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**A THREAD
IN THE COLONIAL WEB**

The Malmö Cotton Textile Industry 1855–1872

Bio & Abstract

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Abstract:

Cotton, as a raw material, links two critical processes in world history: industrialisation and colonialism. The industrial production of cotton textiles played a key role in the industrialisation of Western Europe and, simultaneously, the emergence of colonialism on a global scale. Cotton would also come to play a key role during the early years of Swedish industrialisation, despite conventionally being seen as a successful case of industrialisation through the domestic consumption of domestic products, ignoring the obviously non-Swedish character of the raw material. Recent research paints Sweden as a 'junior partner' that was firmly integrated into the dominant colonial powers.

The aim of this text is to recontextualise the emergence of the Swedish cotton textile industry given the expanding international research field focusing on the interconnectedness of the industrial revolution in Western European countries and the colonial system of violence, resource extraction and labour exploitation. We do so using the example of Malmö, focusing on the period from 1855 to 1872, when the first cotton industries were established in the city and industrial capitalism in Sweden took off.

In dialogue with current research on Sweden's position in the colonial world, we can conclude that the Malmö cotton textile industry is not an example of formal Swedish colonialism, Swedes being directly involved in colonialism or settler colonialism. Instead, we find the notion of 'colonial complicity' useful. Complicity, in this context, refers to an ambiguous position of participation and benefit from colonial discourses and practices.

Introduction

It was surprising to learn on what an immense scale this cotton spinning mill had been set up and in what ingenious way it was run. [...] Through this marvellous perfection of the cotton spinning mills, the great triumph of the mechanical arts has become an opportunity, which must be found in the remarkable circumstance that the English, after having bought cotton in the East Indies and transported it 1000 miles across the sea home to their factories, yet find advantage in sending back the cloths made of the cotton to the East Indies and selling it there.¹

These are the words of the young Malmö merchant Johan Peter Bager when he was visiting a cotton spinnery in Manchester in 1840. It reflects the predominant understanding of the immense economic success of British industry during the industrial revolution: Technologically advanced mills and factories were the key. However, this understanding of the industrial revolution is now being contested.

Cotton, as a raw material, links two critical processes in world history: industrialisation and colonialism. The industrial production of cotton textiles played a key role in the industrialisation of Western Europe and, simultaneously, the emergence of colonialism on a global scale. Critics who reject a singular focus on technology in attempts at understanding and explaining the industrial revolution argue, instead, for the importance of the colonial empires, both for providing the needed raw materials and creating a market for the product, which the young Bager is reflecting upon. Sven Beckert, author of the book *Empire of Cotton*, emphasises the importance of British control over naval trade routes and what he refers to as ‘war capitalism’, a process via which the British merchants gained control over and, in many cases, exclusive access to markets for their textiles in Africa and Asia.²

Cotton would also come to play a key role during the early years of Swedish industrialisation, despite conventionally being seen as a successful case of industrialisation through the domestic consumption of domestic products, ignoring the obviously non-Swedish character of the raw material.³ However, Sweden was not as unaffiliated with the colonial system, as we may have previously imagined. Recent research paints Sweden as a ‘junior partner’ that was firmly integrated into the dominant colonial powers.⁴ Thus, we have good reason to revisit the history of the Swedish cotton textile industry and its international connections.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this text is to recontextualise the emergence of the Swedish cotton textile industry given the expanding international research field focusing on the interconnectedness of the industrial revolution in Western European countries and the colonial system of violence, resource extraction and labour exploitation. We will do so using the example of Malmö, Sweden’s third largest city, which is on the southern border with Denmark, focusing on the period from 1855 to 1872, when the first cotton industries were established in the city and industrial capitalism in Sweden took off.

The interconnectedness between colonialism and industrialism can come in many forms. We will consider the origin of the capital invested in the new cotton textile industries. Did it come from local, national, or international investors? We will also consider how the technical equipment was acquired and how the labour force, both key technicians and workers, were recruited. Were there active international networks? Furthermore, we will investigate the sources of raw material. Where did the companies buy the raw cotton? Were the companies involved in the production and trans-

portation of cotton integrated with the Malmö cotton industry regarding ownership or the board members of the companies?

