



Locating Sweden in Time and Space: National Chronotopes in Civic Orientation for Adult Migrants

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to use courses in civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants in Sweden as the empirical entry point from which to investigate *whether*, and if so, *how*, civic values are tied to the Swedish nation through specific discourses and narratives. With the help of a framework that brings together theorisations of the discursive construction of the nation with the notions of the chronotope and ‘social narratives’, the article demonstrates how narratives within civic orientation are characterised by specific spatio-temporal moves that discursively construct Sweden as a nation-state. Such national chronotopes are not innocuous but are part of a rhetoric of nationalism that constructs a linear and comprehensive story of prosperity and superiority, not least *vis-à-vis* some other geographical areas in the world. As such, the analysis seeks to contribute to the burgeoning scholarship on civic orientation programmes by offering further empirical evidence of the shapes such programmes take, and how civic values become nationalised. With the help of the notion of the chronotope, the article also seeks to add some fresh perspectives to scholarship on nationalism and othering by showing mundane spatio-temporal moves in the production of a ‘national imaginary’ (Calhoun 2017).

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of migrants has become a key policy objective and has given rise to significant public discussion across Europe. There is a general trend towards what has been termed ‘the civic turn’ (Borevi, Kriegbaum Jensen & Mouritsen 2017; Joppke 2007; Mouritsen, Kriegbaum Jensen & Larin 2019): that is, compulsory integration programmes, the introduction of civic integration education and stricter policies about citizenship acquisition rules. In the Nordic countries, civic orientation courses have been established with the purpose of ensuring that newly adult arrived migrants experience a fast transition to education and work (Brochmann et al. 2012; Fejes et al. 2018). While such programmes are not entirely new, Joppke (2007) has argued that, over the last 10 years, they have lost their national and cultural distinctiveness and have instead become more similar, *converging* around certain universal liberal values such as human rights and gender equality. Mouritsen has questioned the idea of liberal convergence in the ‘civic turn’, claiming that ‘national trajectories are less similar than they may appear’ and continue to be characterised by ‘different cultural interpretations and reactions to broadly similar challenges’ (2013: 87). This means that liberal values do not necessarily supersede nationalism. Rather, as in the case of Great Britain and Denmark, they have become ‘nationalised’, being tied to ‘Britishness’ and ‘Danishness’ (Mouritsen 2013: 101).

Ultimately, the questions of *whether*, and if so *how*, civic values are tied to the nation through specific discourses and narratives are empirical questions. The present article investigates narratives about the nation in Swedish civic orientation courses (*samhällsorientering*). More specifically, our analysis is informed by the following research questions: How is Sweden presented and discussed in civic orientation classes? How is such an image negotiated and/or contested by the participants in these classes? To answer these questions, we draw upon a framework that brings together theorisations of the discursive construction of the nation (Bhabha 1990; Billig 1995; Calhoun 2017; Triandafyllidou 1998) with Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of the chronotope and Shenhav’s (2015) ‘social narratives’. With the help of this analytical apparatus, we show how narratives within civic orientation are characterised by two main spatio-temporal moves that discursively construct Sweden as a nation-state: (1) a temporal, historical narrative and (2) a spatial dichotomy between ‘here’ and ‘there’. We argue that Sweden is presented through a rhetoric of nationalism (Billig 1995; Calhoun 2017) that, through certain selected events, constructs a linear and comprehensive story of prosperity and superiority, not least *vis-à-vis* other geographical areas. As such, our analysis seeks to contribute to the burgeoning scholarship on civic orientation programmes in a variety of contexts by offering further empirical examples of the shapes such programmes take, and how civic values become nationalised. Moreover, with the help of the notion of the chronotope, this article also seeks to add some fresh perspectives to scholarship on nationalism and ‘othering’ (Triandafyllidou 1998) by showing how the production of a ‘national imaginary’ (Calhoun 2017) and the concomitant discursive construction of a sense of self (‘we’) *vis-à-vis* an imagined ‘other’ rely on specific spatio-temporal moves.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We begin by introducing civic orientation courses in Sweden, its history, aim, content and implementation. We then provide an overview of current research on civic orientation in Sweden, before presenting our theoretical framework, analytical approach and research methods. The findings are presented in the third part, followed by a concluding discussion.

