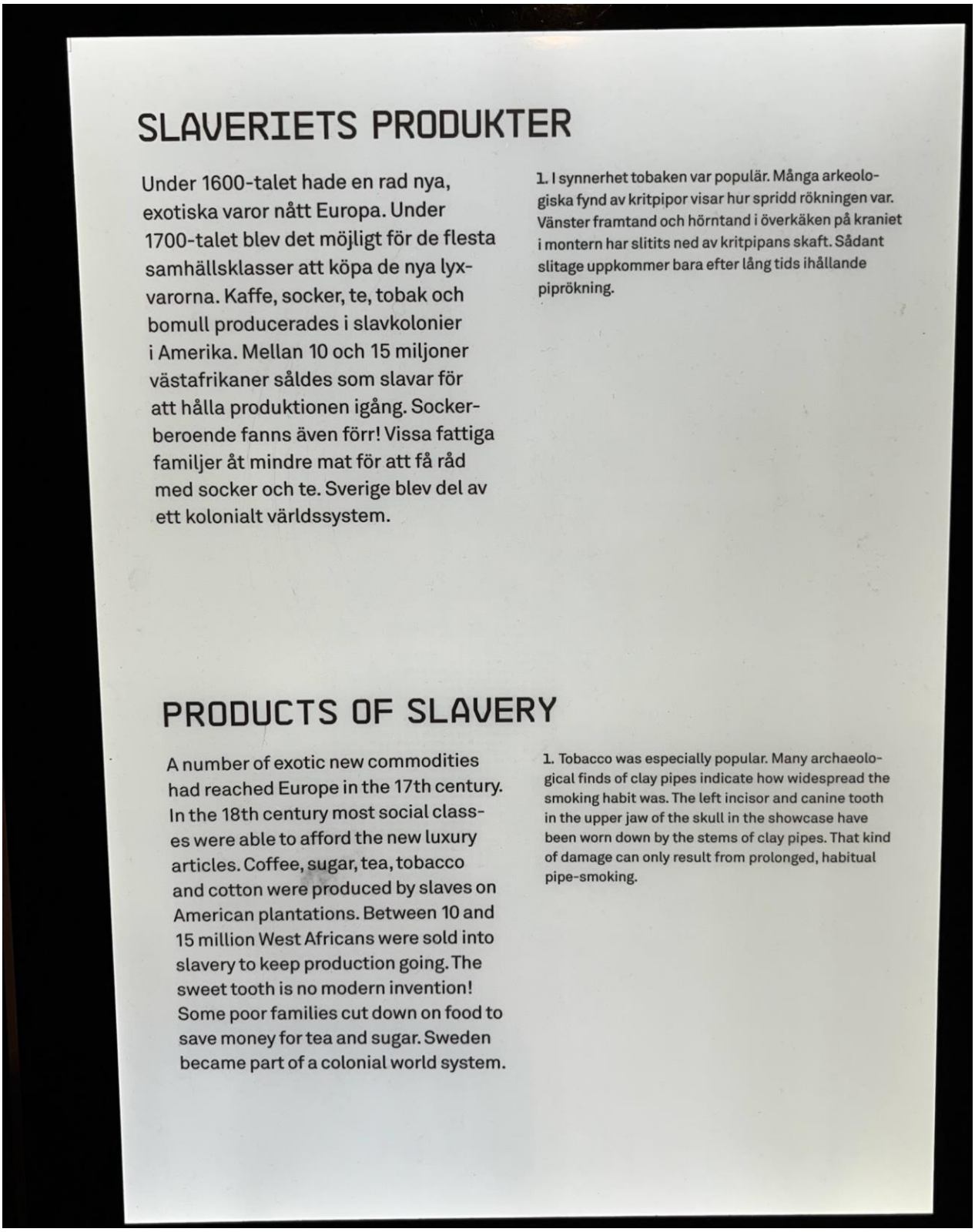
Picture 13

This focus is mirrored in the panel "Products of slavery"[175]: the caption lingers on the "new luxury articles" and presents ironically the *craze* of the public for sugar and other products ("the sweet tooth is no modern invention!"), along with data on the enslavement and exploitation of "between 10 and 15 million West Africans [...] to keep production going". The "white gold" is referred to in another panel as "one of the main driving forces of the slave trade".[176] With the focus put on the success of colonial plans in the previous century, it is then a surprise that this caption simply refers to how "Sweden became part of a colonial world system". This implicitly connects the participation not to owning colonies "of its own", but to being complicit through trade and access to goods, thus presenting the myth of Sweden as non-colonial and not directly responsible for colonial acts or conquests. This concept is also strengthened by the lack of active agency from Sweden, as neither the government nor the colonial trading agencies are included among the agents, especially when it comes to the description of slavery.



Picture 14

[175] Picture 15.
[176] Picture 14.



SLAVERIETS PRODUKTER

Under 1600-talet hade en rad nya, exotiska varor nått Europa. Under 1700-talet blev det möjligt för de flesta samhällsklasser att köpa de nya lyxvarorna. Kaffe, socker, te, tobak och bomull producerades i slavkolonier i Amerika. Mellan 10 och 15 miljoner västafrikaner såldes som slavar för att hålla produktionen igång. Sockerberoende fanns även förr! Vissa fattiga familjer åt mindre mat för att få råd med socker och te. Sverige blev del av ett kolonialt världssystem.

1. I synnerhet tobaken var populär. Många arkeologiska fynd av kritpipor visar hur spridd rökningen var. Vänster framtand och hörntand i överkäken på kraniet i montern har slitits ned av kritpipans skaft. Sådant slitage uppkommer bara efter lång tids ihållande piprökning.

PRODUCTS OF SLAVERY

A number of exotic new commodities had reached Europe in the 17th century. In the 18th century most social classes were able to afford the new luxury articles. Coffee, sugar, tea, tobacco and cotton were produced by slaves on American plantations. Between 10 and 15 million West Africans were sold into slavery to keep production going. The sweet tooth is no modern invention! Some poor families cut down on food to save money for tea and sugar. Sweden became part of a colonial world system.