The overarching question that we pose is as follows: What are the implications of the cotton industry's international connections for Sweden's relationship to colonialism?

In researching this subject, we revisit previous research on the Malmö textile industries. There were several books published in the early twentieth century, and by asking new research questions in view of this old research, we can find interesting answers. We also use source material from the companies, such as correspondence, accounting and other documentation on the economy. In dialogue with international research on the cotton textile industry and the interconnectedness with the colonial system, we attempt to shed new light on Sweden's colonial history.

Previous Research

Our inspiration to investigate the connection between colonialism and the Swedish cotton industry stems from the recently developed area of historiography that has been dubbed the New History of Capitalism. In this regard, the following works can be listed: Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton*, Walter Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams* and Edward Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told*.⁵ This line of scholarship has placed a new emphasis on the role of the production of raw cotton by African slaves in the emergence of industrial capitalism.

In *Empire of Cotton* (2014), Beckert makes a strong case for a revised understanding of the emergence of industrialism in Great Britain. The traditional explanation emphasises the role of new inventions in the textile industry as a driving force in establishing and expanding it in the Manchester area in the late eighteenth century. Beckert, on the other hand, emphasises, as previously

mentioned, the importance of British control over naval trade routes and what he refers to as ‘war capitalism’. In Beckert’s explanation, the precondition for sales of British textile on a world market is the destruction of textile production in India and the disruption of long-established trade routes between India and the West African market, in combination with chattel slavery in the United States producing vast amounts of cotton at low prices. This understanding of the industrial revolution is not completely new (i.e., Eric Hobsbawm made a similar description in the late 1960s, although it was less empirically footed).⁶

The hypotheses of *Empire of Cotton* provide ample reason to revisit other threads in the colonial cotton web. However, the history of the Swedish cotton textile industry is a very different story from the global scale of British cotton production and processing. The first cotton-weaving factory in Sweden was established in 1834 (Rydboholms konstväfveribolag outside Borås in western Sweden). This was well over 50 years after the first mechanised cotton-spinning factory was established in Manchester in 1778, and it was not until the 1850s that a more general boom regarding cotton spinning and textile production took hold, most notably along the west coast and the Sjuhärad region but also in Stockholm and Norrköping. With some notable forerunners, along with minor cotton-spinning mills in the 1830s, from its inception, the Swedish cotton mills produced goods almost exclusively for domestic consumption (in contrast to the British, who, to a large extent, exported their products to the colonial empire).⁷

While perhaps not particularly large or significant from the viewpoint of global economic history, the Swedish cotton industry plays a key role in the industrialisation of Sweden. Economic historian Lennart Schön identified cotton as the point of origin of Swedish industrialisation. The first cotton mills emerged in the

Sjuhärad region and were embedded in local networks of trade and home crafts and an established putting-out system. It was in this context that the industrial production of textiles became a viable venture that could meet the new broad-based market demand for textile products that had been made possible through slowly accumulating agricultural gains.⁸

Schön dubbed this the domestic market model and contrasted it with the export-oriented model, which according to him, originated with Eli Heckscher and was further developed by Lennart Jörberg, among others. By contrast, the export-oriented model holds (according to Schön) that 'development up to the 1890s was largely seen as an adaptation to events outside the Swedish frontier'⁹ and that exports such as iron and lumber played key roles in building an industrial base.

Schön provides us with two basic narratives regarding Swedish industrialisation: either it emerges through cotton mills, domestic consumption and chiefly domestic factors or it emerges from sawmills and ironworks, export commodities and the ability to react and adapt to external factors. Is Swedish cotton an entirely domestic affair? Regarding international scope, sources typically refer to the role of British technology and know-how in establishing cotton mills in Sweden. Before Britain lifted its ban on exporting machinery in 1842, British engineers setting up shop in continental Europe played an important role in manufacturing and exporting such machines to Sweden.¹⁰ It was also necessary to acquire the expertise required to organise the production process. This came from Britain as well, with the most notable example being the Lancashire-born overlooker Charles Hill, who was initially brought over to oversee production in Rydboholm and later went on to set up several cotton mills of his own in Norrköping and Alingsås.¹¹