CIVIC ORIENTATION COURSES FOR ADULT MIGRANTS IN SWEDEN

Civic orientation courses for adult migrants in Sweden were established in 2010 (SOU 2010:16). In addition to labour market orientation and Swedish language teaching, civic orientation is a publicly regulated programme for newly arrived migrants and their families after a residence permit has been granted (SFS 2010:1138). The teaching of civics to migrants is not a new phenomenon; knowledge of Swedish society and its laws has been integrated into courses in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) since the 1960s. However, SFI language courses have been criticised for ‘poor organization, lack of requirements and goals, but also poor pedagogy’ (Carlson 2002: 21-22). In the mid-2000s, the Swedish government decided to separate language tuition from civic content. This was done with a view to (1) making SFI more efficient by turning it into a purely language education provision and (2) offering information about Swedish society at an early stage of migrants’ arrival in Sweden and in their ‘mother tongues’, as they could otherwise risk missing or misunderstanding important information (SOU 2010:16: 9). As a result, civic orientation was officially instituted in 2010.

The main policy document governing these courses states that

Civic orientation aims to facilitate the establishment of newly arrived migrants in work life and society. Civic orientation must provide a basic understanding of Swedish society and a basis for continued knowledge acquisition. The goal should be for participants to develop knowledge about human rights and fundamental democratic values, the rights and obligations of the individual in general, how society is organized, and practical everyday life. (2 §, SFS 2010:1138)

It was also established that the municipalities would be responsible for the organisation of the courses. Moreover, civic orientation should be given in a language that a newcomer knows well and should be characterised by dialogue and respect. In terms of content, it was decided that the civic orientation should cover several content areas from how to support oneself and taking care of one’s health to political participation and ageing (3 §, SFS 2010:1138). However, it was foregrounded that ‘emphasis should be put on practical aspects of living in Sweden’ (3 §, SFS 2010:1138). These content areas are covered in the teaching materials for civic orientation: the textbook entitled *Om Sverige*¹ [About Sweden] (Göteborgs Stad och Länsstyrelsen Västra Götalands län 2014), which has been translated into 10 different languages, and PowerPoint presentations used in the courses.

In 2019, the duration of civic orientation increased from 60 to 100 hours, and more focus was placed on gender equality and human rights (Ministry of Labor 2019). The courses are led by ‘civic communicators’ who usually do not have similar educational backgrounds or qualifications but are employed mainly because of their own experience of migration, their multilingual repertoire and their knowledge of Swedish society (SOU 2010:16: 16). For the courses investigated in this article, a university degree was required to work as a communicator.

RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF CIVIC ORIENTATION

Within a variety of disciplines, there is growing interest in integration programmes and education policies for newly arrived adults as part of civic integration policies (see

1 <https://www.informationsverige.se/sv/omsverige/> [Retrieved 27 June 2022].

Bobrowska, Gierszewski & Kluzowicz 2018; Goodman & Wright 2015; K pplinger 2020). Most researchers have been interested in comparing the content between different countries' civic integration policies, as they lead to tests and examinations (Joppke 2013; Michalowski 2011; Paquet 2012; van Oers, Ersb ll & Kastakopoulou 2010). The research findings show that citizenship tests in particular 'can be the instruments of a multiplicity of policies beside civic integration, ranging from citizenship promotion to immigration control' (Paquet 2012: 244). Focusing less on policy documents than on classroom interactions, Griswold (2010) employed a narrative approach to show how America is represented in citizenship classes offered by community adult schools. Griswold illustrated how the instructional narratives convey a dominant ideology of individualism through historical narratives of specific individuals in shaping the course of US history (2010: 510).

In the case of Sweden, the narratives are shaped *inter alia* by the relationship between long-standing Swedish colonialism against the S mi and more recent integration policies and practices (Carlsson 2020). Through analysis of policy documents and interviews with 'integration workers' in Swedish S pmi, Carlsson (2020) demonstrated how state-led migrant integration is characterised by what she called 'banal colonialism'. That term indicates the reproduction of colonial practices in the present, through such means as the forgetting of Swedish colonial past and the concomitant othering of Indigenous populations 'while letting the dominant majority set the norm' (Carlsson 2020: 282). As Carlsson clarified, the banality of these practices does not mean that they 'are harmless, nor that they are unnoticed for everyone; rather, it directs the attention to what has been erased for the dominant to be perceived as banal' (2020: 272).

