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SEPARATISM AND COOPERATION

Democratic participation, asset-building and narrative representations in
The Women's Cooperative Society Swedish Homes, 1904-1916

Abstract

Within the context of economic history, this case study discusses “separatist cooperation” as an organizational and economic strategy for addressing multiple forms of alienation and inequality. Unique in the European cooperative movement at the time, *The Women’s Cooperative Society Swedish Homes* (Kvinnornas Andelsförening Svenska Hem), active in Stockholm 1905-1916, is a case in point. Using a theoretical framework drawn from social and economic reconstruction as well as critical perspectives inspired by intersectionality, the study analyzes how arguments, practices and choices of Svenska Hem are manifested in terms of three themes/strategies of de-alienation: democratic participation, asset-building and narrative representation. Cutting through each of these themes/strategies, explicit and implicit conceptions of gender, class and group solidarity are critically analyzed. The results show that the separatist strategy in combination with cooperative organizing generated considerable movement energy and capital accumulation e.g. in the face of an organized boycott from competing (male) traders. Further, the women’s cooperative constituted a space for asset-building while negotiating the changing social role of women generally and housewives in particular. The analysis shows that Svenska Hem’s organization and narrative was marked by class bias, while striving to become a cooperative relevant to “women of all classes”, invoking the housewife-as-consumer as a collective with a shared interest.

Keywords: *cooperation, separatism, separatist cooperation, cooperative movement, women’s cooperatives, Kvinnornas Andelsförening Svenska Hem, Kooperativa Förbundet, feminism, de-alienation, reconstruction, intersectionality, alternative institutions.*

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1 Introduction

Cooperation and separatism, two phenomena that at first glance may seem at odds with each other. However, both terms denote organizational strategies used by groups facing inequality, exploitation and alienation, as collective tools of liberation and social transformation. Cooperation as a value-driven and democratic form of economic organizing around community needs, and separatism as a space of group support, healing and solidarity. Both have been described as sites of de-alienation, asset-building, and as seeds of wider systemic change.¹ Especially relevant for the present thesis, these strategies have historically and in the present day been *combined* to create vehicles that simultaneously address everyday needs, challenge multiple forms of inequality, and accumulate various forms of emancipatory power.² Historical and contemporary examples include women's cooperatives, ethnically or racially defined cooperatives, queer and trans cooperatives, disability cooperatives, and specific groups of workers.

It is this dynamic intersection between cooperation and separatism that constitutes the starting point and main area of interest for the present study. The question of separatist cooperation connects issues of social movements, economic theory, business history, labor history and economic history. The transgressive nature of this type of multi-purpose organization, paradoxically, seems to have made it fall between the cracks of academic traditions and focal points. The study of separatist cooperation is relevant to the field of economic history precisely because it brings to light previously understudied analytical connections by centering practices alternative to conventional understandings of the labor-capital nexus, while addressing multiple dimensions of power. Further, it is an economic form of social justice organizing that emphasizes emancipatory and utopian practices beyond resistance or advocacy. In terms of cooperative and economic history, this thesis brings particular attention to women's separatist organizing.

A historical case in point in the Swedish context is *The Women's Cooperative Society Swedish Homes* (Kvinnornas Andelsförening Svenska Hem), active in Stockholm 1905-1916. Initiated and run by prominent members of the women's movement, social reform movement, labor movement and peace movement, the consumer cooperative set out to sell high quality, unadulterated food at a cheaper price. In addition, they strove to support women in their role as housewives and promote cooperation as a means to challenge capitalism while providing a

¹ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), Howell (1989), Valentine (1997), Wiksell (2020).

² Gordon Nembhard (2014), Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019).

women-only democratic space for nurturing group solidarity, education and asset-building. The history of Svenska Hem has been told through booklets produced by the cooperative movement,³ more recently by journalists with a popular women's history perspective⁴, briefly mentioned in singular cooperative studies,⁵ and has been depicted in a fictitious television series,⁶ but has never been at the center of an academic study.

To be sure, there are studies on women's cooperatives in contemporary contexts,⁷ but no studies of women's cooperatives during the "golden age of cooperation" around 1880-1930.⁸ At this time, cooperation was more connected to a broader vision of radical social transformation than it is today. Historical studies of separatist cooperation or "group economics" – notably centering the African American cooperation⁹ – have been carried out to draw general conclusions of the potential effects of such a strategy but few have focused on the more detailed strategies and choices of singular organizations.¹⁰

1.1 Aim and research questions

This study intends, on a broad level, to make the case for "separatist cooperation" as a specific de-alienating strategy relevant for further study. More specifically, the thesis intends to deepen the understanding of the motivations, strategies and choices made by a particular cooperative which can be considered typical of separatist cooperation and which was unique to the historical context.¹¹

Using themes derived abductively from reconstructive and critical theory, existing research and empirical material – democratic participation, asset-building and narrative representation – the study aims to analyze practices and choices made by Svenska Hem. In order to critically interpret the meaning, strengths and limits of the separatist strategy, attention is given to how the material – Svenska Hem's member magazine and other official prints – expresses ideas about women, the housewife, and class relations. Such research strategy intends to both broaden the available knowledge about the case, as well as tentatively

³ Gjöres (1930), Nilsson (1950).

⁴ Eronn & Norman (1992), Björk & Kaijser (2005).

⁵ Aléx (1994).

⁶ Oljelund, SVT (2013).

⁷ See e.g. Nippierd (1998).

⁸ That I have been able to find in English or Swedish.