It is perhaps cotton itself that presents the greatest problem for the domestic consumption model. For all the spinning, weaving, buying and selling of cotton in Sweden at the time, the raw commodity itself, which made this particular moment possible, was wholly imported. Primary sources typically note the raw cotton's origins in the slave-owning states in the US South. Some of the cotton originated from India or the Ottoman empire, particularly during the cotton famine in Europe caused by the US Civil War, which negatively affected Swedish cotton textile production. Moreover, as the Civil War and ensuing global cotton shortage dramatically demonstrated, cotton existed as a cheap and readily available commodity for pioneering Swedish producers because it was part of a global commodity chain that was contingent on both slavery in the US and British colonial rule over India. The textile industry that initiated Swedish industrialisation may have produced for a domestic market, but the raw commodity itself and the circumstances that enabled its favourable use were, in fact, linked to and contingent upon what Schön refers to as events outside of Swedish borders.

In contrast, our understanding of these commodity chains is inspired by feminist, post-colonial scholars such as Anne McClintock, who writes the following in her seminal book *Imperial Leather*:

imperialism is not something that happened elsewhere – a disagreeable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather, imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity.¹²

For this study, this is a central inspiration that allows us to transcend geographical boundaries and borders, considering the 'outside' to see the interwovenness of the Malmöite cotton textile industry and the global imperial project. In stressing that interconnectedness

between Western identities and imperialism, McClintock is also underscoring the gendered aspects of these processes and pointing to very material factors as the foundation of these identities, connecting gender to ‘class, race, work and money’¹³ and refusing to make marked distinctions between material and cultural factors. Returning to our interest in the ‘outside’, we are inspired by the expanding field of decoloniality, which is striving to delink from Eurocentric understandings, and we are indebted to the scholars working on Swedish colonial practices in Sápmi (in the North of present-day Sweden) for methods of challenging mainstream narratives.¹⁴ We are also inspired by the analytical assumptions and methodology of world-systems analysis. Wallerstein proposes treating the world-system, rather than the nation-state, as the unit of analysis. This methodology can be implemented by beginning from the viewpoint of a single commodity, in this case cotton, and analysing how it moves along the global commodity chain.¹⁵ The most apparent impact of this approach is our aim of overcoming methodological nationalism and asking research questions that take us far beyond the Swedish borders.¹⁶

A similar point is made, from a methodological point of view, by Michael Burawoy’s concept of global ethnography, which insists that global processes must be analysed locally but also that the local must be understood as part of the global. This means that global processes cannot be understood without rigorous research on the ground, and that these processes must be understood in their historical context. Global ethnography also stresses the necessity of analysing international processes together, connecting forces, connections and imaginations.¹⁷

If the Malmöite (and Swedish) cotton textile industry represents a thread in a global colonial web, what larger implications are there for our understanding of Sweden’s relationship to colonial-

ism? Here, we would like to briefly make a point based on the current state of research on Swedish colonialism. In an introduction to *Historisk Tidskrift* (2020:3), Fur and Hennessey argue that there are four major ways in which the topic of Sweden's colonial history and legacy has been explored:

- Formal Swedish colonialism (Swedish St. Barthélemy)
- Colonial relations with Sápmi, including settler colonialism in establishing Norrland as Swedish territory
- Swedish settlers in the US (New Sweden)
- Transimperial history, Swedes as cadres in larger colonial projects, such as King Leopold's Belgian Free State (see, for example, the legacy of Jacob Letterstedt or Joseph Stephens).¹⁸

These four themes mainly address various direct links between Swedish society and colonialism. In our assessment, these direct colonial links are important but not sufficient in attempting to grasp the full extent of the colonial web. Cotton was clearly a commodity embedded within a colonial system, and while there are documented historical cases in which Sweden and Swedes were directly involved in the colonial system in India or the US, this does not explain the supply of cotton made available to Swedish producers. Therefore, we argue that trade relations within the colonial system should be seen as an additional category in terms of understanding Swedish coloniality.