Also focusing on the mundane but no less pernicious discursive practices in integration programmes, Milani et al. (2021) employed the notion of governmentality to illustrate how civic orientation courses 'socialize newly arrived migrants into a specific mode of conduct framed by Swedish values and norms' (Milani et al. 2021: 2). These include a variety of 'incitements to discourse' (Foucault 1990) about eating habits, water intake and encouragements to 'be patient' and 'trust the system'. Analogous to the examples that challenge the colonial order in Carlsson's study, Milani et al. (2021) illustrated how some migrants perform acts of defiance that question the civic orientation content. However, a bleaker picture emerges from Gren's (2020) Weberian analysis of the bureaucratisation of introductory courses in Sweden. Here, participants experience a feeling of hopelessness and of 'getting stuck' in the states' welfare system due to the inflexibility and standardisation of the programmes. Moreover, the programmes do not meet the participants' main aspirations of further education and their dreams of upward social mobility.

Overall, there is both readiness and resistance to the image of the 'good citizen' conveyed through the courses. Some participants are critical because they feel they must learn to become 'good' Swedish citizens and defend themselves against a strong disciplinary perspective (Abdullah 2017). Others are positive, as they have the opportunity to discuss areas such as individual freedom and children's rights (Abdullah & Risenfors 2013: 123). Crucially, gender may play a role in migrants' experiences, with men often being more critical than women to the courses (Bucken-Knapp, Faki h & Spehar 2019: 232).

It is worth underlining that there needs to be a contextually sensitive account through which to understand civic orientation programmes (Brochmann et al. 2012). While

the aims and purposes of these programmes and courses may be similar across different nation-states adopting civic integration as policy, the distinctive context of each nation-state shapes and constrains how these policies are operationalised in practice, and also creates and conditions a specific discursive field in which particular narratives are made possible and presented in the civic orientation courses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

A narrative approach was taken in this study, with an interest in the storytelling that occurs between the storyteller and the listener. As emphasised by De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) and Calhoun (2017), national narratives are produced, reproduced and spread by actors in concrete, institutionalised, contexts such as the media, the military, the school system and so on. Civic orientation programmes are yet another institutionalised setting that is both complex and multi-layered, consisting of three levels: a macro-level of national policy, a meso-level of regional/local policy and organisation and a micro-level of interactions between civic communicators and participants. Courses are led by communicators with various educational backgrounds and different experiences of migration within the organisational context of an institution in a local municipality, in line with broad guidelines established by policy regulations at state level. As such, civic orientation courses are rich epistemological sites for studying how the national imaginary of Sweden is discursively created as 'a bridge between the objectively recurrent and the subjectively enacted' (Calhoun 2017: 23) and illustrating how 'representations are embedded and reproduced in action' (Calhoun 2017: 23–24).

With this in mind, we draw on Shenhav's (2015) work on 'social narratives', which other studies have called 'cultural' or 'collective narratives' (see Haste & Bermudez 2017). Such narratives are particularly relevant for the purpose of the present article, given that the aim of civic orientation courses is to provide migrants with practical knowledge about Swedish society. Social narratives can be defined as 'narratives that are embraced by a group and also tell, in one way or another, something about that group' (Shenhav 2015: 17–19). Thus, the assumption is that a 'social narrative' tells common and collective perceptions and understandings of society. According to Shenhav, three concepts are particularly relevant when analysing narratives: (1) *story*, (2) *narration* and (3) *text*. To begin with, a story consists of a chronological order and characters that appear in the story. A narration refers to the process of communicating a story. Finally, a text is the way in which the story is conveyed (Shenhav 2015: 16–17). In the case of our investigation, the text comprises communicators' oral storytelling with the help of PowerPoint presentations, and participants' reactions and negotiations, which we wrote down as fieldnotes. A story invariably involves a *selection of events, characters and point of view* (Shenhav 2015). Therefore, by focusing on narratives and negotiations that take place *in situ*, it is not only possible to understand what has been included or conversely erased, but also how certain narrative sequences are accepted or contested.

Because of our focus on the narrative construction of a nation-state – Sweden – Bhabha's (1990) understanding of the nation as narration is particularly relevant. Bhabha highlighted how national narratives are produced through a process of streamlining that makes rather complex and chaotic historical events appear to be rational and systematic for national audiences. As Bhabha put it, 'The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the sighs of a coherent national

culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects' (1990: 209). How such streamlining happens discursively can be traced more precisely with the help of Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, which can be defined as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' (Bakhtin 1981: 84). As Bakhtin explained, in the chronotope, 'time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (Bakhtin 1981: 84). While Bakhtin developed his theorisation of the chronotope on the basis of literary works, scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has recently re-appraised the analytical relevance of the chronotope for a breadth of narratives and contexts (see, in particular, Blommaert & De Fina 2017). Textually, 'small words' such as adverbs of place ('here' or 'there') or personal pronouns ('we', 'they') can be key linguistic resources in the 'rhetoric of nationalism' (Calhoun 2017), creating specific chronotopes of the nation in which a national sense of selfhood ('we') is presented as superior to ('them'), (see Triandafyllidou 1998).

