



Televising the Famine: An Audiovisual Representation of the Famine in Northern Sweden, 1867–1868¹

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In the 1970s, historical documentarists Olle Häger and Hans Villius at the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation made both a documentary and a dramatic television production about the famine years of the 1860s. The productions indicate that a class perspective dominated popular culture at the time. Yet, not least the documentary (“Ett satans år,” [One Year of Satan] 1977) is evidence of how media producers sought to communicate seriously about famine in the past, at the same time relating to contemporary issues.

Introduction

How have memories of famine been used in popular culture? In some cases, famine memories seem simply too painful to be even mentioned. Jun Jing, trying to track memories of the great famine of 1959 to 1961 in a Chinese village found that still decades later people found it very difficult to talk about. He suggests many survivors bore a sense of guilt,² which may help explain why there is sometimes a lack of memorial culture surrounding historical famines. By contrast, other famines have become important themes in popular culture as well as elements in political agitation. In the cases of Ireland or Ukraine, memories of famine have laid the foundation for resistance activities against a perceived oppressor.

The Irish famine, in particular, has led to many stories, poetry, prose, art works, films, and monuments. But it is certainly not pre-given exactly what famine memories will survive. The streams of Irish migrants fleeing the famine to the USA created strong narratives, whereas other voices such as those fleeing to Canada have been

1 The chapter draws on Ludvigsson, 2003.

2 Jing, 2001. See also Pernin, 2014.

Andrew G. Newby (ed.)

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heard less often.³ As has been argued by Jason King, the Irish famine orphans adopted by French-Canadian families became inscribed in Irish and Canadian consciousness, yet to a large extent this was thanks to John Francis Maguire’s popular book *The Irish in America* (1868).⁴ The well-known song “Skibbereen” tells of the sorrowful state of Ireland in the 1840s, but ends on a vengeful note,⁵ thus emphasizing a political aspect of the famine. Both “Skibbereen” and Maguire’s book are examples of how cultural products influence memories of famine. The meaning and memory of the Irish famine remain contested.⁶ In Ireland the famine continues to evoke memories of suffering, whereas in North America monuments erected to commemorate the same famine contain a sense of optimism, of building a new life.⁷ Even in the case of Ireland, as Emily Mark-FitzGerald has argued, there was for a long time a relative absence of commemorative activities. Mark-FitzGerald suggests that this lack of commemoration was due to the famine’s “lack of central characters, linear narrative, heroic episodes or key dates”.⁸ Yet, she suggests radio and television documentaries and dramas helped keep famine history alive in popular consciousness.

Mark-FitzGerald’s conclusion is an interesting and important one, and for two reasons. First, she points out the power of modern mass media to influence historical memory. A number of scholars have argued that many people learn history from television and film, Gary Edgerton even going so far as to claim that “television is the principal means by which most people learn about history today”.⁹ While the media landscape is constantly changing, and radio and television may already have passed their high peak years, mass media undoubtedly influence historical memory including memories of famine. Second, Mark-FitzGerald suggests that the Irish famine commemoration was muted until relatively recently because of its lack of certain characteristics. It is well known that uses of history in popular culture are influenced by cultural logics such as popular television conventions. These conventions can be, for example, that it should be possible for subjects to be represented visually, that narratives offer objects for identification, and that they follow the dramatic unities of time, space and action. There is a continuous need to investigate how historic famines are shaped or transformed when turned into cultural media formats such as television.

3 McGowan, 2014.

4 King, 2012, 128–33.

5 Falc’her-Poyroux, 2014.

6 Newby & Myllyntaus, 2015, 157–8.

7 Mark-FitzGerald, 2013; Goek, 2013.

8 Mark-FitzGerald, 2012, 146.

9 Edgerton, 2001, 1.

Televising the Famine of 1867–1868

In this chapter, I shall discuss an audiovisual representation of a historical famine, namely *Ett satans år* [*One Year of Satan*], a documentary made by historian-filmmakers Olle Häger and Hans Villius for SVT, i.e. the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, in 1977.¹⁰ The documentary deals with the famine of 1867-68, which affected large areas of northern Europe including Sweden. I will use this film as a case study to explore popular representations of famine.



