Bamse and the Legitimacy of the State

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Abstract
This article aims to explore inherent power dimensions in the Swedish children's comic book *Bamse*. While previous scholars have noted the ideological aspects of the series, (and placed these in a context of the Swedish welfare state), this article offers an analysis of the power structures in the narratives from an institutional perspective. I argue that the functions of the main characters in their hometown correspond to important functions of the Swedish welfare state.

Furthermore, I argue that the functions of the main characters as they are represented in their different journeys to remote places correspond to functions of a colonial state. While also stressing the differences between these two contexts in this article, I suggest that as an allegory, the characters are relationally organised through shared underlying ideals; these being an understanding that it is possible to identify general human needs from an ideological standpoint, as well as a practice of solving certain problems through technocratic means.
Key words: Bamse; children's literature; Swedish welfare state; colonial state; violence; institutions; legitimacy; division of power

1. Introduction

The Swedish children's comic book *Bamse* is one of the most recognisable and successful comic serials in Sweden and, as such, can be considered to be an integrated part of Swedish children's literature[1]. Consequently, within a Swedish literary context, *Bamse* is commonly understood to exemplify a recognisable set of positive moral and ethical values, and is often associated with humanism while being lauded for strong statements against coercive violence (Magnusson 2003). Thus, considering the cultural impact of the narrative as described, and with young children being the targeted audience, morally loaded phrases[2] provide a recognisable frame through which a closer critical investigation may prove instructive.

With this in mind, it is surprising that there are actually very few critical analyses of *Bamse*. Helena Magnusson provides one such exception and argues that Swedish comic books have not attracted sufficient critical attention up until

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[1] *Bamse* was first published in 1966 in the weekly magazine *Allers*. From 1973 and onwards it was published in a separate comic book, with the title *Bamse - The strongest bear in the world*. In addition to this, several comic books and animated films have been made by its creator Rune Andréasson, who, until 1990 when he retired, wrote all the manuscripts for the cartoon himself, even if some stories were illustrated by others from 1976 and onwards. *Bamse* is still in print with 18 issues published yearly.

[2] Examples of such phrases would be "nobody becomes nice from being hit"; "together the weaker can defeat the strong"; "it is courageous to dare to say that you are scared" (my translation).

2005 with her own dissertation attempting to fill this void (2005). In Magnusson's study ethical aspects come to the fore, and in accordance with a recognisable reading, Magnusson underlines that *Bamse* is not only making general moral statements, but that the comic book also conveys explicit political and ideological messages (2005). Furthermore, Magnusson convincingly suggests that a strong belief in science permeates the narrative, while there is a continual stress on the importance of education (Magnusson 2005). With these issues in mind, Magnusson makes the interesting point that the ideological, ethical and didactic aspects of *Bamse* became more explicit in the 1980s (Magnusson 2005), which resonates with Lars Bäckström's view that the world of *Bamse* reassembles a *folkhem* utopia relating the ideals of *Bamse* to the ideals of the Swedish welfare state (1990).

With this intersection of ideological, institutional and ethical / moral aspects, Claes Reimerthi adds a useful dimension by arguing that the narrative is organised around a town which is actually a representation of a rudimentary society, with basic formal institutions such as a hospital, a school and a policeman. Reimerthi also argues that as a result of the incompetence of the policeman in the narrative, the character Bamse is incorporated into the structure of formal institutionalised power by compensating for the incompetence of the policeman by upholding law and order (2013). While previous scholars have noted that informal and formal institutional roles are conflated in the narrative, and that these can be read against an allegory of Swedish institutionalism, it does not provide an adequate theoretical model for analysis of the relations between formal and informal institutions within the state, or, for that matter, how those institutions relate to representations of extra-state activities in the stories.

My aim, therefore, is to explore inherent power dimensions as they are represented in the narrative by reading Bamse's home town of Höga Bergen as an allegory[3] of the state. I will investigate how the basic functions of a state are upheld in Bamse's society, but also analyse which model of state is constructed, and how legitimacy is maintained within that structure. I will also investigate the division of power between the different actors and institutions in this model. In excess of this, Bamse does not only act as an institutional representative in his own society as he often travels to remote places and remote countries to solve problems. The aim of this article will be, therefore, to discuss how the model of the Swedish welfare state and the model of the colonial state overlap within one example of Swedish children's literature.