RESEARCH METHOD

The data analysed in this article were collected as part of a larger research project that explores how civic orientation courses for newly arrived adult migrants are implemented and discursively negotiated in the educational sessions *in situ* in three large Swedish municipalities. We are specifically interested in which dominant perspectives, social and cultural values and norms are apparent in this educational practice, and how these values and norms are understood and negotiated between the communicators and the course participants.

We opted for an ethnographic approach because this method provides an opportunity to listen to the communication and negotiations as they unfold. Being present also makes it possible to ask questions and interact with the participants in more informal ways, such as casual chats during coffee breaks and walks to study.

In our ethnographic work we wrote fieldnotes by hand and we mainly took a participant/observer position. Our role as researchers was clear and overt, all our informants were informed, and they gave their informed consent. We occasionally participated peripherally in group discussions when asked and tried to interfere as little as possible during sessions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018: 543).

The data upon which this article is based consist of 210 written pages of fieldnotes taken from three civic orientation courses, two conducted in Arabic and one in English, during the spring of 2020.² The main reason for choosing these courses is that the majority of migrants in Sweden come from several countries in the Middle East and are Arabic speakers. Moreover, those who attend the English-speaking courses originate from countries including Bangladesh, Cameroon, Pakistan, Peru and Vietnam. By focusing on civic orientation classes in Arabic and English, it was possible to gain insights into multiple migrant perspectives. As such, our analysis is not generalisable to civic orientation as a whole. Rather, it is a 'case study'; it provides a window into how civic integration policies are put to work *in practice* in Sweden.

² All research participants were given information about the study, both through e-mail and verbally, and all provided their written consent to be part of the study. We followed the principles of research ethics as formulated in 'Good Research Practice' from the Swedish Research Council (2017). All names are pseudonyms.

One of us began by attending a course on site, which was then moved into classes on Skype due to the onset of COVID-19. This meant that data from two-thirds of our research were produced digitally. The change to distance learning occurred quickly and caused both challenges and possibilities. Unsurprisingly, there was a great deal of difference between distance and on-site teaching, as group dynamics and interactions were limited online. This also applied to our ability to interact with the participants outside of the teaching environment, which in the on-site setting provided us with interesting insights into the civic orientation course itself, as well as participants' own reflections on their lived experiences. Moreover, cameras were not always used by the participants, and whenever informal talk occurred online, it took place while everyone present could hear everything that was being said. The organisers coped well and quickly with the changing context caused by COVID-19.

FINDINGS

In the next part of this article, we present an analysis of the communicators' talk and dialogues on *selected events* that construct two salient stories forming social narratives: the construction of Sweden in time and space. The time narrative uses a historical perspective on Sweden, and the space narrative is predominantly formed through references to 'here' and 'there'.

TIME AND THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SWEDEN

Education has often been identified as one of the principal 'nationalising' agents of the modern state, and history education is probably the main arena in which the idea of the nation and its myths, memories and symbols are explicitly presented (De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999: 154, 156; Sant 2017: 107). Analytically, it is important to tease out *how* historical events are narrated, who or what is foregrounded or conversely backgrounded (erased even) and how events are presented in a time frame in stories about the nation (Shenhav 2015: 10–11).

One of the first sessions in the English course has the heading 'Arriving in Sweden' and the first part of the presentation is on 'Swedish History'. Here, Swedish history is presented in two sequential PowerPoint presentations, one entitled 'From the ice age to the 19th century' and the other entitled 'From the 19th century to modern times'. Together, the presentations show 11 historical periods and some selected historical figures with significance in Swedish traditional teaching materials' historiography. In line with Shenhav's (2015) theorisation of story, a chronological sequence of events was presented, together with some characters. The periods and figures were listed as follows: The Ice Age; 800s (The Viking Age); 1000–1100 (the Christian era [sic]); 1397 (Kalmar Union); 1523 (Gustav Vasa); 1818 (Jean Baptiste); Industrialisation (1850–1900); 20th century (Democracy is introduced); 1914 (World War I); 1939 (World War II) and 1960–2000.