Map 1. The traditional regions and districts of Sweden. Taken from Nelson, 1988, p. 176 (appendix 1). Reproduced with kind permission of Professor Marie C. Nelson.

¹⁰ *Ett satans år* was first broadcast on December 28, 1977. It has since been re-broadcast by SVT several times, and was made available for purchase on DVD in 2007 (the DVD title is *1000 år. En svensk historia. Ett satans år* is on the DVD as an additional film). At the time of publication, *Ett satans år*, and several other 1970s documentaries by Häger and Villius, are available online. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GN2nDkRINsk> [accessed 20. Jan 2017]. Research copies are also available for consultation at the *Kungliga Biblioteket* / National Library of Sweden.

Before discussing the film, a few things must be said about the famine that struck Sweden and Finland in the late 1860s, and which has been considered the last major famine in northern Europe to arise from natural or climatic triggers. Also, a word is needed on the society in which it happened. As the film deals only with northern Sweden and not Finland, the context presented here is about Sweden. Briefly, Sweden at this time was a poor country but also a society in transition. The population was growing rapidly. It was still mostly a pre-industrial agricultural country, yet new industries were expanding. In the northern parts of the country lumbering and saw-mills attracted workers and even caused a worker migration from the south to the north, thus offering an alternative to emigration. From 1851 to 1930 an estimated 1.2 million Swedes emigrated, mostly to North America, which means a fifth of the population (and most of them young people) left the country. Emigration peaked during the famine years in the late 1860s. In spiritual terms, the church still held people’s souls in a tight grip. Politically, a number of important reforms were gradually changing the country, a major parliament reform taking place in 1865/66, but the vote was still restricted on the basis of gender, wealth and income.¹¹

Historically, famine was a recurring phenomenon in northern Europe during the early modern period. The famine of 1695-97 struck hard in Scandinavia, Finland, and the Baltic region, causing particularly high mortality in northern Sweden and Finland.¹² With regard to the 1860s in Sweden, harvests were bad during several years but 1867 was the most difficult, and it remains the coldest year ever recorded in Sweden. Different names have applied to it in different regions, for example the Lichen Year referring to lichen being used as food in this year of starvation. Northern Sweden certainly went through a major crisis, yet modern research has suggested that the relief efforts were largely successful. In the words of Marie C. Nelson, who investigated the famine in the district of Norrbotten, “deaths due to starvation related diseases were not numerous, and deaths due directly to starvation a myth”.¹³ Peasants survived yet lived in misery and destitution, many baking bread of bark, lichen, and straw. While conditions were bad in both countries, the famine left a much higher death toll in Finland than in Sweden.¹⁴

The memory of the famine years lived on, especially in the northern parts of the country. Further, famine or scarcity of food has been a recurring theme in novels about nineteenth-century Swedish peasants, such as Vilhelm Moberg’s

11 On Sweden during the late nineteenth century, and specifically on Swedish migration to North America, see Runblom & Norman, 1976. On northward migration, see Vikström, 2003.

12 Lappalainen, 2012; Jutikkala, 1955, 48-63. In Finland, for example, it is estimated that over a quarter of the population perished. Muroma, 1991, 180.

13 Nelson, 1988, 174. Donald Harman Akenson has challenged this assertion, however, in his comparative study of Irish and Swedish emigration to North America. He writes: “to take [Nelson’s] study area of Norrbotten, it is hard to see how a crude death rate from 17.9 in 1866 to 27.0 per thousand in 1868 did not involve some emaciated or fever-twisted bodies.” Akenson, 2011, 142.