The centrality of trade relations in Sweden's role in colonialism has recently been argued for in *Riding the Wave*, by Torkil Lauesen. Sweden was arguably a minor player in the colonial system, and it was unsuccessful in direct colonial ventures. However, the example of Sant Barthélemy illustrates its willingness to try.¹⁹ In order to grasp the full extent of the colonial system and

Sweden's involvement in it, Lauesen encourages us to conceptualise European colonialism as a unified whole with a division of roles between different nations. Some nations managed territories and opened markets, while others provided capital, built infrastructure or specialised in transporting goods. In Lauesen's analogy, Sweden rode the wave of the great colonial powers to tap into the profits enabled by imperialism.²⁰

Lauesen suggests that there were two ways that Sweden stood out within this division of roles during the nineteenth century. Firstly, in the late nineteenth century, Sweden had a vast merchant fleet. Sweden and Norway, together, had the third or fourth largest merchant fleet in the world.²¹ Secondly, Sweden was a major exporter of iron and timber to imperial Germany and thus benefitted from Germany's colonial expansion.²²

Lauesen provides three hypotheses for interpreting Sweden's relationship to colonialism, the first being the analogy of a division of labour between European states, the second being the role of the merchant fleet in this division and the third being the role of iron and timber exports. The division of labour fits with our understanding of Sweden as a net consumer of cotton, the role of the merchant fleet would have to be investigated in the case of cotton imports and the third is beyond the scope of this paper (but in line with Heckscher's export-oriented model).

With these above points in mind, we return to Lennart Schön's narrative on Swedish industrialisation and argue that cotton-led industrialisation must be partially decoupled from the domestic consumption narrative. The model must be revised to account for how the domestic processes were embedded in a colonial trade system that enabled industrial expansion. Profitable development became possible due to access to cheap and plentiful cotton that emerged through the empire of cotton. Just as in Heckscher's ex-

port-oriented model, which arguably ties iron and timber exports to German colonialism, global commodity chains and the colonial context become equally key to understanding Swedish industrialisation regarding cotton.

In sum, the literature on Swedish colonialism reveals various ways in which Sweden was integrated into the colonial project, in which Malmö's cotton textile industry constitutes a part of a unified colonial whole. This includes a wide range of factors, from the dependence on the colonial production of raw materials, via dependence on the know-how accumulated in a setting made possible by the colonial accumulation of wealth, to potential integration in the lower/earlier stages of the commodity chain (plantations, brokerage, and shipping) and/or capital with colonial connections. To investigate this topic, we turn to the empirical example of the cotton textile industry in Malmö.

The Dawn of Industrial Capitalism and Cotton Textile Industry in Malmö

In 1855, two companies working with cotton were established in Malmö. This was not the first time cotton was processed in the city, and at the time, there were a number of minor companies working with cotton, producing socks and assorted clothing.²³ However, in terms of scale and the organisation of production, these two companies constituted something totally new. They marked the beginning of industrial capitalism in Malmö. In the following section, we will analyse the first 20 years of these companies.

Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd.

In the spring of 1855, Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. (Malmö Manufakturaktiebolag) was formed with the aim of establishing a cotton-spinning mill in the city. The initiative was taken by C.J.

Kock, a wealthy merchant in the city, in cooperation with the merchant companies L.P. Kruse & Son and M. Flensburg's Sons. In the invitation, they painted a vivid picture of an expanding new industry.

It is well known that the cotton-spinning mills in Sweden have not been able to satisfy the country's ever-increasing need for cotton yarn over the course of several years. Every merchant knows the difficulty and time involved in getting orders for this item fulfilled. Large quantities of cotton yarn must therefore be annually imported, although the foreign manufacture incurs duty, freight, insurance, and other charges, while here the raw material, cotton, is free of duty, and the cost of labour as cheap, if not cheaper, than in England. The Swedish Cotton Spinners have enjoyed a good economy and are, for good reasons, considered as one of the most profitable industries. It is true that some new plants are under construction within the country, but the resulting larger production will probably in the near future not be able to keep pace with the ever-increasing consumption of cotton fabrics in our home craft production. This at the same time as three new large cotton-weaving mills, namely in Gävle, Norrköping and Rydboholm, did not have time to complete their assignments. Hence, everything points to that cotton spinning should remain profitable for a long time.²⁴

The profits were, according to their calculations, made possible by lower taxes on cotton than on yarn and lower labour costs than in the UK, as well as on the increasing demand for cotton yarn.