The teaching pace in the course was high and the communicator narrated Swedish history by pointing to the designated periods and some historical figures, such as a picture of a boat from the Viking time, a Cathedral, the Swedish kings Gustav Vasa and Jean Baptiste Bernadotte. The time of industrialisation is illustrated by a picture of industrial workers, the introduction of democracy by a hand casting a ballot paper, and the world wars by soldiers and a cannon. The story is told in one stretch by the communicator Dania as follows (from fieldnotes):

Long ago Sweden was covered in ice, but that disappeared about 11,000 years ago. The Vikings were Nordic men who travelled quite long distances and traded in fur and undertook looting journeys to other places. King Gustav Vasa was the first king in Sweden, and after him followed Karl XIII. Because he was childless, Karl XIII adopted Jean Baptiste Bernadotte in 1818, who was then appointed Swedish King. During this time the population in Sweden grew due to better food and living. During industrialisation, a lot happened in Sweden and these were quite turbulent times. In the beginning of the 1900s, democracy was introduced, but initially only men with a certain level of income could vote. In 1919 women won the right to vote and the first election in which women could vote was held in 1921.

Dania then jumps to the picture (icon) of the First World War and states that the Nordic countries were neutral in the war. This was also the case during the Second World War, she states. In the 1960s the welfare system was established. People got four weeks of vacation [...] and this was the time for economic increase. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

Here, Swedish history is briefly summed up as a sequence of selected events. The story tells how, over a long period, the nation slowly approached its destiny into 'modern times' with the establishment of the Swedish welfare system, economic growth and four weeks of vacation. The narrative proceeds at a fast pace and the selected events might be quite difficult to understand for the course participants, who might not possess any previous knowledge of Swedish and European history. The story is told from a purely Swedish perspective, without any other reference to historical events with which the participants might be more familiar. In terms of national imaginary (Calhoun 2017), time 'thickens' and space get 'charged' in this story, as Bakhtin would say, forming a chronotope (space/time nexus point) of Sweden as a fixed, bounded and stable nation since the Ice Age without any presentation or problematisation of, say, past poverty, struggles or challenges. The only exception is the expression 'turbulent times', although this term remains unexplained by the communicator. In this story, the national chronotope of Sweden is that of a nation that undergoes some kind of natural development, has various kings and becomes modernised through an almost banal sequence of selected events. As such, the temporal frame produces the impression of natural self-evident certainty about Sweden as a nation (cf. Billig 1995: 93; De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999: 151). Crucially, such a temporal frame is not idiosyncratic to this specific occurrence in civic orientation courses but has been singled out by Andersson (2009) as a trait of Swedish historiography more broadly, in which conflicts and violent events in Swedish political history, such as hunger riots, clashes between military and striking workers, have been toned down and disregarded as exceptions (Andersson 2009: 230–231). Here, the educational context of civic orientation works as a mediator of the official master narrative of the nation (cf. Bhabha 1994: 1; Coulby & Zambeta 2005; De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999: 156).

After the above story of Sweden coming into being, one of the participants, Adnan, asked:

What was the first religion in Sweden?

Dania responds: Sweden was a Christian country [...] but laws are separated from any religion. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

Adnan continues and wants to know about the Vikings and their religion. Dania responds that they had an early Scandinavian religion with deities such as Thor, Odin and Freya before Christianity took over. Adnan replies and refers to a film that he has seen where the Vikings and Christians were fighting, and he wonders why they did so. Dania answers that the two religions were competitors back then. Dania concludes the dialogue by saying that we are going to touch upon this theme in another lecture. Adnan says, 'Thank you'. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

Whenever issues of religion emerge in the course, the communicators reply that 'laws are separated from any religion' and that Sweden is a secular country. It seems like the issue of religion is controversial, and communicators are eager to quickly put an end to any potential discussion by underlining the separation between church and state. After some information from Dania about Sweden's five national minorities – the Sámi, the Tornedalians, the Sweden-Finns, the Jews and the Roma – Adnan asks again:

Were the Vikings the first people in Sweden? And Dania replies: No, they were not the first people [...] the Sámi people in the north were the first.

Adnan: Thank you!

Dania: All right! (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

This brief dialogue briefly shows the complexity of trying to convey the history of an imagined firm and bounded nation and its diversity of people through some very brief selected events. The story becomes almost unintelligible, and the questions concerning the Vikings and the mentioning of the Sámi people without much explanation might appear confusing for the participants. Unlike the results in Carlsson's (2020) study summarised above, it is possible to see here a crack in 'banal colonialism', one in which the indigenous people of Sweden, the Sámi, are mentioned explicitly, thus momentarily complicating an otherwise ethnically homogenous narrative of the Swedish nation. That being said, no deeper reflection about Swedish colonialism in the far North is presented.