14 See, e.g. Pitkänen, 1992.

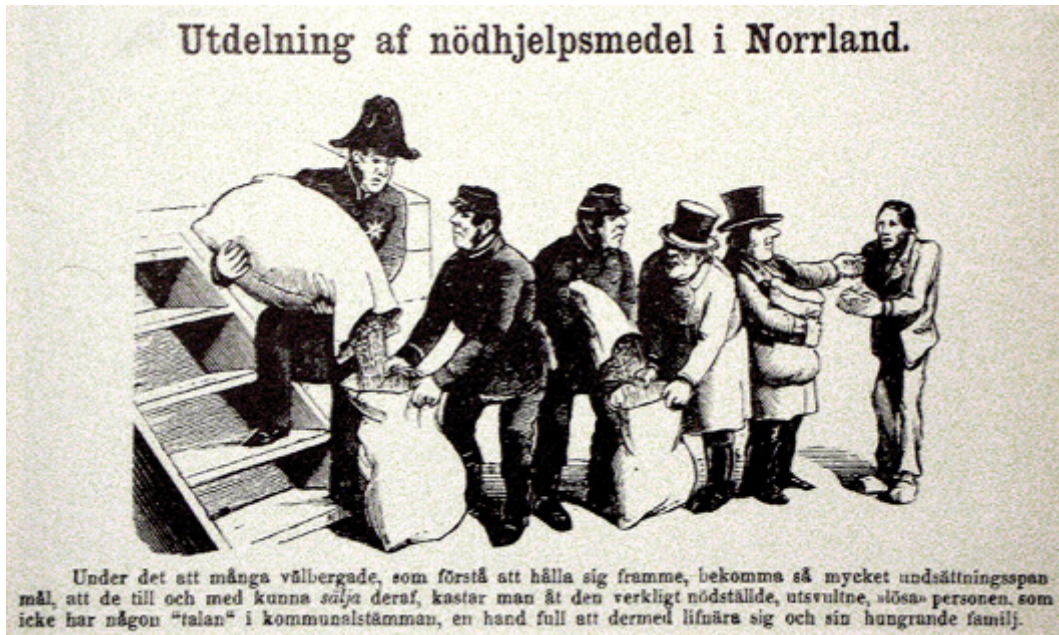


Figure 1. "The Distribution of Emergency Meal in Norrland", a sardonic portrayal of the 1867 relief effort in Sweden, taken from *Fäderneslandet* 14 December 1867, and reproduced in *Ett satans år*. By implication is that, by the time aid has trickled down from the state officials and wealthy farmers, only a small amount is left for the genuinely needy. Via Wikipedia commons (accessed 1 March 2017). [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/Emergency_help_image_F%C3%A4derneslandet_1867.jpg]

epic *Utvandrarna* [*The Emigrants*] (1949)¹⁵, Linnéa Fjällstedt's *Hungerpesten* [*Hunger Plague*] (1975), and Bernhard Nordh's *Nybyggare vid Bäversjön* [*Settlers on Beaver Lake*] (1946), which plays out in 1867 and 1868.¹⁶ In Sara Lidman's *Din tjänare hör* (1977), peasants in the 1870s cannot stand to talk about the famine of the previous decade.¹⁷ One of the first Swedish realist children's books, Laura Fitinghoff's *Barnen från Frostmofjället* [*Children of the Moor*] (1907), also set in 1867, tells the story of seven children whose parents have starved to death and who now wander southwards in search of food and human compassion. The book was popular for decades and has been turned into a feature film (1945) and more recently into a theatre play (2011).¹⁸ Starving peasants make up the crucial starting

15 *Utvandrarna* ("The Emigrants"), a tale of agrarian hardship in, and emigration from, Småland, was made into a successful film (1971), directed by Jan Troell and featuring Max von Sydow and Liv Ullman in starring roles. A sequel, *Nybyggarna* ("The New Land"), also based on Moberg's writing, was released in 1972.

16 On the hard life in the north of Sweden where food was often scarce, see also the novels by Torgny Lindgren, and the documentary works by Lilian Ryd.