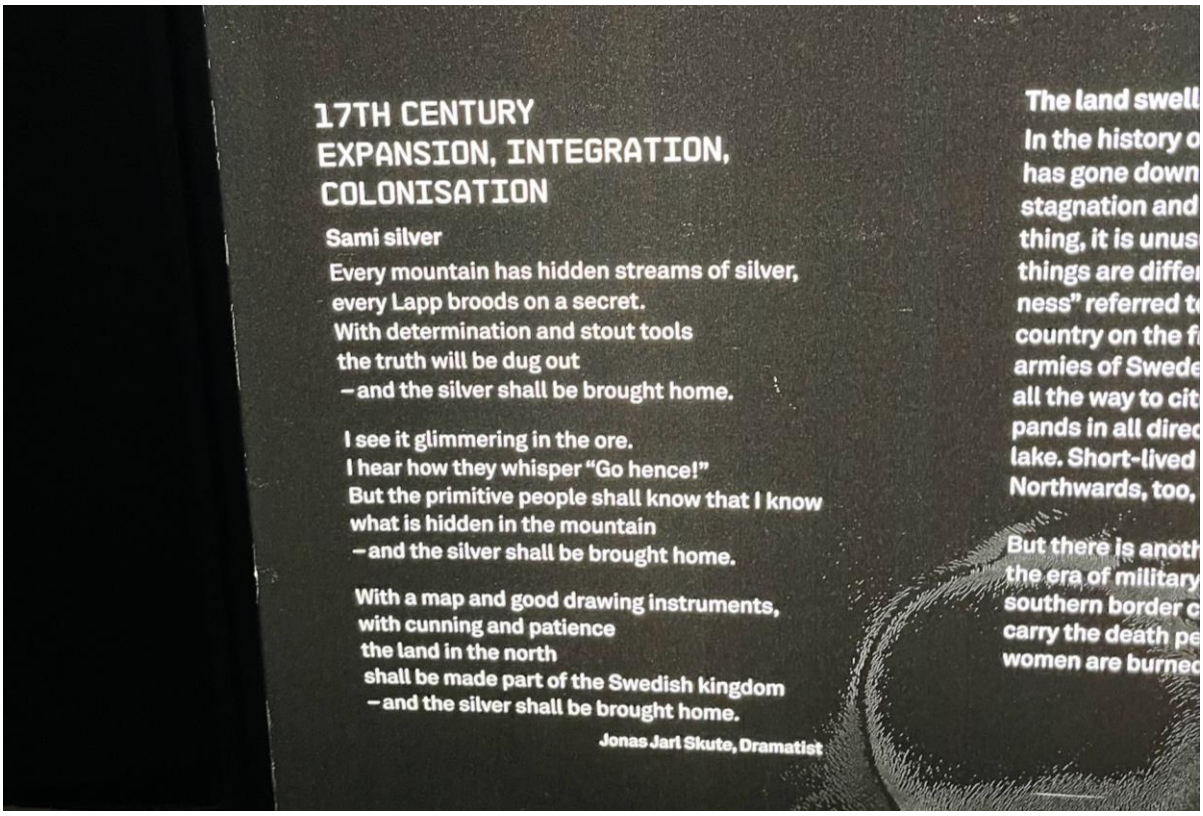
1. Tobacco was especially popular. Many archaeological finds of clay pipes indicate how widespread the smoking habit was. The left incisor and canine tooth in the upper jaw of the skull in the showcase have been worn down by the stems of clay pipes. That kind of damage can only result from prolonged, habitual pipe-smoking.

Picture 15

The colonial voice and the importance of silver is represented again in the poem present on the panel dedicated to the 17th century and titled "Sámi silver".[177] Here a disclaimer is needed: it is a modern text, composed for the exhibition itself in 2009, and written by a contemporary dramatist. As the rest of the other poems included on the main century panel, it is meant to represent and bring forward the voice of someone living in the century taken into consideration. Examples include Ulfrid, an 11th century man describing his travels, or Ulrika Eleonora Stålhammar, who dressed up as a man to join the military and married another woman. In this case, the voice talking through the poem is one that strongly embodies the ideas behind the colonial plans in Sápmi. In the best interpretation of the original intentions, it can be seen as an attempt to simply display the point of view of someone living in the era and conforming to what were then socially acceptable ideas. It could have been also seen as a way to highlight the absurdity of some of those views, by positioning the audience in an uncomfortable position. While this has been used as a technique in museums talking about colonialism and slavery, it has also received strong criticism.[178]

[177] Picture 16.

[178] See A. N. Andersen, 'Curating enslavement and the colonial history of Denmark: the 2017 Centennial' in J. Apsel, and A. Sodaro (eds.), *Museums and Sites of Persuasion*, London, Taylor & Francis, Routledge, 2020,