This discursive puncture notwithstanding, what is clear from the narration above is a chronotope of progress in which the Swedish nation readily moves towards modernisation and welfare without much of a struggle. As the communicators went on to explain, Sweden even managed to keep out of two World Wars, although this is only a half-truth as it required a certain degree of concessions to the Nazis (Liljefors & Zander 2003). However, the rather dark chapter of Swedish/Nazi relationships is never mentioned. There are some interruptions in the storytelling as Adnan asks detailed questions about the 'first people in Sweden', although the communicator does not elaborate on these.

During another lesson dealing with how Sweden is governed, a short introduction is provided about the development of democracy. This is an important topic that is emphasised in policies about civic orientation, according to which the content of the courses should include 'knowledge about human rights and fundamental democratic values' (SOU 2010:16: 1138, 2 §). The communicator says:

In 1789 the French Revolution took place. We all have probably learned about the French Revolution [...] I suppose [...] there was a very big gap between rich and poor. The French Revolution had big consequences for all

European countries. A coup took place in Sweden, after which a new form of government was drawn up. It was completed and adopted by Sweden's four different groups in 1809 [...]. There were priests, rich men [...] men from important families, the nobility [...]. That was a big step forward at that time [...] it was a good start. 1842 is a very important date: education was made mandatory, and everyone had the chance to learn to write and read for free [...] several movements were going on at that time [...] for democracy. In 1909 Sweden got the public right to vote; it didn't include everybody, only men 23 years old or older with an income [could vote]. Women were not satisfied with this and in 1919 a new law was made whereby women also got the right to vote. 1921 was the first election that women participated in elections. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

In this narration, a story is constructed through short, selected events that present the emergence of democracy in Europe and in Sweden, in particular. Different political positions constitute the untold 'subtext' of the story: 'different groups' are mentioned and participants in civic orientation are told that 'women were not satisfied' when they were not able to vote. No mention is made of the struggles of workers and women to gain the right to vote. Again, the national chronotope here is that of Sweden developing towards democracy without any major obstacles. Analogous to the first example above, the narration relies on a spatio-temporal portrayal of Sweden as a nation that has always been in place and where progress just happened.

Read together, the examples in this section indicate how the communicators voice a national story of Sweden's progress and prosperity from historical times towards becoming a modern welfare state without many narrative inconsistencies. It is an 'unequivocal story' without many layers, describing a continuous, accumulative, fixed and stable nation-state. These examples illustrate how the discursive construction of national imaginaries 'is often very prosaic', and may appear relatively unproblematic at first sight. Such a construction relies on a 'syntax of forgetting' – an 'obligation to forget or forgetting to remember' (Bhabha 1990: 310) the 'others' (Triandafyllidou 1998); that is, those who were present but are only mentioned (such as the Sámi above) or are completely overlooked such as Jewish people and Swedish antisemitism across time. In no way do we wish to point fingers at the communicators or the organisers of civic orientation programmes and convey that forgetting and erasure was intentional. Whether intentional or not, the examples above illustrate the more banal facet of the 'rhetoric of nationalism', which 'consists not just of a bunch of word that happen to be repeated but participates in grammar and syntax that make it hard to speak without reproducing national thinking' (Calhoun 2017: 24).

SPACE AND THE NOTION OF 'HERE' AND 'THERE'

While the previous section focused on the temporal features of the narration of Sweden as a nation in civic orientation, we now move on to consider in more detail the spatial aspect of narratives about a variety of topics that are not overtly about Sweden as a nation as those in the section above, but where a national frame emerges more subtly through an opposition between 'here and there'. Through such a dichotomy, the communicators can narratively manage the complex relationship between the participants' and their own experiences of migration, as well as juxtapose Sweden to the participants' countries of origin. In relation to such dichotomous division of space, two relevant emic expressions emerged as they were used repeatedly in class: 'in our

societies/communities' [*mujtam'ātna*] and 'in our countries' [*blādna*]. For example, during the first day of in-person ethnography, the communicator Latifa employed the expression 'in our countries' when presenting herself and telling the class about her own experience of migration to Sweden. By narrating a personal story related to 'our countries', Latifa sought to simultaneously create an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of Arabic-speaking migrants and position herself within such a community. In other words, she activated her personal lived experience in order to establish some common ground with her group. The communicators, Latifa and Salma, also expressed the constructed 'we' and the importance of the narrative device 'in our communities' in a conversation with the researcher in the staff room; they claimed that it would be a bad thing 'if civic orientation were to be taken up by SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) or the People's University [Folkuniversitetet], as the participants feel safe meeting someone from the same background and ethnicity' (Fieldnotes, March 2020). Reading through Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, we can again see how space 'gets charged', this time in a way in which 'our communities' here/now in Sweden are spatio-temporal moves geared to creating a feeling of sameness and belonging among Arabic-speaking migrants in relation to an imagined other, in this case non-Arabic-speaking migrants.