17 Lidman, 1977, 59–60.

18 The film was made available for purchase on DVD in 2007 and 2011. When the book was published again in 2011, related teaching materials were made freely available on-line by the Swedish Institute for Children's Books. See Runsten, 2011.

point also in Sven Nykvist’s Oscar-nominated feature film *The Oxen* (1991).¹⁹ Thus, fictionalized stories of famine have persisted in Swedish culture. Yet while there are starving people in the works mentioned, there are few deaths. Memories of the famine did not result in any extensive memorializing rituals in Sweden. While not unknown, the famine years never reached the status of a key event in narratives about Sweden,²⁰ and thus have begun to fade in the memories of people even in the north.

The historian-filmmakers who took on the issue of the famine in Sweden, Olle Häger (1935-2014) and Hans Villius (1923-2012), were academically trained historians who both left university to work for the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, first making radio programmes and then, from the mid-1960s, historical television. Forming a team in 1967, they would work together for over thirty years, making more than two hundred historical documentaries, a few drama-documentaries, and writing several books in the process. Being trained historians, all through their careers they narrated stories about the past with great expertise. In theoretical terms, while making historical documentaries will always involve a process of negotiating between competing considerations, cognitive considerations played an important part in their filmmaking process; by the term cognitive considerations I mean the filmmaker’s efforts to discover and communicate knowledge.²¹ As a consequence of their decades-long production of historical programming, often made in the expository mode,²² the names of Häger & Villius became perceived by the Swedish television audience as a guarantee of high quality programming, and the characteristic narrator voice of Villius became known as the “voice of history” in Sweden. Villius himself once told the anecdote of overhearing someone say “that must be Hans Villius, because when just ordering a herring sandwich it sounded like the outbreak of the Second World War”.²³ It should be added that no commercial television channels were present in the Swedish media landscape until in the late 1980s. Thus, in the period covered by this chapter, public service television had a very strong position in the Swedish media landscape, and its historical programming reached very broad segments of the population.

Widely appreciated, the history production by Häger and Villius comes out of a specific production context. The public service channel where they worked in the 1970s, TV2, was known for politically radical programming. Both conservative and social democratic politicians criticized several programmes for having left-wing

19 The famine year was reintroduced in Sweden in early 2016, when Finnish writer Aki Ollikainen’s novel *Nälkävuosi* (2012) was translated into Swedish as *Nödåret* [The Year of Hunger]. It is entitled *White Hunger* in English-speaking markets.

20 Cf. Newby, 2014.

21 In Ludvigsson, 2003, I discuss the work of Häger and Villius in terms of aesthetic considerations, moral considerations, and cognitive considerations.

22 On the various modes of documentary film, see Nichols, 2001.

23 Ludvigsson, 2003, 122.

tendencies, an indication of the radical atmosphere at TV2.²⁴ The productions by Häger and Villius reflect some of that radicalism. Typically, they tended to focus on experiences of the working population, thus seeing history from below. This perspective comes through when the producers designed their project about the famine year of 1867. Interestingly, they connected the project to the on-going debate on developmental assistance policy. In the description for the project, communicating with bosses at TV2, they wrote that 1867 was:

The last year that Sweden was a developing country.

In this year we saw [...] a possibility to get at and shed light upon the current problems of aid to developing countries. This is about our own background. And here [in Sweden's past] we found the same arguments that one hears today, arguments about our lazy, ignorant, and wasteful ancestors.²⁵

Clearly, the producers were critical of those moralizing against the poor. Häger and Villius started planning for the famine project years before shooting the film. In 1974 they contacted university historians for advice. Not much research had previously been done on the famine.²⁶ This caused them to search through primary source materials such as court records and newspapers themselves. They researched the programmes themselves in the spring of 1976, also seeking assistance from one of the staff members at Skellefteå Museum. After the research phase they wrote scripts, filmed during the winter and then did editing work during 1977. The project resulted in the documentary film *Ett satans år* but also in a docudrama, *Isgraven [The Ice Grave]*, and a book on the famine. Häger and Villius made the documentary, whereas Häger made the docudrama together with filmmaker Carl Torell.