Picture 16

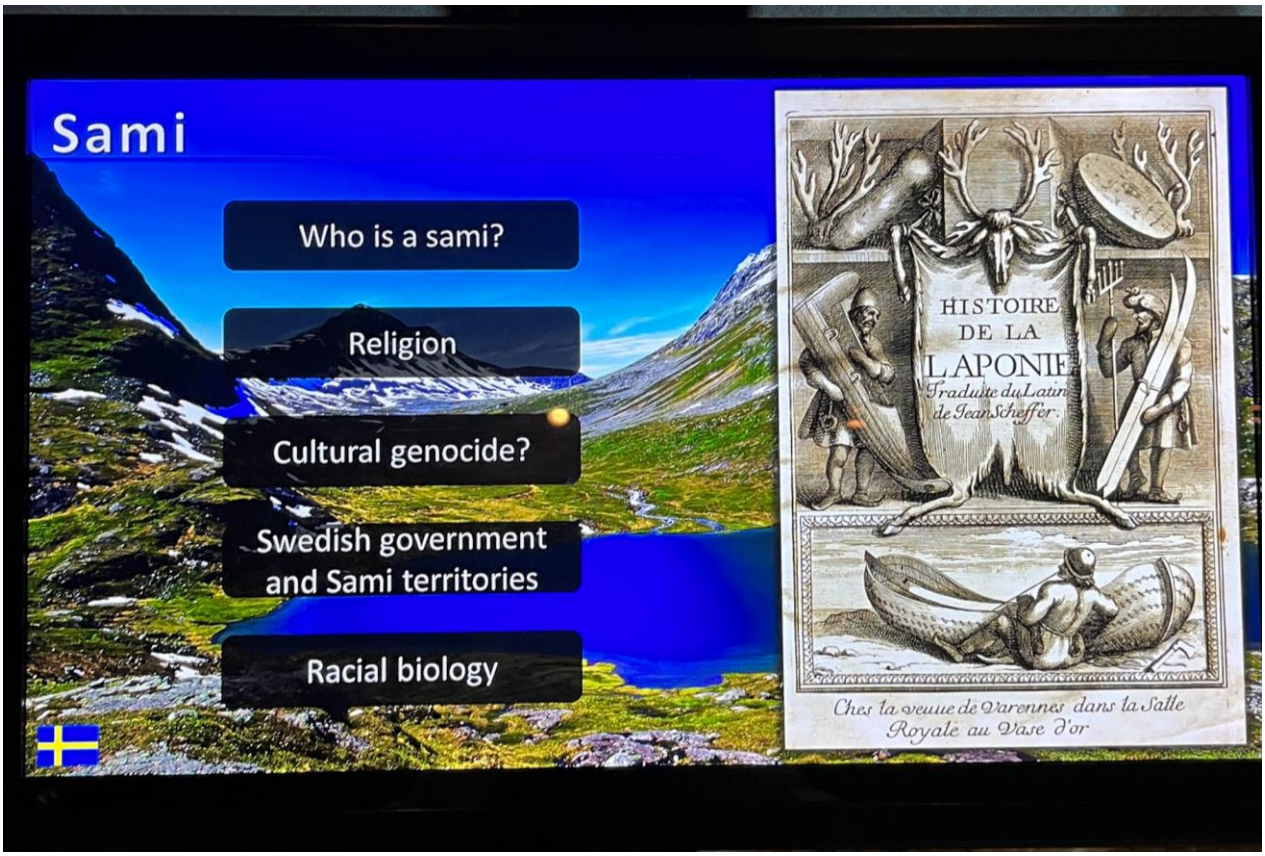
However, Critical Discourse Analysis has to be anchored to the text and materials present and not to possible intentions, no matter how honourable they might be. It is important to notice how no counter narrative is presented in the panel, nor any critical view, apart from the admission present in the title "Sámi silver". The poem contains depictions of Sámi people that reflect harmful and colonial stereotypes, even by using what is widely considered as a slur ("every ~~Lapp~~ broods on a secret", "the primitive people"). The othered Sámi are then shown as the obstacle to Sweden's naturalised mission ("and the silver shall be brought home"), presented as if the same natural forces were asking for the silver to be brought to light ("I see it glimmering in the ore/I hear how they whisper "go hence!"). This is particularly problematic in the light of the exploitation of both the Sámi and Sápmi for precious metals or other resources. On the contrary, Sweden is presented using the language of values and skill, often used to explain and justify colonialism by indicating a moral and material superiority over the colonial "Other" ("determination and stout tools", "with a map

and good drawing instruments/with cunning and patience"). The poem, while falling in the rhetoric of the economic, thus rational, justification for colonialism, presents also the concept of colonialism as land expansion. Its position in a panel describing the glory of 17th century Sweden without addressing the implications of these actions nor presenting any type of different narrative can be seen as almost grotesque at best, and reinforcing colonial concepts and group relations that do not seem to conform to the *values and norms* that are now usually considered *Swedish* (or that are so presented in nation branding campaigns through exceptionalist discourses).[179]

5.2.3 Colonialism as shame//Sweden as responsible

The consequences of colonialism in Sápmi and the presence of Sámi people have been addressed more in depth in the "Sveriges Historia" exhibition, although in a touchscreen stand that has been recently added. The presentation, simply titled "Sámi", presents five different main points: "Who is a Sámi?" (sic), "Religion", "Cultural genocide?", "Swedish government and Sámi territories", "Racial biology".[180] From the titles, the expected content presented could be divided into two main categories, one more focused on the aim of educating and informing about the Sámi, and one more focused on bringing awareness to the colonial and postcolonial issues in Sápmi. The panel is presenting openly and in relative detail some shameful parts of Swedish history, of colonial relations and of weaponised pseudoscientific belief.

[179] van Dijk, 'Discourse and Ideology', p. 396.
[180] Picture 17.