2. Models of the Modern State
The modern state has been the main object of study within the disciplines of political theory and political philosophy (Østerud 1997). Within these theoretical

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[3] While recognising the abstract qualities of this term, I employ the term allegory in its simpler sense as the representation of an abstract entity portrayed through a simplified or concrete form that is generally recognisable through its relational similarity and translatability within a frame of established cultural conventions.

fields much has been written about how states should be studied, how they function, and how legitimacy is created and maintained. But for the purposes of this essay, it is suffice to say that a modern state can be defined as a form of centralized control over a specific and defined territory. Within such a state, the political institutions have a formalized monopoly over the exertion of force and violence, and as such, states have commonly been studied as units of formalized or constitutional sovereignty (Østerud 1997). This means that a particular state is independent in relation to other states and other external bodies and that it has some form of centralized control over violence (military and police force). In excess of this, states maintain systems of legislation, financial regulations and taxation. While power and the capacity to make certain decisions is commonly divided between different bodies, (as in Sweden with the division between the government and parliament), power is also delegated to various government officials and local authorities creating varying degrees of relative sovereignty.

However, states are not merely studied as an instrument of control over a certain population or a certain territory. Within political philosophy legitimacy has been understood as a fundament of a modern state (Østerud 1997). In the social theory of Thomas Hobbes, monopolized violence is in itself a way of justifying the existence of a state. State violence is his theory is construed as a protection from the war of every man against every man (Hobbes & Backelin 2004). Beyond such a simplified dichotomy, there are several alternative ways of understanding legitimacy according to different social theories: these include cultural standardisation, civil rights, political participation, and distribution of welfare (such as in schools, hospitals, and economic aid to name some examples) (Østerud 1997). From a standpoint of liberal political philosophy, the legitimacy of the state is closely tied to the creation of a division of power and responsibilities between different bodies of / within the state, (this is done in order to minimize the risk of power abuse and to guarantee the legal rights of the individual [Østerud 1997]). One important principle in this model is a division between legislative, executive and judicial branches. However, while a modern state has direct control over monopolized (legal) violence, a state with a high degree of trust or legitimacy does not uphold its power position merely by that course of action.

2.1 The Swedish Welfare State
In liberal social theory monopolized violence should be understood as something necessary for the protection of citizens of the state by means of the protection of state borders against threats from without, and by upholding law and order within the state's own borders against threats from within. However, the liberal state is also often understood as being a necessary evil and should only seek to uphold basic state functions with minimal interference in the private lives of families and individuals. In addition to the basic functions of the liberal state, a welfare state compensates for social and economical inequalities in a market society by collectively financed unemployment insurance and benefits. Historically this was

a way for states to secure political order in response to demands from working-class movements (Østerud 1997). Within this model, economic redistribution is motivated by a certain ethical framework maintaining that a state should take care of its citizens, but it is also a way of keeping a workforce ready for industrial service when needed. As such, the fundamental idea behind liberalism is that the market will regulate itself if the state protects private property and facilitates the necessary infrastructure. Thus, in a welfare state there is a stronger emphasis on the necessity for the state to regulate the market through different interventions in order to compensate for what is often understood as natural fluctuations in the economy.

Sweden under the rule of the Social Democratic Party between 1932 and 1976 is a textbook example of a welfare state (Rothstein 1996). Rothstein writes that "[even] when the bourgeois parties ruled Sweden from 1976 to 1982 […] they neither challenged social democratic hegemony nor altered any established programs" (Rothstein 1996:3).[4] As Rothstein notes, there were only small changes in Swedish political praxis when the bourgeois parties came to power in 1976. Furthermore, the contracting economic growth that characterises Sweden in the 1970s led to a public debate concerning the limits of the welfare state itself (Thullberg & Östberg, 1994). Even so, in 1994 Esping-Asplund contended that there was still a dominating consensus concerning support for the welfare state in Sweden (1994).

Within this framework, the concept *folkhemmet* refers to a specific political program and a specific rhetoric. As a model of the welfare state, *folkhemmet* strived for full employment, to provide social welfare, and to facilitate economic redistribution. But it also included a vision of a better society that could be realized through long term social planning and advancement of science and technology. It was a vision of creating a common national identity, not so much based on a common history, but on economic and social progression, and through the construction of common goals.