The creative process of the documentary can be partly reconstructed. In an early draft there are twelve paragraphs summarizing what happened during the famine and which form a rough outline. Among the content-focused paragraphs are: poor Sweden; crop failure in successive years; summer's hope; those forced to leave the village; speculators; the first night of frost; fund-raising begins; starving people etc. The draft shows the starting point of the filmmakers was not a particular story, nor a heroic or tragic individual, but a fairly structural, general account about a society struck by famine. The filmmakers wanted to transmit knowledge of importance, or in principal terms, they were strongly influenced by cognitive considerations. *Ett satans år* follows the early outline as set out above, although not

24 On the radicalism of Swedish public service television, see Thurén, 1997.

25 Sveriges Radio Dokumentarkivet (Stockholm), T21, F1, 31, *Ett satans år*. Manus, CD, Produktionsbeskrivning.

26 In their book, Häger, Villius and Torell list works they had benefitted from during their research, but most of these works deal with the famine mostly in passing. See Häger, Villius & Torell, 1978.

all of its details. The finished 44-minute programme consists of thirty sequences, which I have divided here into ten segments (A–J):

- A. Sequences 1–2. Opening words and the tale of Erik Gideonsson.
- B. Sequences 3–5. The hard winter of 1867. Re-enactment introduces Nils Petter Wallgren.
- C. Sequences 6–7. The wintry forest land. Photograph from 1867 proves the late spring.
- D. Sequences 8–11. The short spring. Re-enactment shows a peasant at work. Re-enacted stills show Nils Petter Wallgren looking for work. Wealthy farms portrayed.
- E. Sequences 12–16. Saw-summer. The sawmill industry, its workers and owners. Nils Petter Wallgren works at a lumberyard.
- F. Sequences 17–18. Robber economy in the forests. Re-enactment stills, story of timber theft.
- G. Sequences 19–21. Railroads and emigration. Nils Petter Wallgren dreams of America.
- H. Sequences 22–24. Autumn of hunger. The tale of Josefina Eliasson. Re-enactment of people trying to find food in the forest.
- I. Sequences 25–29. Relief work. Aid is gathered and distributed. Letter from bishop is quoted.
- J. Sequence 30. Nils Petter Wallgren works, falls sick, is transported home, and dies. Re-enactment. Credits roll.

The programme follows a chronological cycle of the famine year, the annual cycle thus providing a linear narrative. But when compared with the early outline it becomes clear that certain elements were added to the programme along the way. First, there are two authentic witness accounts, one of them (A) illustrating the hard winter and the other (H) the terrible first night of frost.²⁷ These accounts are told in first person voices and add both presence and detail. Not least, and although they are very factual, by being read in an intense tone the eyewitness accounts communicate some of the horrors that people will have felt during the famine. The dramatic sound track is contrasted by still imagery of a landscape that seems deserted by humans. Second, the story of a young boy, Nils Petter Wallgren, has been added and is told bit by bit through the programme. This story was not part of the early draft but is an example of how the filmmakers transformed the abstract past into an engaging, concrete story about human beings, thus evoking identification amongst the viewers. In effect, Wallgren becomes one of those central characters that may, as Emily Mark-FitzGerald suggests, be a prerequisite to permit a famine-related narrative to become an attractive part of popular culture. Further, by telling

27 These eyewitness accounts are preserved in the ethnographic collections of Nordiska muséet in Stockholm.

the story of Wallgren through re-enactments, it provided images with people in them. This will have been a key issue, because television norms demand that subjects are covered both through words and images. This is often a difficult norm to handle in historical television, because there are rarely authentic images of past events or people, unless the subjects have been rich and / or famous. In fact, there is a strong tendency for historical television to portray issues that have gathered a wealth of archival pictures, such as the Second World War which was widely documented by cameramen accompanying the troops. Similarly, royal families have always attracted photographers as well as painters and cameramen. For example, a very large share of the old film archive at SVT contains film depicting the Swedish royal family, which makes it easy to make historical television about the royals.²⁸ By contrast, few professional photographers were active in Sweden in the 1860s, and few of their photographs circulated or entered media archives.²⁹ Häger and Villius found very few historic images that in a direct way could represent the famine year, one of them a photograph taken in early June 1867 showing there was still snow on the ground. But none of these images depicted the starving poor or the harsh living