Picture 17

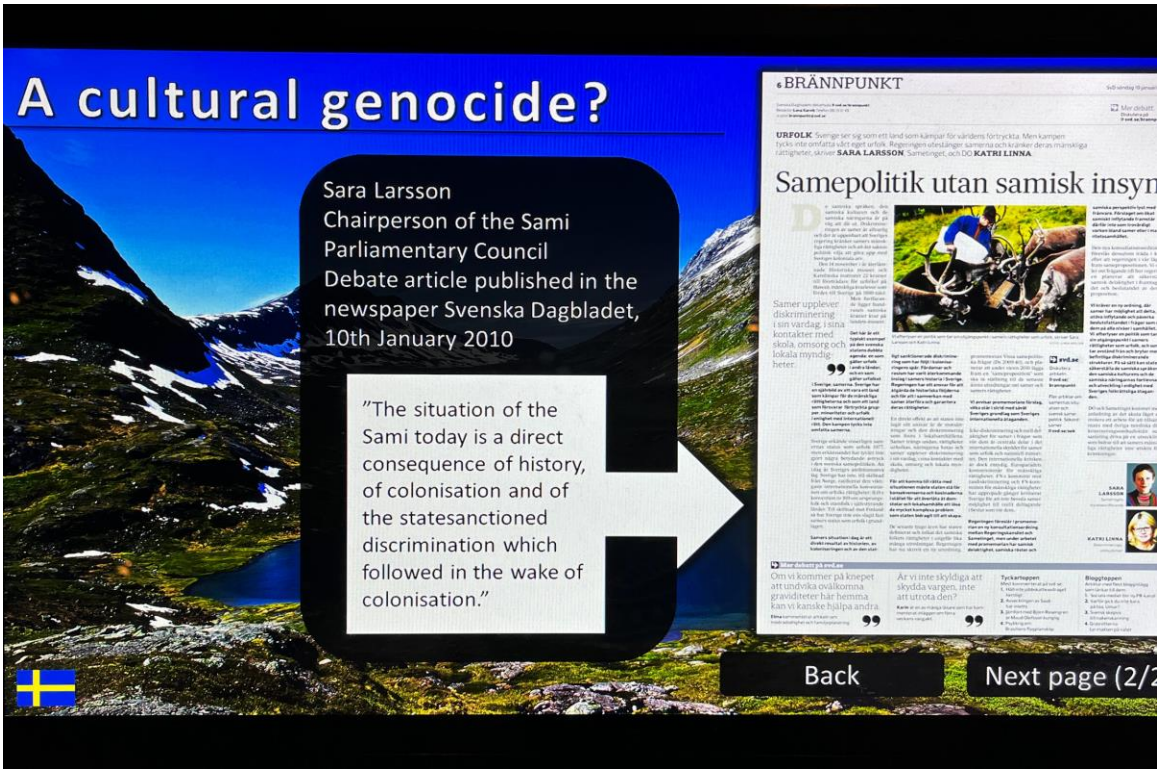
The title "Cultural genocide?" brings forward a particularly striking question: however, one that will not necessarily find an answer by the museum itself. The first slide quotes an article by Sara Larsson, chairperson of the Sámi parliamentary council:

> The situation of the Sámi today is a direct consequence of history, of colonisation and of the statesanctioned discrimination which followed in the wake of colonisation.[181]

The text is clear and indicates the colonial project of the Swedish state as responsible for the "situation of the Sámi today". The inclusion of Larsson's title as chairperson both implicate her authority on the subject, but also define her as part and voice of the "Other". It is positive that this perspective is presented and centred, as it gives voice to the minority group directly

[181] Picture 18.

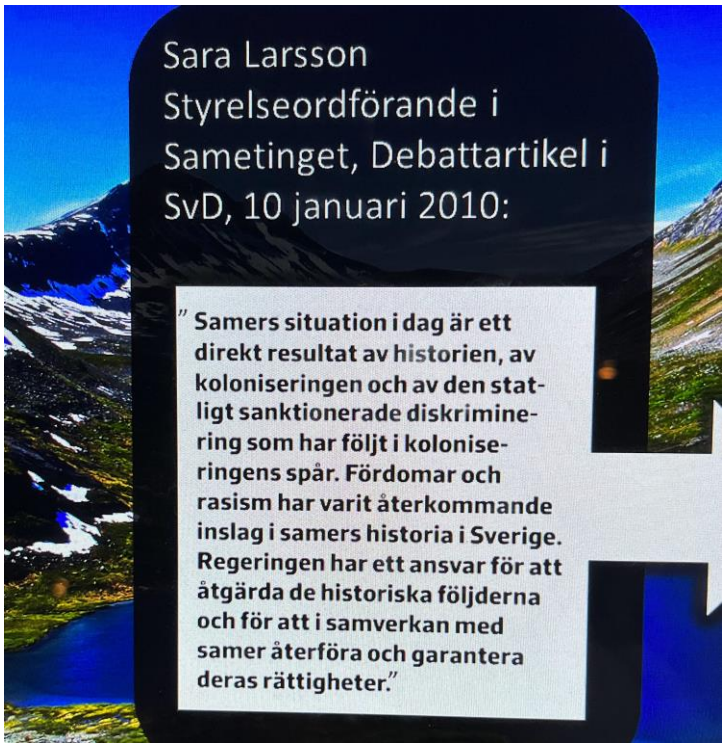
(even if mediated by the genre of the article). However, the voice of the museum does not intervene in the matter, neither to support nor to oppose this narrative. If the exhibitions can be considered as constructing meaning also through the implicit authority of the museum, here this quote is not presented as part of the general narrative: is it, after all, *only* an opinion?