In consequence, *Folkhemmet* was built on a strong ideological belief in the possibility to create a better society through compulsory reforms and imposed social engineering. The basis for such as model is an assumption that it is possible to identify common goals and common interests, and that it is possible to put into practice solutions through rational and scientific methods (Østerud 1997). Østerud writes that especially during the interwar period, the social democratic welfare state had a strong element of technocracy (1997), meaning that decisions should be made and problems solved by expertise. Technocratic solutions build on an underlining assumption that it is possible to identify common values. With a strong belief in technocratic solutions, political participation becomes secondary and decisions are evaluated by their efficiency and their ability to solve certain problems, rather than by the process of decision-making.

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[4] The national vision of the Swedish welfare state is commonly referred to as *folkhemmet*, a term coined in 1928 by Per Albin Hansson, who, at that time, was the party leader of the Swedish Social Democrats.

2.2 The Modern Colonial State

The modern colonial state, as I apply it, refers to European colonies in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Colonies were European states that were supported by military power and tried to establish a state structure to some extent similar to a European state, with a similar set of institutions. There are of course huge differences between different European colonial projects in modern times.[5] Subsequently, even if the implementation of institutions is constructed diversely, and to different extents in different places, I argue that colonization can be understood as an attempt to implement a modern state in a territory considered as stateless, (or rather made stateless), or a state with a form of government considered inferior by the colonizer.

A fundamental principle of a democratic state is that power is derived from the people, (or demos), and that the demos has the means to hold the politicians accountable through elections. A colonial state and its different institutions is governed by a population external to the demos of the state, and rests on an understanding that the people being governed are not yet ready to govern themselves. In contrast to the established modern state it does not build its legitimacy in relation to the colonized, but instead its legitimacy is based on its consequences in an imagined future. A high degree of support among the population, (indicated by a low degree of riots and armed resistance), is naturally desirable for the colonial administration, but riots and armed resistance can also help motivate the violence of the colonial state as these riots constitute proof of the indigenous people's lack of rationality and their inability to know their own best.

Hence, the legitimacy of the colonial state is motivated by the ideological assumption that a certain type of governance is superior. But at the same time the specific decisions and interventions of the colonial state are not ideologically motivated, as the state is in a phase of implementation. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hanna Arendt argues that the most fundamental aspect of European colonization in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries was a bureaucratic administration whereby the process of decision-making ceased being political and became solely an administrative function (Arendt 1973). Baron Cromer, the famous colonial administrator, known among other things for his service in the British colony of Egypt, stated that it is impossible to rule a colony through democratic institutions (Arendt 1973). On the contrary, he argued, a colony had to

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[5] As one example, The Congo Free State was a colony ruled by king Leopold II of Belgium between 1885 and 1908, whose existence was primarily facilitated by a strong military presence and the minimum of institutions necessary to control the area which facilitated the exploitation of natural resources. On that point, exploitation has always been a key aspect of colonial projects and it has even been an important explicit argument to motivate the high costs of upkeep in the host countries. Even so, there are several colonial states that have worked more actively to build a state with the institutions of a modern state, and this is marked especially among the British and French colonies.

be governed by a well-trained and competent elite. Furthermore he suggest that the motherland should have a limited knowledge of the exact whereabouts of the colonial administrators so that the administrators themselves could take the blame, and step aside, if anything went wrong (Arendt 1973). This means that decisions are not made through a political process but as a way of administrating or solving certain problems.

3. *Bamse* and the Modern Welfare State

The three main characters in the comic book are Bamse, Lille Skutt and Skalman. The main character is of course Bamse, and he begins every day by eating a special type of honey; by eating it he turns into the strongest bear in the whole world. Bamse's closest friends are Skalman the tortoise, and Lille Skutt the rabbit. Lille Skutt is easily frightened, but he is swift and has the ability to jump high. Skalman on the other hand, is a solitary inventor; he is always objective, knowledgeable, and impartial, and he remembers everything he sees and hears. Skalman often has a technical solution to different problems when Bamse's strength is insufficient, or when he is deprived of his strength for one reason or another. This trio is referred to simply as *the friends*.

These three friends live in a village called Höga Bergen - in the early stories they lived by themselves, but later on Bamse and Lille Skutt gain families and have children. In this village there are also other anthropomorphic animals such as hedgehogs, badgers, foxes and squirrels – but these are minor characters in the stories and often require the help of the three friends. Also, there is a policeman in Höga Bergen, Pontus Kask, and he is known for being very inefficient. To compensate for his incompetency Bamse often takes his place. The main antagonist in the stories is the vole Krösus Sork who is represented as being a ruthless capitalist (Magnusson 2005). There are also other antagonists including trolls, wizards, as well as different thieves such as wolves or pirates.