In forming the company, they were using the newly instated juridical form of a Private Limited Company (Aktiebolag), an institutional innovation imported to Sweden in 1848 from the UK.²⁵ This was the first time this type of company was used to gather a large amount of capital in Malmö, and the aim was to reach 500,000 Riksdaler Banco, approximately 49 million Swedish Kronor today.²⁶ This was a huge sum, and even though many of

Malmö's most wealthy inhabitants bought shares, the sum could not be reached and only 350,000 Riksdaler Banco were gathered. In the initial plan, calculations were made to include both cotton-spinning production and mechanical weaving in the company. To be able to proceed, the weaving component of the company was excluded, and thus, the amount needed was lowered to 400,000 Riksdaler Banco, with the possibility of borrowing money if needed to run the operation.²⁷

When the plans were altered, L.P. Kruse & Son and M. Flensburg's Sons assumed a less prominent position in the overall company. Instead, it was F.H. Kockum who, together with C.J. Kock, sent out the invitations to the meeting to start the company. Kockum was an immensely important businessman in Malmö at the time, one who owned a profitable tobacco factory and, in 1840, had founded Kockums Mechanical Works, which was to become one of Malmö's leading companies for more than a century.²⁸ On the first company meeting in Malmö's town hall, many of the most important merchant families were represented, as was the landed aristocracy of the Skåne province. C.J. Kock was chosen as the first manager.²⁹

The largest shareholders, each contributing 20,000 Riksdaler Banco, were J.H. Dieden, C.J. Kock, F.H. Kockum, J.P. Bager (the young merchant we quoted in the beginning of this text), P.M. Elsner, N. Åberg, G. Hedman, A. Wollmar, Friherre Hans Ramel and the firm of Dyberg & Flensburg. Most of these names were well-known merchants in Malmö. As far as we can see, there was no need for foreign capital.³⁰

The factory was erected between two streets, Kalendegatan and Djäknegatan, north of Stora Nygatan. In the first year, a steam engine and machinery for spinning were bought from the manufacturer Parr, Curtis & Madeley, in Manchester, UK. Also,



a British technician, Joseph Hartley, was recruited with the help of the Manchester firm, as well as two skilled supervisors. However, Hartley soon demanded too high of a salary and was dismissed. He was replaced by one of the other British supervisors,



The spinnery of Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd seen from Stora Nygatan with the church of St Peter towering behind it. Photo: Axel Sjöberg / Malmö museum, ca 1896–1905.

Dan Laynds. Cotton was bought from New Orleans. Half a shipload was purchased in order to have some extra in store, as the political situation was complicated given tensions between the US and the UK regarding some of the Caribbean islands. When the

recruitment of labour eventually began, it was local labourers from Malmö who were employed.³¹

However, the company ran into difficulties during the first years of its existence, as the international economy experienced a downturn in 1858. Large quantities of yarn from the factory lay unsold in the warehouses, and for a period, the factory was closed. During this period, the company needed to lend money on several occasions, but it seems they were able to find lenders in Sweden. Many other Malmö firms had loans from German banks, especially from bankers in Hamburg, who were severely hit by the crisis and demanded their loans be repaid. However, this did not have an important effect on the cotton spinnery. Due to the complicated financial situation, C.J. Kock left his position as manager and was replaced by Gustav Flensburg.³²

Soon, production could begin again, but in 1861, civil war broke out in the US, and cotton shipping across the Atlantic was halted. Luckily for the Malmö company, it had just purchased a large shipment of cotton from New Orleans, and the company was able to profit from increasing yarn- and cotton prices during the war. The cotton famine, as the period is called, left many working-class families without subsistence when the spinning factories closed. Malmö was less severely hit than other locations, but eventually, the spinnery was closed in the autumn of 1862. However, profits were high, and the company had good results from 1860 to 1862.³³

In 1865, the US civil war ended, and in many places, cotton-spinning companies resumed production, but not in Malmö. Due to high cotton prices, the demand for cotton yarn was low. In 1866, the auditors of the company made the following remark to the annual meeting:

The consuming public, during the long time the prices of cotton have been so high, have learned to partially dispense with cotton fabrics, which have been replaced by linen fabrics, which in relation to their strength and quality are cheaper.