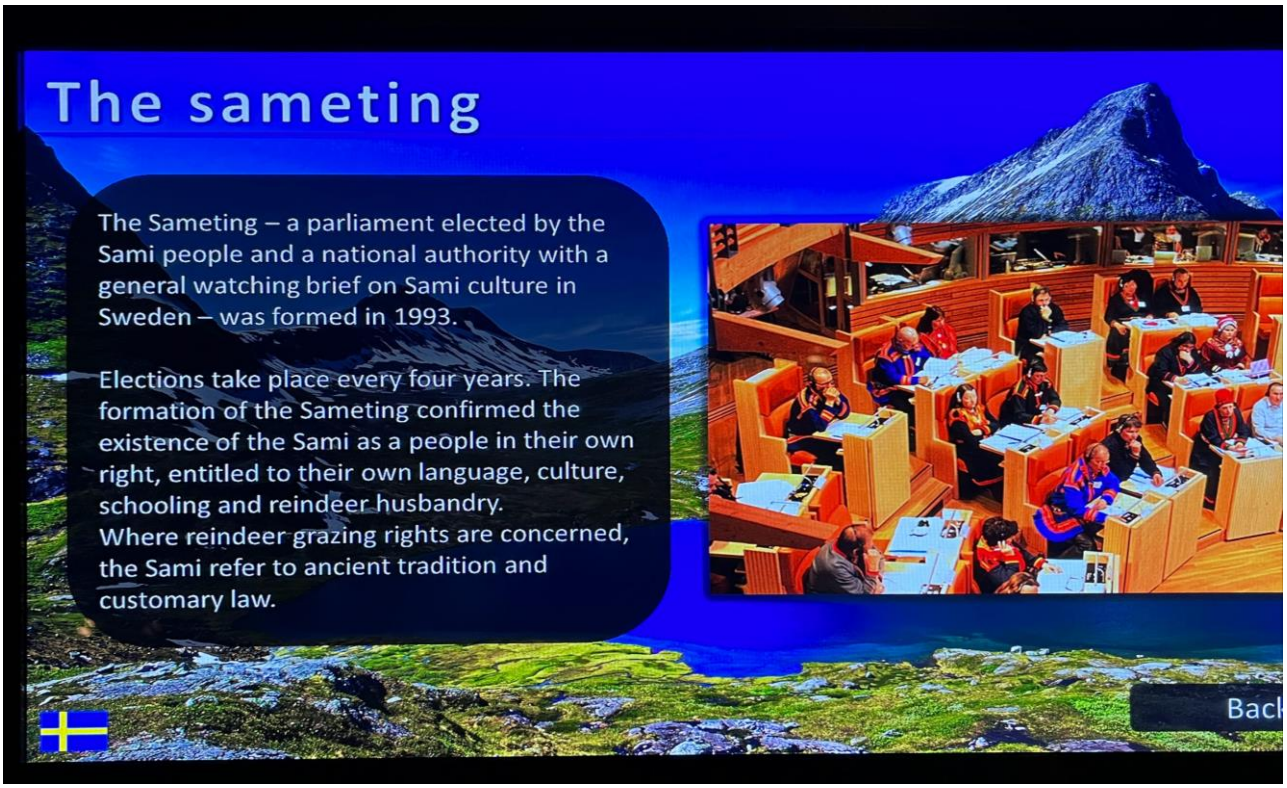
Picture 18

It is also interesting to notice how the Swedish version of the same page presents a longer and more direct reference to the recurring character of racism and prejudice in Sweden, along with the responsibility of the government to grant the Sámi's rights and tackle the consequences of colonialism in Sápmi.[182] The next slide in the same section does not continue the theme, and instead introduces the Sameting. According to the text, its formation "confirmed the existence of the Sámi as a people in their own right", rather than simply the right of the Sámi for representation at a national level.[183]

[182] Picture 19.
[183] Picture 20.



Picture 19



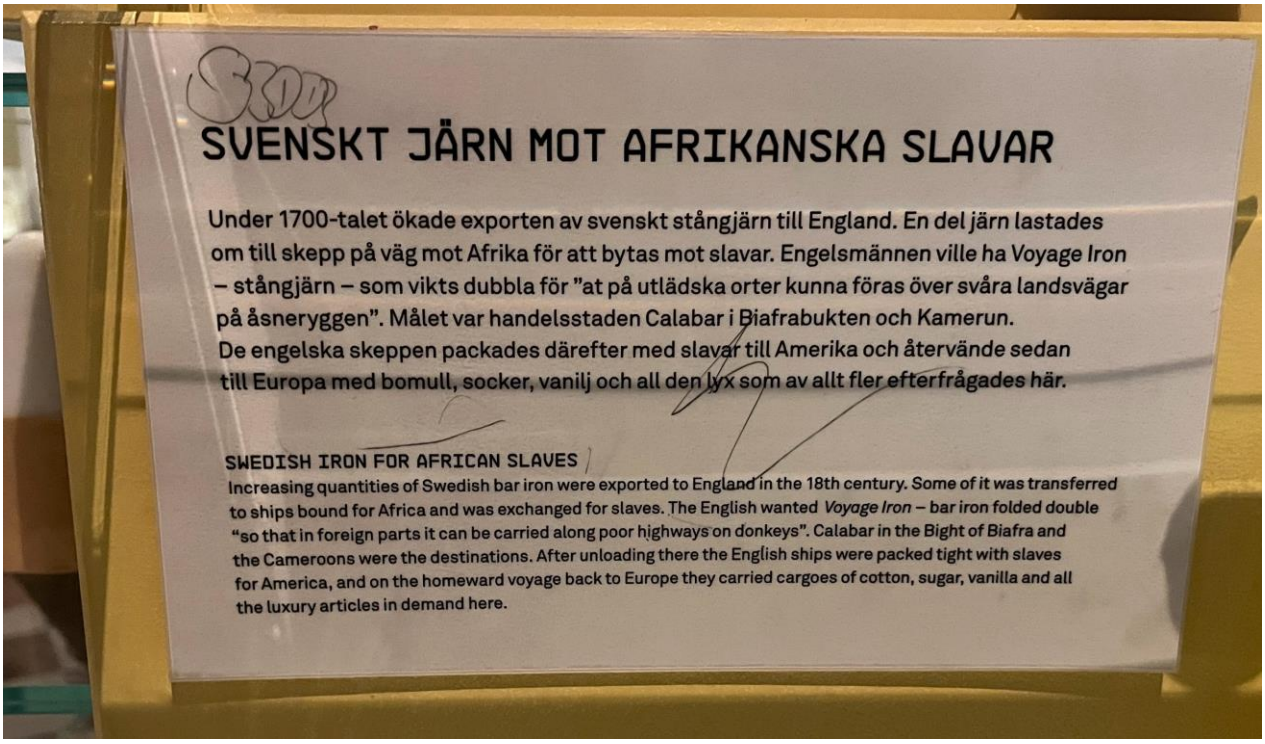
Picture 20

In contrast with the rest of the text on colonial successes, in the main panel on the 17th century colonialism overseas is somehow downplayed, by presenting a low level of description and completeness: "Short-lived colonies are founded in Africa and America ".[184]
This is also reinforced by the map - presenting the same area as in every other map (Scandinavian and Baltic area) and not including the colonies in New Sweden and Congo. While it is mentioned, overseas colonialism seems not to be included in the national narrative to the same degree. This becomes increasingly clear especially as it is not possible to find any traces of its more long-lasting example, the island of St. Barthélemy, in the "Sveriges Historia" exhibition. This omission and the vagueness could seem to confirm the "De-emphasize *Our* bad things" axiom found in van Dijk's ideological square.[185] It however also contradicts the axiom, as it is being presented in a context that celebrates similar events. Is failed colonialism in an otherwise successful century a source of shame?