In Höga Bergen, Bamse, (often together with his close friends), helps the other anthropomorphic animals with different things that need the hand of a strong bear. He removes trees from the road; he moves stones from garden plots; and he helps the ants to carry heavy burdens to the anthill. Furthermore, he resolves conflicts and protects the animals in Höga Bergen from witches or erupting volcanoes.

If we understand Höga Bergen to represent the structure of a rudimentary state, (which is in line with Reimerthi's argument), Bamse seems to uphold the function of monopolized violence. He catches thieves and upholds order even though there is a policeman in the village but as discussed, he is a peripheral actor often in need of Bamse's help. It is also of interest that Bamse is also a protector against external, as well as internal, threats. In one story the witch Hia-Hia enchants the local citizens of Höga Bergen (Andréasson 1992). Bamse's donkey is turned into a pig, the wolf is turned into a balloon, and Lille Skutt's ears are turned into carrots. Bamse and his friends form an expedition to the Troll's forest to put an end to the attacks. This story shows that Bamse does not only uphold law and order in his own community, but also protects its external borders. In most of the

stories Bamse is the only instance of power and in Höga Bergen there is neither formulated law, nor a functioning juridical system, or even an established police force that Bamse has to take into consideration for that matter. Bamse alone decides whether to punish a thief or to let them go.

These decisions are not made according to formulated rules administrated by institutions, rather Bamse acts from his moral principles. As Reimerthi writes, Bamse's verdicts are quite arbitrary (2013). One example of this is that he lets Mrs Fox go free after she robs the grocery store because of his sympathy for her personal situation (Reimerthi 2013). Therefore, Bamse is not only the one who catches the thieves in most cases; he is also both the legislator and the judge.

Even so, Bamse claims to be against all form of violence. The final point in many of the stories is that Bamse is not only the strongest bear in the world, but also the kindest. Repeatedly he takes a stance against weapons, and he frequently claims that he does not like to use violence. The violence that he uses in the different situations is always justified in relation to the narrative, and in most cases it is enough with only a threat of violence to solve a certain conflict. The statement often made by Bamse is a motivation for a minimum amount of violence. Bamse often motivates using a minimum amount of violence by repeating the slogan "nobody becomes kind from being hit". This underlines the principle that it should be understood as an inferior method for disciplining. However, I argue that the limited amount of violence should rather be understood in relation to Bamse's tremendous strength. By being able to stop an entire army with his hands, weapons become unnecessary. The paradox that Bamse is the strongest bear in the world, while, at the same time, communicating a message of non-violence can be understood as being a representation of certain institutional functions within a modern state. In a well integrated state with a high degree of legitimacy, the use of violence is limited, and not being viewed as violence as such, has primarily an administrative function.[6]

If we read Höga Bergen as representing a state, Bamse upholds the basic functions of a modern state by keeping law and order and by protecting its external borders. By helping the other animals in Höga Bergen in all aspects of their lives, he also upholds a function of a welfare state by distributing welfare. I argue also that Skalman should be seen as upholding important functions of the welfare state that complement Bamse's functions, as through inventions and technical expertise his actions correspond to the social engineering practices of a welfare state. As in the welfare state, Skalman's technological solutions and his technocratic decision-making are not understood as being related to a system of values or specific ethics. Instead, his function is a merely a method for administrating certain problems not at odds with the political process of decision-making.[7]

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[6]The individual police officer or soldier is not violent in him / herself, (other than in exceptional cases such as when sentenced by a martial court), but is a container for the violence.

[7] Lille Skutt does also have a function in the narrative that corresponds to important functions within the state, however, this argument had to be excluded due to the limited scope of this article.

In Bamse's conflict with Krösus Sork, the greedy capitalist, for example, Bamse protects the other animals from exploitation and the interests of the market, which in the stories is totally separated from the other animals' interests and influences. Bamse does this by any means necessary, (for example by carrying away excavators), and Reimerthi argues that this should be understood as an act of civil disobedience (2013). But if we instead see Bamse as upholding certain functions of the state then I would rather suggest that we should interpret his actions as a way of controlling the market by state interventions. This is also in line with upholding important functions of the welfare state.