Figure 2. The ship “Föreningen” is launched in Härnösand in northern Sweden, early June 1867. The photograph was used in *Ett satans år*. The narrator points out that while it should be summer, snow is still on the ground and people in the foreground have on winter clothing “because it is still winter-time”. Thus, while the photograph does not directly show the famine, it is used as a visual source that demonstrates the cause for the coming failure of crops. Photo Courtesy of Länsmuseum Västernorrland.

28 Ludvigsson, 2003, 74–5, 274.

29 Rittsel, 2008.

conditions of the north. Therefore, in order to live up to the aesthetic norms of the time,³⁰ the filmmakers had to create imagery that could function as a substitute for missing authentic imagery showing the famine.

Two strategies were used to create the important new imagery. One was to shoot images of wide, snow-covered forests and of log cabins and other historic environments that could be taken to be from the 1860s. These images propose to the audience that this is what it looked like, although the viewers are of course expected to realize that the filming had taken place much later. In *Ett satans år*, voice-over narration was used to give a special sense to the images it was covering, claiming it took weeks and months to get messages about starvation to pass through the vast land. Further, the sound track featured the sound of (a cold) wind, and the dramatic music of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, which also help to load these images with the sense of urgency and threatening nature.

The second strategy was adopting re-enactments. Bill Nichols has criticized documentaries for adopting re-enactments of historically based events, arguing they “trade documentary authenticity for fictional identification”.³¹ However, in *Ett satans år* re-enactments were used in very specific ways. First, re-enactments in the documentary do not feature dialogue, but instead voice-over narration is used over these images, thus maintaining a distance between the audience and the people featuring in the re-enacted scenes. Second, the acts performed in re-enacted scenes were of typical work in the old, rural society, such as cutting down a tree or ploughing and sowing, and the actors clearly know their task. Thus, there is a very strong effort to achieve authenticity in the way the re-enactments were set up. The element of identification is more obvious only in a couple of close-up re-enacted scenes, in particular when the camera pans over the bleak faces of churchgoers, the narrator reading from a pastoral letter that the poor have “thoughtlessly squandered the rich profits of summer” (I). At this point, the audience is led to identify with the parishioners who received the message from the bishop, feeling indignation in response to the moralizing, authoritarian voice from this church leader.

In the case of the Wallgren story, the element of identification is stronger. Wallgren is first introduced in a colour film re-enactment scene, when a number of people are seen slaughtering a pig in front of a small cabin, snow on the ground (B). The camera zooms in on a tall, thin boy standing a little to the side, the narrator saying this is Nils Petter Wallgren and there are court records describing him; “this is how we have imagined him to be”, and “we will meet him again during the year”. The image freezes to a black-and-white photograph, the narrator adding that within the year the boy will be dead. When Wallgren appears again, he features in

30 In the 1990s, the on-screen presenter appeared in historical programming thus offering a new solution to the problem of how to provide imagery when covering topics that had not resulted in authentic pictures. Another creative solution, used by Ken Burns, Marianne Söderberg and other documentarists but not by Häger & Villius, is to zoom in on words in hand-written letters.

31 Nichols, 1991, 250.

black-and-white photographs, representing not only himself but also clearly being the representative of the faceless and nameless poor. Thus, he is seen on the road looking for work (D) as well as working in a lumberyard (E). At one point, the narrator says Wallgren dreamt of going to America, the image showing the boy reading a romantic story of American Indians (G). This dream cannot be verified in written sources about Wallgren, but seeing him as a representative of the poor, famine-stricken population there can be no doubt some of that population shared dreams of migrating to America. Ultimately, after the narrator informs that he had to work hard and was beaten by the employer, images show Wallgren lying down looking sick (J):

He laid down very sick for 35 days. Nobody cared about him. Snow came through a broken window. He had gangrene in both his feet, bedsores on his right hip, a wound four inches long, and the iliac crest was bare to the bone. He was completely emaciated. In the middle of February 1868, Nils Petter Wallgren's mother came wandering to Sikeå to fetch him [...] Two weeks after his home-coming, on 29 February 1868, Nils Petter Wallgren died. He died from negligence and typhoid caused by hunger. A pauper, a name among all the nameless, one year of Satan.