In the 18th century room, a panel informs the audience on the role of Sweden in the slave trade. Yet, instead of disclosing the role of ships and captains transporting enslaved people across the Atlantic under Swedish flag, the ambitions guiding the trading forts in Cabo Corso or why St. Barthélemy became a free port, the exhibition focuses on the role of "Swedish iron for african slaves"[186] (sic). It is of course an important part of Sweden's role in the transatlantic trade, and it is positive that it has been included: it challenges the idea of Sweden as not implicated in the trade of enslaved people and the consequent colonial system of exploitation. At the same time, the focus seems to be again on the economic side. The triangular trade is presented, but the agency is implicitly removed from Sweden and Swedish actors, with the use of passive verbs ("Increasing quantities of Swedish bar iron were exported to England") and the description of "English ships" as the main focus. While the word "slave/s" is repeated quite frequently both in this caption and in the rest of this part of the exhibition, the focus is not on the enslavers, but rather on the economic system.

[184] Picture 9.
[185] van Dijk, 'Discourse and ideology', p. 396.
[186] Picture 21. As the picture shows, the panel has been ruined and vandalised with a pen. For a more substantial account of the impact of the iron trade, see C. Evans, and G. Rydén''Voyage Iron': An Atlantic Slave Trade Currency, its European Origins, and West African Impact', *Past & Present*, vol. 239, no. 1, 2018.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the wording of "the English ships were packed tight with slaves for America" and "the price of slaves fell"[187] in a previously mentioned caption present problematic undertones, representing enslaved people as objects to be traded, no differently from "cargoes of cotton, sugar, vanilla and all the luxury articles in demand here".



Picture 21

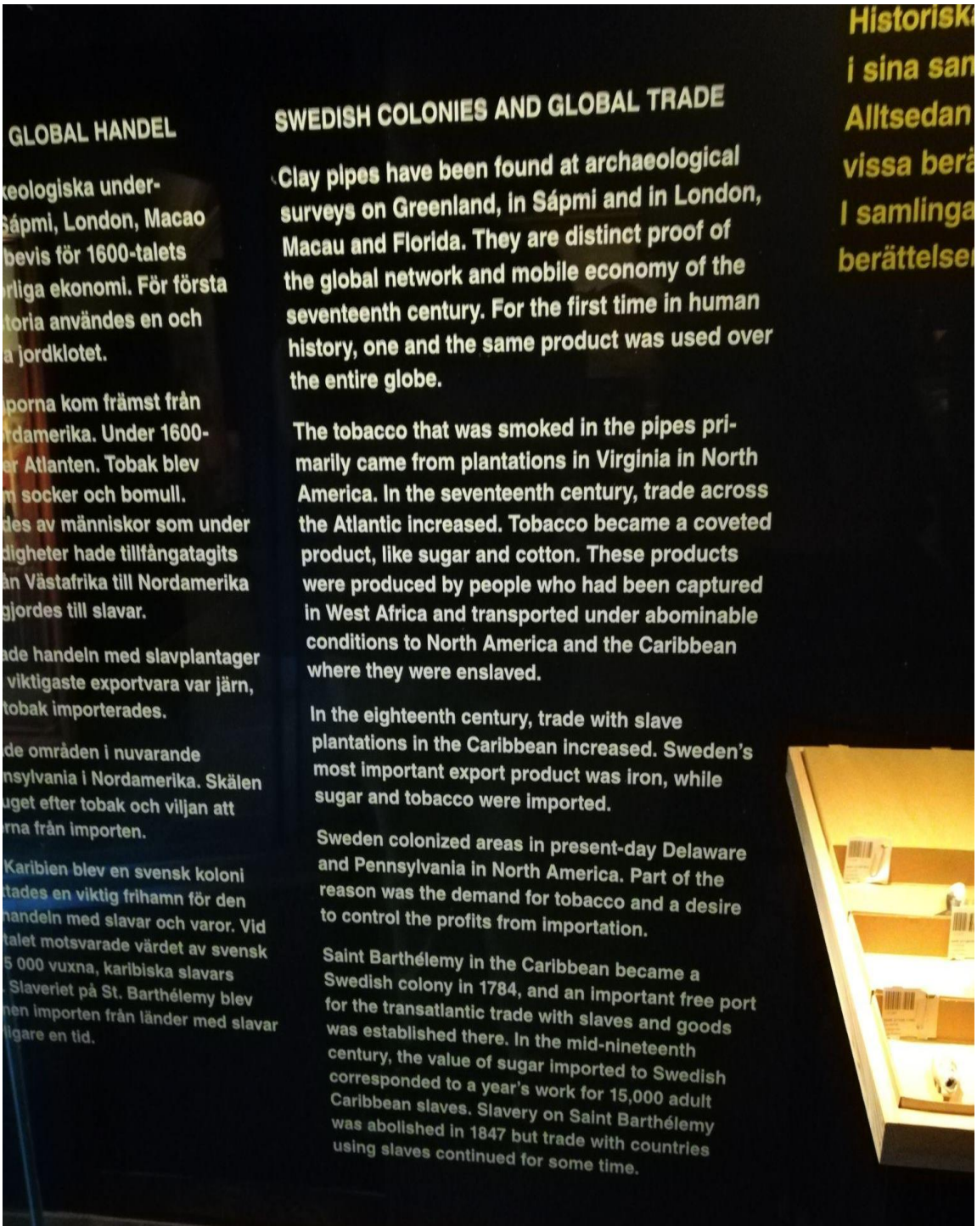
The caption is positioned under a little glass drawer containing a cotton plant; underneath it, a Marabou chocolate bar and cocoa nibs, along with a caption highlighting the working conditions of the chocolate industry. On its side, a little monitor repeatedly shows a short video on the Transatlantic trade. The images presented are quite varied: cars driving on a dusty road, a building in the colonial style of a plantation house, a person talking (an expert?), statues in a garden, representing Black men, with a colourful cloth around their hips, a wooden vessel in particularly agitated waters, a handwritten note (in Swedish) from what could be the 17th or the 18th century (maybe a ship manifest?), fires, shackles, burning rods,

[187] Picture 14.

a white man trying on and feeling the weight of old and thick chains. However, no further analysis can be presented, as the audio unfortunately did not work.