Even so, though Bamse and Skalman uphold central functions of the modern state, there are also important aspects that are missing. Höga Bergen is lacking an institutionalized division of responsibilities, an institutionalized division of power, as well as the means to hold the state accountable. *The friends* represent all of the functions of the different institutions, the key departments within the bureaucratic system, as well as different governmental and municipal functions. Even if Bamse works together with his friends Skalman and Lille Skutt, there is always a mutual understanding about the nature of the different problems that they confront, and what the best solution is at any given moment. Even if the power of the state is incarnated in their separate bodies, this division does not correspond to the division of power and the division of responsibility of an actual democratic state. In this aspect Höga Bergen differs from a modern welfare state as it is idealised. The legitimacy of Bamse and his friends lies in their ability to solve a certain problem rather than through any sort of political process and, as such, the idealised state is represented as being divorced from political procedure.

4. Bamse as a Colonial State

Bamse and his friends do not only act in their own home environment of Höga Bergen. In several episodes *the friends* travel to remote places such as to the troll's forest, to exotic countries, or back in time with a time machine invented by Skalman. A common narrative is that *the friends* travel to a remote place or time and help different creatures to solve various problems, or save an oppressed people from the tyranny of a dragon or an evil wizard. In their voyages to foreign places they often remarkably come to countries ruled by oppressive kings or feudal lords (Reimetri 2013). In one story (1988) Bamse threatens to throw the feudal king all the way to the moon if he does not change the constitutions of his country. In this episode, Bamse and his friends act with the authority of an imposing state until the form of government is changed.

The lack of an institutionalized division of responsibilities, an institutionalized division of power, and the means to hold the state accountable become even clearer in this context. Beyond the boundaries of their home they are left completely to themselves: that is to Bamse's strength, Skalman's technological skill, and to Lille Skutt's athletic speed. In the absence of institutions and laws they together represent all the functions of the different state institutions, bureaucratic functions as well as representing governmental and municipal

officials. Lacking any written laws and any institutionalized division of power the three friends are both legislators and judges as well as embodying executive power. The actions of the three friends, therefore, corresponds exceptionally well to Arendt's model of colonial administration. As a colonial state *the friends* do not act according to a constitution but improvise and find suitable solutions to specific problems.

Just as in a colonial context, Bamse and Skalman are external actors in relation to the populations that are affected by their interventions. In some of these narratives the population explicitly ask for their help, while in other narratives *the friends* identify problems that, in their opinion, need to be solved. Their different interventions are based on an underlying assumption that the local population, for one reason or another, either do not know what is good for them or that they lack the ability to solve their own problems or make mature and rational political decisions. Subsequently, Bamse and his friends have the abilities to solve the problems that the local population are unable to solve, and just as in a colonial context, such interventions gain legitimacy by being successful and effective.

5. *Bamse* and the Monologist Perspective of the State

If we read Bamse and his friends as facilitating the institutional functions of a state, it is still possible to argue that Bamse's interventions and Skalman's solutions have a high degree of legitimacy. Both within their own society and in remote places the majority of characters are grateful for their help and supportive of their interventions. However, in relation to the ideals of the institutionalised division of power and responsibilities of the liberal state, Bamse's use of power is problematic. The administration of justice is somewhat arbitrary, there are no channels for political participation, and there are no means to hold someone within the state accountable. Nonetheless, it is still possible to argue that a strong level of public support is also a way of creating legitimacy for the state, as the power of a democratic state has its origin in the demos.

However, I want to argue that the high level of support for Bamse's actions is only possible as the stories present a one-sided account. The narratives appear reasonable and ethical since the animals being helped are not awarded a voice of their own, or the means to give alternative comprehensible accounts. The stories do not allow different perspectives or different voices to come through. As such, Bamse and his friends are the voices of modernization and rationalization, and in the remote places and time that are represented in the stories, it is doubtful that Bamse's interventions would be understood as being helpful or moral. In line with this trope, the stories also express contempt for different modes of local knowledge such as beliefs in astrology or a belief in ghosts. At the same time *the friends* navigate in landscapes inhabited by witches, trolls and wizards. These creatures are not described as being imaginary threats, but as being actual threats. This means that *the friends* also have the ability to define the demarcation line between the normal and the paranormal, rationality and superstition, real threats and imagined threats, as well as between truth and lies.