Sources prove there is a reliable basis for the account. Wallgren was sick for 35 days, his mother came to take him home, he died on 29 February 1868, witnesses testified there was a broken window near the boy's sickbed, a doctor used the word "negligence", and Wallgren himself testified his employer had beaten him.³² His fate is important in a cognitive sense as it helps the audience to understand the unknown lives of the poor. Yet, interestingly enough, historical sources indicate the story could have been told differently. Clearly, the filmmakers have read the sources in a selective way. According to the court records, there were other people sleeping in the same room as the boy, indicating others shared the same living conditions. Second, sources state Wallgren visited his parents' home shortly before he fell ill. Because these pieces of information are withheld from the audience, it leaves the impression that he was alone in the world. Offering images of a sad young boy created an atmosphere of loneliness and vulnerability, instead of the feeling of solidarity that could have resulted from images of relatives or working companions surrounding him. Third, and particularly important, the narrator fails to mention that the employer and his wife were sentenced by the court to pay the considerable sum of one hundred riksdaler for the negligence of the sick boy. This information suggests that society punished employers who treated the poor as badly as Wallgren was treated. By suppressing it, the filmmakers simplified the story of Wallgren's suffering and created a morally indignant tale about poor people who lacked rights. Through Wallgren, we get to see injustices but not how society at the time attempted, at least in part, to redress the balance.

³² Sveriges Radio Dokumentarkivet (Stockholm), T21, F1, 30, Ett satans år. 1867, XYZ, copies (21 pages) of court records.

There are other examples indicating that moral and dramatic considerations sometimes won out over more balanced cognitive considerations. According to the narrator, the ruling classes did not handle the relief as one may have hoped:

Finally even the authorities understood [...] that a real famine winter was approaching. [...] Charity cleared the conscience of the rich [...] there was both private and state relief. But much never got there in time [before the sea became ice]. Only half of the money was used for grain. The rest remained in Stockholm. [...] Somewhere far away it had been decided in detail how the relief was to be used [...] when the Tåsjö people asked for permission to mix bark and straw in the bread, the authorities said no. It should be fir lichen, for that had been decided. And so the old and feeble had to plod out into the forest to collect fir lichen [...] the relief was left for weeks and months in Kramfors and Härnösand before it was collected and distributed.

As noted above, at the time the documentary was made no thorough historic research had been done on the 1860s famine in northern Sweden and thus the filmmakers will have found it difficult to estimate how well the relief met with the needs.³³ Still, it is striking that dealing with the relief efforts, *Ett satans år* focuses on the problems rather than on what was accomplished. The narrator uses a host of verbs that signal passivity, such as the food was “left” for months before being distributed, and money “remained” in Stockholm. And finally “even” the authorities understood what was happening. Further, distribution was connected with apparently foolish stipulations. The overall effect of the account is the impression that while nature sent the bad crops, the authorities caused the famine. Again, this interpretation builds on a simplified view of relief efforts. For one thing, as the narrator notes in passing, famine relief came from both private and state sources, and if in some cases the use of bark or straw in bread was prohibited, then that was probably a localized stipulation by a particular relief organization. Just as the example of the bishop’s letter mentioned earlier, it adds to the overall interpretation that the authorities did a bad job, thus serving the moral function of increasing the viewer’s indignation.