It is not easy to predict how much time may elapse before the cotton weaving [sic!] industry is restored to its former position, or whether this will ever be the case, since the production of cotton since the abolition of forced slave labour in the American Southern states has become both more difficult and more expensive, whereby the raw material will probably not for a long time be offered in the world market at as cheap a price as before the war [...]

this deplorable position for the cotton industry may, unfortunately, continue for many years, and the auditors therefore do not dare to endorse the resumption of the factory.³⁴

The note from the auditors resulted in an assignment for the board. It had to find a buyer for the company. This proved difficult, likely due to the uncertainty of cotton distribution and prices. However, in the following year, the situation completely changed, and at the annual meeting, the board suggested that production in the factory should be resumed.

The note illustrates the perceived dependence on slave labour for cotton production to be profitable, and it represents an early intervention in the ongoing debate over how profitable the slave-based system of production was. The position of the contemporary Swedish observer supports the position of Klas Rönnbäck and others, underscoring the huge profits made by slave owners.³⁵ It is interesting to note the competition from linen cloth, reminding us of Sven Beckert's insistence that it was not the good quality of cotton cloth that was its competitive advantage but, in the context of sales in West Africa, the violent destruction of competing Indian traders.³⁶

As the total stoppage of yarn production during and after the US Civil War indicates, the company was heavily dependent on

the colonial production of cotton, and after the war ended the company resumed its trade with US cotton producers, making a major purchase in 1867 and continuing to do so in the 1870s.³⁷ During the last years of the investigated period, sales were good, and the factory expanded. In 1870, Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd made a major purchase of new machinery and, again, turned to the same Manchester company as in 1855, Parr, Curtis and Madeley.³⁸

Malmö Mechanical Cotton Weavery

When Malmö mechanical cotton weavery (Malmö mekaniska bomullsväfveri) was formed in 1855, it was the merchant companies L.P. Kruse & Son and M. Flensburg's Sons that provided the initial capital. These were the two companies that initially participated in starting up Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd., but they left the company when the initial plan for a combined spinning and weaving factory was dropped. Instead, they founded a company with dyer Johan Daniel Ruhe, one of the city's richest craftsmen, who also took part in providing capital for the new company. The Ruhe family was from Lübeck and included a long line of dyers. Ruhe was the manager initially but died in 1858, and Carl Kruse replaced him as manager. Ruhe's widow, Andrina Maria 'Mimmi' Ruhe, born Malmros, took on his responsibilities as owner.³⁹ The organisational form of the company was that of a general partnership (Handelsbolag), in which all participants are personally responsible for the economy.⁴⁰ The capital for the company was obtained from the three owners.

The factory was set up in central Malmö at the corner of Grynbdogatan/Engelbrektsgatan in a house owned by Ruhe, just a block away from the newly inaugurated Gustav Adolfs square. During the first year, the company bought machinery, tools and



Malmö Mechanical Cotton Weavery with Engelbrektsгатan going left to right in the picture. Photo: Axel Sjöberg / Malmö museum, 1903.

other equipment from the UK, particularly from the firm Daniel Foxwell, in Manchester, but also from Copenhagen.⁴¹ A Master of Weaving, Ed Sommer, and a Master of Dyeing, J.W. Grams, were recruited from Germany.⁴²

Yarn for production was initially bought from the UK but soon replaced with domestic supply from Rydal (a core company among the Sjuhärad cotton-spinning mills). A few years later, the Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. was totally dominating the supply of yarn, and the Malmö mechanical cotton weavery was their largest customer.⁴³ Also important for textile production are chemical substances for dyeing. These were initially bought from Hartlepool and Newcastle, in the UK, and also from Copenhagen. Later, these products were bought from Gothenburg and Lübeck.⁴⁴

The company was doing fairly well but lacking in capital. In 1858, the company borrowed money from the Hamburg branch

of Braunschweigischer Bank, and loans were also obtained from wealthy Malmö inhabitants. In the turmoil caused by the US Civil War, with rising prices on cotton fabric, the company made very good profits. When Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. stopped production, yarn was bought from other producers in Sweden. In 1864, yarn was purchased from the Nääs spinnery, and in 1867, it was purchased from the UK. In 1865 and the following years, the company was experiencing severe economic difficulties, which were likely connected to the lack of cotton due to the US Civil War.⁴⁵