Swedish colonialism in the Caribbean is only mentioned in the “History Unfolds - a reflection” exhibition. As the project had as an objective to uncover previously less known parts of history, taking a more aware and reflexive point of view on difficult themes, a subversion of the themes present in the “Sveriges Historia " could be present. This could be then seen as part of a more general moral use of history in the project, breaking the ideology square and dealing with difficult and confusing topics for both the internal and the external public. The text[188] analysed is positioned towards the exit of the last room, next to a painting of the city of Gustavia in Saint Barthélemy. From the title “Swedish colonies and global trade”, it is implied that the text will not only focus on Swedish colonial history, but also touch on the importance of global trade, possibly highlighting its role in pushing the colonial expansion and the economic consequences of colonialism.

[188] Picture 22


GLOBAL HANDEL
eologiska under-
Sápmi, London, Macao
bevis för 1600-talets
rliga ekonomi. För första
toria användes en och
a jordklotet.
porna kom främst från
rdamerika. Under 1600-
er Atlanten. Tobak blev
m socker och bomull.
des av människor som under
digheter hade tillfångatagits
ån Västafrika till Nordamerika
gjordes till slavar.
ade handeln med slavplantager
viktigaste exportvara var järn,
tobak importerades.
de områden i nuvarande
nsylvania i Nordamerika. Skälen
uget efter tobak och viljan att
rna från importen.
Karibien blev en svensk koloni
tades en viktig frihamn för den
handeln med slavar och varor. Vid
talet motsvarade värdet av svensk
5 000 vuxna, karibiska slavars
Slaveriet på St. Barthélemy blev
nen importen från länder med slavar
ligare en tid.
SWEDISH COLONIES AND GLOBAL TRADE
Clay pipes have been found at archaeological surveys on Greenland, in Sápmi and in London, Macau and Florida. They are distinct proof of the global network and mobile economy of the seventeenth century. For the first time in human history, one and the same product was used over the entire globe.
The tobacco that was smoked in the pipes primarily came from plantations in Virginia in North America. In the seventeenth century, trade across the Atlantic increased. Tobacco became a coveted product, like sugar and cotton. These products were produced by people who had been captured in West Africa and transported under abominable conditions to North America and the Caribbean where they were enslaved.
In the eighteenth century, trade with slave plantations in the Caribbean increased. Sweden's most important export product was iron, while sugar and tobacco were imported.
Sweden colonized areas in present-day Delaware and Pennsylvania in North America. Part of the reason was the demand for tobacco and a desire to control the profits from importation.
Saint Barthélemy in the Caribbean became a Swedish colony in 1784, and an important free port for the transatlantic trade with slaves and goods was established there. In the mid-nineteenth century, the value of sugar imported to Swedish corresponded to a year's work for 15,000 adult Caribbean slaves. Slavery on Saint Barthélemy was abolished in 1847 but trade with countries using slaves continued for some time.
Historisk
i sina san
Alltsedan
vissa berä
I samlinga
berättelse

Picture 22

While Swedish colonial history is treated more in depth in this section, the main narrative present is still an economic one, as it possible to see in the part dedicated to the colony of New Sweden:

> Sweden colonized areas in present-day Delaware and Pennsylvania in North America. Part of the reason was the demand for tobacco and a desire to control the profits from importation.[189]

While in a previous example the colony was presented in the light of colonial success, here only "part of the reason" is stated, and by connecting it mainly to somewhat sound economic reasons, it downplays the interests that the state had in participating in the colonisation process, and the resulting power struggles. Furthermore, as we will see in the section regarding St. Barthélemy, the text avoids discussing the shortcomings and failures of the Swedish colonial endeavours, such as losing the colony to the Dutch in 1655 or the 1878 referendum that put the island back under French rule. It nonetheless presents a higher level of description compared to previous mentions of the colony, by specifying the geographical and the economic context, and a clear agency of Sweden as the colonising country.

The Caribbean island is then described both in his economic role and in connection to the issue of slavery:

> Saint Barthélemy in the Caribbean became a Swedish colony in 1784, and an important free port for the transatlantic trade with slaves and goods was established there. [...] Slavery on Saint Barthélemy was abolished in 1847 but trade with countries using slaves continued for some time.[190]

The text does not indicate explicitly that Sweden was at that point a slave holding and trafficking nation. The only information given on the presence of enslaved people in any of the Swedish colonies discussed in the exhibition is the year of abolition. However, the text implies that it was directly benefiting from the slave trade, the trafficking in the free port and the forced work of enslaved people. It is more painted as a passive engagement rather than

[189] Picture 22.
[190] Picture 22.

an active participation, while there had been by that point an interest to be part of the slave trade, as the Cabo Corso forts can attest to. Archival documents show clearly how integrated St. Barthélemy was in the economy of slavery. While the context for the acquisition of the island is not explained, and there is no indication of when it was not a Swedish colony anymore, the importance of the slave trade and the presence of enslaved people on the island is to some extent touched in the paragraph.