Finally, we should highlight a few interesting language issues. The narrator uses the concepts of “upper class” and “working class”. While the concept of class was commonly used in Sweden in the 1970s, it was a politically loaded term that indicates the filmmakers saw conflicting interests within society. Further, when commenting on the evolving lumber industry of the north, the narrator talks of “squires” with “money in bulging leather cases”, “speculators” and “forest thieves”. Taken together, in the Swedish source language these words build up a story of brutal capitalism that adds to the filmmakers’ interpretation of the famine-stricken society as one deeply divided, where the rich felt little compassion for the poor and where authorities did not take the necessary responsibility.

33 Nelson concluded that the relief was a success. Nelson, 1988, 82 (table 5.2). See also Newby, 2017, in this volume.

Concluding Discussion

Ett satans år is an example of how television producers sought to communicate seriously about historic incidences of famine. As we have seen, the filmmakers took careful cognitive considerations, both by doing extensive research and by including descriptive and analytical elements in the programme. But there is also evidence of their taking aesthetic and moral considerations. Already the original choice of subject was motivated by contemporary problems of aid, and in the documentary both the negative depiction of the authorities and the simplification of the Wallgren story are proof that famine history was in fact politicized. The film's indignant version of the boy's fate is based on political morals as much as on historical fact, and the famine is represented as largely the result of the absence of political action.

The tendency to offer empathetic portrayals of the poor and emphasize the greediness of the rich can be perceived as a signifier of the film's radical 1970s context. During these same years, there was a movement among workers in Sweden to investigate and tell the story of their workplaces from a "view from below" perspective.³⁴ Also, the increased popularity of genealogy and local heritage groups added to the tendency of ordinary citizens offering historical interpretations, and very often they sided with their poor ancestors against their supposed oppressors.³⁵ In some ways, this was a demonstration of the consensus-oriented master narrative of Sweden being challenged by alternative, especially leftist narratives.³⁶ The famine of the 1860s can be interpreted as historical content that lent itself to conflict-oriented narratives about Sweden's past.

The results confirm studies that have argued that historical documentaries tend to portray those parts of collective memory that are felt to be relevant at a given time, thus negotiating a "useable" past.³⁷ Yet it should be noted that while the 1970s was a radical period, not all Swedes appreciated the radical programming of the public service broadcaster.³⁸ When it comes to the political perspective championed in *Ett satans år* it is not certainly one of restoration, but could be seen as one operating to argue in favour of a more radical position. It is history from below and an expression of a radical public service channel in the radical 1970s.³⁹ While *Ett satans år* was not the most provocative of historical programmes to be produced

³⁴ Alzén, 2011.

³⁵ Edquist, 2009. For an analysis of the public historical debates in Sweden in the 1970s, see Zander, 2001.

³⁶ Wiklund, 2006. See also Johansson, 2001, who discusses competing interpretations of the Ådalen events in 1931, i.e. a famous incident in Swedish history when military troops opened fire on demonstrators.

³⁷ Edgerton, 2001, 8.

³⁸ Cf. Ludvigsson, 2003, 100–1.

³⁹ Ludvigsson, 2003, 363.

at SVT in that decade it should be seen as one of those public service productions that challenged the ruling power by championing a perspective of class conflict.⁴⁰

When compared with the filmmakers’ book on the famine, which tells of the famine year in a matter-of-fact way, the analysis confirms that conventions of the television medium influenced how the famine was represented. Dramatic music and sound effects like a cold wind blowing were added to the sound track. The filmmakers struggled to create images that could represent the famine year and the addition of the Wallgren story provided an individual for the viewers to identify with. Wallgren, who was represented in a large number of photographs, was not even mentioned in the book. Thus, they shaped the famine to fit the medium. Through the careful selection of facts, images and stories, the addition of music and sound effects, and the occasional intensity on the part of the narrator, memories of the famine were put to use as television entertainment.

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40 A similar phenomenon took place more-or-less simultaneously in the UK, with the BBC defining its “public service” remit to include radical / progressive productions, notably via its *Play for Today* series. See, e.g., McGrath, 2015, xxix; Kershaw, 1992, 148.

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