In 1872, the company was restructured into a Private Limited Company (Aktiebolag), primarily because Mimmi Ruhe wanted to leave the company. The restructuring meant inviting the general public to buy shares in the company but also led to a closer connection with Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd., which bought 20 percent of the shares. The list of major shareholders was dominated by members of the Flensburg family, many of them merchants who were also connected to the Swedish Church. Substantial shares were also bought by the clerks and officials of the company, but the Kruse family was less prominent in this regard. All the major shareholders were from Malmö or its surroundings. Theodor Flensburg was appointed manager of the new company, Malmö Cotton Weavery Ltd. (Malmö Bomullsväveri AB), which was initially a success and made good profits in the first years of the 1870s. In connection with restructuring the company, production was expanded, and new looms were bought from the UK.⁴⁶ The company remained in production until 1906, when it was bought and incorporated into Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd.

Connections to Shipping and Trade

Some of the firms and merchants involved in the companies also owned shipping companies, such as F.H. Kockum and Gabriel

Hedman, who owned Malmö Steamship Ltd. (Malmö Ångbåts AB). However, this company was only active in short-range trade with Lübeck, Stettin, Copenhagen, and Gothenburg.⁴⁷ There are no indications that the Malmö merchants active in the two companies were involved in overseas shipping or the ownership of cotton plantations. Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. bought its cotton via brokers in New Orleans or Liverpool, and none of the actors were owners in shipping companies involved in long-distance trade. To the extent that Lauesen is right that Sweden, along with other Nordic countries, played a central role in the colonial project via its large merchant fleet, this was not connected to these companies and merchant families.

Conclusion: Threads in the Colonial Web

To contextualise the emergence of the Swedish cotton textile industry in an expanding international research field, we have traced the sources of capital, technical equipment, skilled labour and raw materials for two Malmö companies, as well as searched for links via the owners to shipping companies and potential colonial holdings.

Our investigation indicates that the capital for the initial startup came from Malmö merchants. Some of them, such as the L.P. Kruse & Son, had earned much of their money from a 'colonial store', selling goods such as coffee, cacao, tea, and cane sugar. Thus, to some extent, there was a connection to the colonial system in terms of the accumulation of the capital. However, the firm's accounting and correspondence suggest that it was not involved in direct trade with the colonies but, rather, bought goods in German ports, such as Hamburg.⁴⁸ Malmö Mechanical Cotton Weavery, which had fewer owners and less capital, was forced to borrow money from Hamburg bankers and, thus, dependent on

foreign capital for a period of time, but with the restructuring of the company in 1872, this dependency ended.

Throughout the period under consideration, both companies were dependent on the importation of machinery from the UK, specifically Manchester and the heartlands of the British cotton textile industry. Both companies travelled extensively in the UK to understand the industry. In addition, in 1870, when Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. was expanding, they bought the needed machinery from the same Manchester company that they bought machinery from in 1855, and when Malmö Mechanical Cotton Weavery was expanding in 1872, they also bought machinery from the UK.

The Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. was recruiting key technicians and staff from the UK, and the Malmö Mechanical Cotton Weavery recruited key personnel from Germany. The labour force in general was recruited locally, and low labour costs was deemed a competitive advantage at the time that the factories were established in 1855.

The raw material for cotton yarn production was a direct link to the colonial economies, and Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. placed their orders directly to sellers in New Orleans but also, at times, used brokers in Liverpool.⁴⁹ Malmö Mechanical Cotton Weavery bought some of its yarn from other European countries in the first period, but after that, they bought it from Swedish producers. Over time, they became almost exclusively a customer of Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. As the total stoppage of yarn production during and after the US Civil War indicates, the Malmö Manufacture Company Ltd. had limited contacts with other cotton-producing regions, such as Antatolia or India. The note from the auditors also shows their knowledge of this dependency, including the assumption that cotton production was de-

pendent on slavery to be profitable. The concern that the end of slavery would be the end of profits proved to be wrong, but this shaped the perception of at least some of the actors at the time. Thus, the dependency on colonial exploitation for the startup of industrial capitalism in Sweden was evident to the historical actors in a way that has, perhaps, been obscured for later observers.