The absence of the Cabo Corso fort in Ghana in the text is quite notable in this light, as it is one of the major failed attempts at colonialism overseas, while showing the interest towards taking part to the Transatlantic slave trade in the 17th century. The issue of slavery is mainly mentioned in the context of trade and production mirroring those already present in the "Sveriges Historia" exhibition, even if with a more tactful language:

> These products were produced by people who had been captured in West Africa and transported under abominable conditions to North America and the Caribbean where they were enslaved.
>
> In the eighteenth century, trade with slave plantations in the Caribbean increased. Sweden's most important export product was iron, while sugar and tobacco were imported.
>
> In the mid-nineteenth century, the value of sugar imported to Sweden corresponded to a year's work for 15 000 adult Caribbean slaves.[191]

At the same time, the mention of iron implicitly indicates one of Sweden's more active roles, even while not explaining why it is mentioned here. Its presence can be considered confusing to the foreign visitor, and maybe also to the Swedish one, or easily overlooked, as the context is missing.

The issue is mentioned more clearly in the essay by Jonas M. Nordin in the History Unfolds book. By tracing the history of the Reenstierna brothers, who were active in Sápmi in the

[191] Picture 22.

copper and brass industries in the second half of the 17th century, the scholar highlights the colonial responsibility of Sweden and the exploitation of the Sámi and Sápmi. The colonial issue is not portrayed as something stuck in the past: the essay concludes arguing for the need for

> an apology from society at large. Maybe the next step will be for both the State and private industry to collate a white paper about the exploitation of Sápmi from the Middle Ages to today.[192]

[192] Nordin, J. M., 'The Colonial Legacy of Scandinavia', in H. Larsson Pousette (ed.), *History Unfolds. Samtidskonst Möter Historia / Contemporary Art Meets History*, Stockholm, Historiska Museet, 2017, p. 205.

6. Discussion

This section will summarise the findings, connecting them to concepts previously presented in the theory section.

The exhibition “History Unfolds - a reflection" and the book “History unfolds. Contemporary Art Meets History" adopt a reflexive and more inclusive approach to the concept of museum: voices from outside the museum or Swedish academic circles are brought in and to some extent centred, as it can be seen in the art exhibition. Furthermore, as it is possible to see from the book, the concept of transparency is highlighted by the curator, by even including a timeline of her time working on the exhibition. By bringing forward different voices and themes, it gave the museum the possibility to shine light on previously less known or less questioned sides of history, creating further visibility. In these ways, it follows more closely the aims individuated by Ariese and Wróblewska. Even if the caption describing “Swedish colonies and global trade” presents a strong focus on trade, it shows a more empathic approach to the horrors of slavery, along with the mention of the colony of St. Barthélemy, otherwise absent from the museum.

The exhibition “Sveriges Historia” does not include a particular decolonial approach or view: the representation of colonialism starts with the glorification of the territorial expansion of the 17th century and continues with the concept of colonial and economical complicity rather than direct responsibility in the 18th century. It then follows the guidelines of van Dijk's ideological square, highlighting the positive and downplaying the negative sides. In this way, it could be seen as reinforcing concepts of Swedish exceptionalism. However, the latter is constructed as a progression of continuities of exceptional success, rather than strictly following the more contemporary idea of the “moral superpower” present in the nation brand.

The ideology square can help understanding how nations can discursively present themselves, but it does not explore the dual nature of negative representations of the self. The concepts of moral use of history and political use of history can be then particularly useful,

as Swedish exceptionalism seems to gain more traction from both the dismissal of a negative past, and the use of the same as a foil to the present, to depict implicitly the current situation as more impressive by comparison.

Human rights are an important part of Sweden's foreign policy, xenosterotype and autostereotype. Rights seem to be presented as part of national history, but this opens to questioning whether this inclusion "into the story of the nation's unfolding unity"[193] could downplay the presence of responsibilities and contrasting histories. Human rights are "rarely secured through an even and uninterrupted progression of ever-increasing entitlements"[194]: by presenting a narrative of continuous progress, there is the danger to construct a myth of a linear and non-conflictual advancement.

[193] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 142.

[194] Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, p. 137.

7. Conclusions

This research had the aim to investigate the depiction of Swedish colonial history in the Swedish History Museum, in order to identify possible themes connected to the concept of Swedish exceptionalism. It also had the aim to analyse the presence of Human Rights related discourses, and their relationship with the portrayal of the nation. Through Critical Discourse Analysis and the theoretical framework, the analysis has brought to light the presence of contrasting narratives on colonialism. While negative sides of history are presented, the exhibition employs concepts of Swedish exceptionalism and Human Rights discourses in order to *show and tell* a grand narrative of Sweden as a continuity of success and progress.

As shown through the analysis, the representation of colonialism highlights the tension between the xenostereotype and the autostereotype of Sweden and its history. The request to acknowledge the past and take responsibility for its consequences could be considered particularly difficult to deal with for any country, but especially *if/when* that would mean contradicting pre-existing narratives and myths that are part of the shared understanding of the national character.

The way in which difficult moments of the history of a state are presented to external viewers can shine a light on the gaps, the controversies and the anxieties connected to the production of a cohesive picture of the nation. This does not mean that the individuals are reluctant to learn about colonial history or are uninterested in it: in my own personal experience, it has been quite the opposite. It is then important for museums to have the courage to *unfold history*, questioning the standard narratives and involving their visitors in this renegotiation, while promoting "visions of the future"[195] based on empathy, democracy and Human Rights.

Any thesis presents some clear intrinsic limitations, and this study has only scratched the surface of an extremely complex relationship between knowledge creating institutions, the

[195] Larsson Pousette, H., 'Curating History Unfolds', in H. Larsson Pousette (ed.), *History Unfolds. Samtidskonst Möter Historia / Contemporary Art Meets History*, Stockholm, Historiska Museet, 2017, pg. 31.

public and its perception of the nation. Further research could broaden the scope of this thesis, by comparatively analysing the representation present in more national and local museums, the visitors' perception of the exhibitions and the work of the professionals involved on the other side of the museum. It would also be relevant to map the answer of the museums to a changing Swedish society, along with changing autostereotypes and xenostereotypes.

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