That the expression 'in our countries' is used as a discursive device for downplaying differences, highlighting sameness and thereby making participants feel comfortable, is shown by its usage as the starting point for discussing often delicate issues such as contraceptives. As the communicator said: 'The next one used is the contraceptive implant, which is not used in our countries. No, it is not used in our countries, the women respond in unison' (Fieldnotes, May 2020). Here, the participants share the platform with the communicators and also get to pronounce themselves authoritatively on the matter based on their experiences.

Furthermore, 'in our countries' is employed as a point of reference in relation to 'here', whenever communicators and participants discuss how the Swedish system works, as in the case of Fouad and Naser reproduced here:

Fouad has a question. He says that in Sweden there are rights for men, women, and children. Is there a ranking within this? No, never, says the communicator Naser. It is not like in our countries, where it is first children, then women. Nothing like that. In Sweden there is no such ranking. Thank you, Fouad responds. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

We can see here how the communicator's explanation about the lack of hierarchy between men in Sweden is given through a juxtaposition to the situation 'in our countries'. This term also occurs when communicators want to discuss a topic in greater depth, or introduce a new topic, as in the case when the communicator Salma wanted to discuss dental health.

She asks about what dental health is like in our countries [*blādna*]. Israa' says that it depends a lot on the person. The communicator says, yes, but generally dental health in our countries is not very good. There are a lot of poor people who cannot afford it. There is not the same access to dentists. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

In the previous examples, the spatial dichotomy of here/Sweden versus there/'in our countries' placed no different value judgement on each element of the dyad, but

there are also examples in which ‘in our countries’ is employed in order to describe something negative, as opposed to a Swedish ideal and norm. An interesting case in point is when participants are invited to guess which country is the worst in terms of democracy:

Ra’ed responds, ‘The Arab countries’. The communicator [Saeed] says that it is not an Arab country. The participant Fouad says Syria, but corrects himself and says that, no, that is an Arab country. The other participants who are currently using their microphones laugh. Saeed also laughs. He says that North Korea is the worst country in terms of democracy. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

Fouad’s immediate reaction is that Arab countries are at the bottom of the democratic scale. When the communicator gives him a hint saying that it is not an Arab country at the bottom of the scale, Fouad still replies ‘Syria’, before immediately correcting himself when he remembers that Syria falls within the group of Arab countries. Of course, we can only speculate why Arabic-speaking participants would immediately refer to Arab countries as the worst example of democracy. It could be because Arab countries are their main frame of reference, and they have personal experiences of these contexts. Whatever the reason may be, what is relevant for the purpose of this article is again how different spaces ‘get charged’ (Bakhtin), this time in narratives about a variety of topics that are not inherently about the nation but become nationalised through the creation of a dichotomy between (1) Arab countries as places of problems that only carry negative connotations and (2) Sweden as the ‘better country’, Such a dichotomy can also be seen clearly in the example below in which the communicator Haider talks about children:

He says that in Sweden children are very happy to be in school, and they want to live here. The schools here are not organised in the same way as in Iraq, Syria and Palestine. Here it is better. He says that it is important to remember what you fled from, and that the children create their homes here. (Fieldnotes, March 2020)

The communicators explicitly point out to the participants that their countries of origins are worse than where they currently are. A similar understanding of place and the dichotomy of ‘here and there’ is echoed by the participant Sabah on a different day:

She says that she is from Palestine, and there women just stay at home and have no freedom. There is no violence here in Sweden. In our country men hit women, their wives, and their daughters. Here men and women have the same rights. (Fieldnotes, April 2020)