Subsequently, by adapting a simplified fictional mode, the stories displace the complexity inherent in all human activity. By framing the story with a beginning and with an end, the narratives misrepresent social phenomena by limiting the consequences of a certain decision or action within a limited time frame[8]. Furthermore, the narratives in *Bamse* are deprived of the uncertain outcomes of specific actions. *The friends* both have the capacity of interpreting social phenomena in remote places as well as judging right from wrong within those new contexts. They also have the ability to foresee the consequences of their actions as the outcomes of their interventions always correspond to their intentions, while every story has an ending through which the reader can evaluate the outcome of each specific intervention.

Beyond the world of pure fiction the outcomes of our actions are always uncertain and the consequences reach far beyond our immediate gaze. What are the possible long-term consequences of the dethroning of a feudal lord as radical reconstructions through external interventions often have unforeseen consequences in the real world of politics? Nilsson (1994) argues that blind faith in technocratic solutions exaggerates the possibility of solving problems, while, counterproductively, facilitating an underestimation of the dangers associated with these kinds of solutions as they affect complex integrated systems. In *Bamse* Skalman's solutions rarely create new or external problems - which is often not the case with the employment of technology in modern society (Beck & Ritter 1992). In this respect, Skalman differs from Gyro Gearloose in *Donald Duck* whose solutions often cause disastrous consequences.

I suggest that Bamse and his friends represent a universal ethic and a meta-narrative, or a narrative structuring the logic of the other narratives. When they travel to remote places they have the ability to understand local life forms as well as identifying their needs. They can resolve different conflicts and they know how various creatures can live emancipated lives. In most cases when Bamse and his friends defeat an enemy in a remote place, the majority of the population shares these universal values and are thankful for the help that is offered. The universalism of *the friends* is not only applicable in the present, but in different historical contexts. With the time machine invented by Skalman, the friends travel through time proving that their way of reasoning and resolving conflicts is valid in all different contexts, thus transcending local particular narratives.

6. Final Reflections

The comic book *Bamse* was introduced at a time when the social democratic welfare state had a very high degree of support, and as discussed in the introduction, *Bamse* has been critically understood to be an allegorical representation of this model. While the narratives are driven by ideals of solidarity and common interest, strong emphasis is placed on the importance of education, on economic redistribution, and on expert technical solutions or modernisation.

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[8] For a more extensive discussion about this topic see Bourdieu (1977).

As discussed earlier, there have been extensive political adjustments in Sweden since *Bamse* first appeared in print. However, very little has changed in the narrative represented in the comic book since its initial publication other than subtle adjustments. Hence, the narratives continue to reproduce the *ideals* and *underlying logic* of the Swedish *folkhem*.

While the aim of this article has been to expand on viewing *Bamse* as an imperative for a Swedish welfare state, in line with Reimerthi's argument, I suggest that it is possible to see Bamse's village as being modelled on a rudimentary state. This facilitates an argument that the actions of Bamse, as well as Skalman, correspond to the central functions of a state. Furthermore, the same fictional characters share an allegory both for a Swedish welfare state, and for a colonial state. Within a colonial state model I have demonstrated that there is a common belief in the necessity of monopolized and centralized violence, and this is replicated in the narrative.

Furthermore, there is a belief in the necessity of certain institutions such as a government, western institutions, and a western juridical system and so on. There are also similarities between the modern welfare state and the colonial state due to an underlying assumption that it is possibly to identify a common good as well as certain needs from an ideological standpoint. There is also emphasis that problems can be solved by technocratic means. At the same time there is also an important difference as the liberal state and the welfare state have to be legitimized in relation to the demos, and must be accountable through elections. This means that the violence of the colonial state is not unpacked in the same manner as the violence of the liberal state. At the same time, the technocratic solutions of the colonial state are not the same as the technocratic solutions of the welfare state as these solutions also have to be legitimised in relation to the demos.

In this article I have not tried to identify historical connections between the colonial state and the modern welfare state. On the contrary, I suggest that Sweden's limited involvement in 19th and 20th Century colonial projects, (and processes of decolonisation for that matter), have facilitated the colonial narrative inherent in *Bamse* as being viewed as critically unproblematic. In a Swedish context, with a strong emphasis on the common good, the ideal of consensus solutions is overbearing. This means that conflicts between different interests are downplayed through a belief that a common set of morals is applicable in differing contexts.

Subsequently, I argue that this naïve reproduction of colonial narratives should be understood as relational to the ideal of the common good within a tradition of the Swedish welfare state. Against this background, an understanding can be reached as to how *Bamse* reproduces colonial narratives while downplaying the representation of extreme violence necessary to implement the pacification of the antagonistic, or the undeveloped, *other*.

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