The fact that high profit levels resumed after the abolishment of slavery does not necessarily contradict the thesis that profits were dependent on slavery. There has been a long-standing debate on the profitability of slavery. If we focus on explaining continuities, then there are two conflicting theses that can account for a continuity in profitability from the antebellum to postbellum period. The first thesis holds that global cotton's dependency on slavery has been exaggerated and that the success of US cotton has wrongly been attributed to the profitability of slavery over free labour.⁵⁰ Thus, while slavery was socially and morally reprehensible, its abolishment would have had only a limited negative impact on cotton prices for European industrialists. The second thesis, which Sven Beckert argues for in *Empire of Cotton*, holds that the sharecropping system owed a great deal to factors emerging through slavery, as well as the white landowning class's struggle to maintain high profits in the new context through intense exploitation. Despite their emancipation, black sharecroppers in the postbellum south found themselves in an exploitative situation *vis-a-vis* the white landowning class, one marked by racial hierarchy, structural inequality and unfreedom. We support this latter explanation. Ultimately, the fact that profits continued for Malmö's textile industry even after the abolishment of slavery in the US shows the extent to which the global cotton networks were dependent on slavery initially and, after its abolishment, on the sharecropping system, which itself owed a fundamental debt to slavery.⁵¹

To conclude, the threads of the colonial web were clearly visible in Malmö during the investigated period and were also known to the actors in that time. Dependency on British and, to some extent, German know-how and machinery remained constant over the period, connecting Malmö's textile production directly to the historical processes of the British industrial revolution, processes that were only possible due to the military supremacy of imperial armies and naval forces, as well as colonial holdings of land that was arable for cotton production on plantations with slave labour. The threads are even more visible in the provision of raw materials, with cotton being directly purchased from the Southern states in the US. In our investigation, we find clear indications of the historical actors seeing slave labour as a prerequisite for the profitable production of cotton yarn in Malmö. However, we see no evidence of connections in terms of ownership, neither for the shipping companies transporting the cotton nor for the plantations in colonies. This can be due to a number of factors, one of which being the relatively poor harbour facilities in Malmö, especially before 1800. Sweden's major shipping companies were in Stockholm and Gothenburg.⁵²

Returning to Fur and Hennesey and the question of how we should conceptualise Sweden's trade-based relationship to colonialism, we can conclude that the Malmö cotton textile industry is not an example of formal Swedish colonialism, Swedes being directly involved in colonialism or settler colonialism. However, Ulla Vuorela has used the notion of 'colonial complicity', originally a term used in postcolonial theory, to explore how Finland, along with the other Nordic countries, has been historically situated, being neither one of the colonial centres of Europe nor an 'innocent victim' or bystander.⁵³ Complicity, in this context, refers to an ambiguous position of participation and benefit from colo-

nial discourses and practices. This seems to fit the Malmö example quite well, with the owners of the companies seeing the profit from the factories as dependent on colonial trade and the use of slave labour. To some extent, imports of colonial commodities also created much of the wealth of the Malmö merchant families that was invested in the cotton-spinning and -weaving mills.

With this article, we would like to underscore the need to further explore the role of cotton textiles in Swedish colonial complicity. This would add a fifth section to Fur and Hennessey's typology, perhaps one of the most important, as it could illuminate the immense importance of colonial complicity to Sweden's remarkable economic development during the late nineteenth century and onwards. Furthermore, we believe it is also important to view cotton consumption, which has not been the subject of this article but is discussed in other articles in this book, more closely. A considerable amount of contemporary research on Swedish textile history deals with patterns of domestic trade, consumption and fashion. In this regard, it could be productive to use Ulrich Brand's and Markus Wissen's concept of an 'imperial mode of living', which denotes how commodities rooted in relationships of coloniality and unequal exchange become desirable and integrated in the consumption patterns and practices of everyday life.⁵⁴ The concept could be applied to explore how relations of textile production and textile consumption form a totality in terms of establishing the colonial commodity of cotton as an item of everyday consumption, allowing a dialogue between the scholarship on cotton colonialism and the scholarship on the trade and consumption of cotton textiles in nineteenth-century Sweden. Colonial complicity would expand its web far beyond the factory walls of the cotton-spinning and -weaving factories of Malmö and other production centres and into the homes of everyday consumers.

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