While Sabah’s account is certainly not factually correct – as there is indeed domestic violence in Sweden – it is an interesting reflection of the participant’s understanding of Sweden in relation to her own country of origin, Palestine. From a narrative perspective, what is particularly relevant is how, in an institutionalised context like civic orientation, which seeks to give migrants relevant information about life in Sweden, a ‘growing circle of national subjects’ – that is, migrants who attend these courses – are interpellated by other migrants – the communicators – through a narrative based on a chronotopic contrast between Sweden as better, more democratic, more gender equal than ‘in our countries’ (cf. [Triandafyllidou 1998: 599](#)). Establishing the truth (or not) of

these representations is ultimately beyond the point. Rather, it should be emphasised how an educational provision that is supposed to ‘strengthen participants’ *ability to shape not only their own lives, but also participate in the shaping of Swedish society* (SOU 2010:16: 37, 18; emphasis added) is ultimately framed by a rather essentialised spatial dichotomy between Sweden and Arab countries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By bringing Bakhtin’s theorisation of the chronotope into dialogue with discussions about the discursive construction of the nation (Bhabha 1990; Billig 1995; Calhoun 2017; De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999; Triandafyllidou 1998) and Shenhav’s (2015) ‘social narratives’, we have shown in this article how the dominant narrative about Sweden in civic orientation classes builds on two main spatiotemporal features. Temporally, the narration of Sweden as a nation takes a specific form that is more ‘around temporality than about historicity’ (Bhabha 1990); it arranges and narrates temporality in a linear fashion; it also places Sweden as part of the overarching narrative of the ‘Western nation’, with reference to the French Revolution and the birth of liberal ideals. This narrative ends with ‘modern times’ and the establishment of the Swedish welfare system, economic increase and four weeks of vacation. It is a top-down perspective ‘seen from the state’ with mentions of male historical figures such as King Gustav Vasa and Jean Baptiste Bernadotte and larger periodisation in history, industrialisation, democracy and the two World Wars lacking complexity, not mentioning struggles or difficulties and downplaying, or even erasing anything that may complicate this coherence, such as the colonisation of the Sámi or Swedish anti-semitism. Spatially, the narrative of Sweden as a ‘success story’ is characterised by the expressions ‘here’ versus ‘there’ and ‘our countries’. We argue that such spatio-temporal moves are key ingredients in a rhetoric of nationalism and play an important narrative role in that they create positive and negative chronotopes that are at the heart of an ‘us and them’ dichotomy (cf. Triandafyllidou 1998). Unlike Griswold’s (2010) study in a US context, which placed great emphasis on individualism, the civic orientation courses we studied foregrounded a narration of Sweden as a modern and well-organised society that is basically free of problems. Such an image of Sweden is not unique to civic orientation but is the manifestation of a broader ‘welfare nationalism’ (Ryner 2007), ‘in which European integration and the “Others” that it brings with it is seen as a threat to the architecture and values of the Model, its collective agreements, wage bargaining system and labour law’ (Andersson 2009: 241; cf. Triandafyllidou 1998). While Andersson highlighted the ways in which ‘welfare nationalism’ operates on the international arena, our analysis provides a glimpse of the ways in which the state intervenes and tries to maintain this political ideological artefact reproducing itself *within* Sweden through narrations interpellating new constituencies of migrants in civic orientation courses. As Bhabha argued, ‘the first duty of the state [is] to “give” the nation its cultural identity and above all to develop it’ (1994: 48). This is certainly the case in civic orientation courses where a ‘national imaginary’ (Calhoun 2017) is produced ‘in action’, even in relation to topics that are not inherently about the nation such as children, contraceptives or gender equality but become nationalised through specific spatiotemporal links to Sweden as opposed to ‘in our countries’.

In conclusion, we return to the more theoretical discussion about the relationship between liberal civic values and nationalism with which we started this article. In our

data, nationalism does not manifest itself in overtly chauvinistic guises. Instead, as with the case of Denmark and the UK presented by Mouritsen (2013), it operates by clearly tying civic values to Sweden and its historical development. In a sense, our analysis gives empirical evidence to Larin's argument that civic orientation courses consist of 'essentially civic nationalist ideology applied to migrants' (Larin 2020: 127). However, while Larin highlighted civic orientation courses as a technology of 'migration control', we want to specify that such a control has very subtle undertones in our data, and it has to do with what kind of values migrants should be socialised into. According to such a perspective, some knowledge of Swedish history and of Swedish 'ways of organising' migrants is viewed as a prerequisite to live meaningful, autonomous lives and function 'properly' in society. However, Swedish history slides between constructing utopian stories and rather simplified generalisations about Sweden, and Sweden takes shape discursively in spatio-temporal oppositions to the Other; that is, Arabic-speaking countries. This dichotomous construction illustrates the persistence of the ways in which 'the political unity of the nation' requires 'a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space' (Bhabha 1994: 213). In civic orientation courses, such apprehension is kept at bay by a shared narrative in which communicators and participants remind themselves that Sweden is ultimately a better place.

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