⁹ Gordon Nembhard (2014).

¹⁰ Note that Svenska Hem did not use the term separatist, but simply called themselves a "women's cooperative society". This is also the case in Gordon Nembhard's research, who usually refer to Black or African American Co-ops. The term separatist in this study, is an attempt to grasp an overall phenomenon.

¹¹ Another women's cooperative – Holmina Cooperative Women's Association – is mentioned in sources about Anna Johansson-Visborg (Höglund 1951). This cooperative transformed into a Woman's Guild around 1907.

add to the theoretical understanding of the possibilities and limits of separatist cooperation.

To these ends, the study attempts to answer two questions:

1. How are the arguments, practices and choices of Svenska Hem manifested in terms of democratic participation, asset-building and narrative representation?
2. How do explicit and implicit conceptions of gender, class and group solidarity appear?

Whereas the first question is intended to investigate *how and which* aims, strategies and choices were articulated and practiced, the second brings a critical perspective of asking *for whom* such aims, strategies and choices were made relevant.

2 Background and context

After providing a brief definition of the cooperative model, I will situate Svenska Hem in the interconnected European cooperative movement by providing an overview of the development of its thought and practice. As SH was explicitly inspired by English cooperative thought and practice, the historical context focuses on how cooperation was defined in England.¹² I will then focus on how dimensions of class and gender are described in the literature on cooperative history. Setting the stage for Svenska Hem as a case, I then zoom in on the Swedish context related to food and consumer cooperation.

2.1 Definitions of a cooperative

Before engaging with the history of the cooperative movement, it is helpful to clarify how cooperatives are defined. Scholars regularly point to the definition developed by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA):

The ICA defines a co-operative in broad terms as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations, through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.” It notes, further, that “co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.”¹³

There are different types of cooperatives, and the typologies and definitions vary somewhat in the literature. Gordon Nembhard provides a simple overview:

Cooperatives are classified into three major categories, depending on the relationship between the member-owners and the co-op’s purpose: consumer-owned, producer-owned, or worker-owned (or some combination of the three).¹⁴

¹² Nilsson (1955), p. 18.

¹³ Hilson et. al. (2017), p. 4.

¹⁴ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 3.

Consumer cooperative societies, which is the focus of this study, have been defined as “the provision of consumer goods through private, collectively owned institutions”.¹⁵

2.2 Cooperative thought and practice in Europe 1880–1930¹⁶

Many historical periods, geographic areas and cultures have developed organizational and economic practices reminiscent of cooperatives.¹⁷ The ideas underpinning the modern European cooperative movement are usually ascribed to the Utopian Socialists associated with Robert Owen in the 1820’s.¹⁸ The cooperative model of consumption and production emerged as a response to industrialization, and like many phenomena related to the first and second industrial revolutions it was first developed in Britain.¹⁹ From there it proliferated as other countries industrialized alongside the expansion of capitalism and European colonial imperialism.²⁰ In 1844, the “blueprint” cooperative, The Equitable Pioneers of Rochdale, was initiated. Its principles have since served as a foundation for the definition of cooperation, and give an impression of the values fuelling the cooperative vision at the time:

The cooperative was to be democratically controlled and to avoid the evils of capitalist enterprise. It was to be a member-owned business, with capital based on members’ purchase of shares. Officers were to be elected. Sales were for cash only, not credit. . . . Share capital was to receive only a limited return, and profits (after meeting expenses and interest charges) were to be distributed to members on the basis of their purchases (rather than on shares). Over the years, additional statutes stipulated that each member was to have only one vote – an important expression of democracy, that a portion of the profits of the cooperative was to be used for education, and that both sexes were to have equality of rights regarding membership.²¹

The Rochdale Pioneers developed the idea of a sequential economic ecosystem, where a cooperative store would build capital to be invested in cooperative production, which in turn would provide employment and produce goods to be sold in the store.²² This plan of a locally grounded and democratic economic infrastructure has been very influential for cooperatives worldwide.²³ Spreading throughout Britain, cooperatives joined to form centralized federations, notably the English and Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Societies which

¹⁵ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 1.

¹⁶ This section in part consists of a reworked historiographical essay preparing for the present Master Thesis course, written within the context of the independent course International Economic History (level 4) at Umeå University, Fall 2020.

¹⁷ Neunsinger & Patmore (2017), p. 731.

¹⁸ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 7.

¹⁹ Neunsinger & Patmore (2017), p. 734.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 732.

²¹ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), 9.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mordhorst & Jensen (2020), p. 217.

organized large-scale wholesaling and production.²⁴ The idea pursued was that a distributive system cutting out capitalist producers and middlemen could significantly lower prices.²⁵

Cooperation at this time infused everyday economic practices with social movement goals of a not-for-profit, fair and collaborative “new moral economy” that would outcompete the increasingly powerful and violent capitalist system.²⁶ Cooperation thus opposed the dominant liberal idea of a “value-free domain called the economy, where moral sensibilities could be suspended”.²⁷ To be sure, a cooperative was not merely seen as an alternative form of business organization alongside others, but a building-block of a society to come. The establishment of the cooperative utopian project – The Cooperative Commonwealth – was to gradually push out capitalism and forge a bridge to economic democracy while avoiding violent revolution. This would be achieved not through state power (which was viewed as illegitimate “short revolution”), but through the practical and cultural collective building of new social and economic forms from below (the legitimate “long revolution”).²⁸ This view undergirded the Rochdale Pioneers principle of “political neutrality”, i.e. that (state) politics should be kept out of cooperation, and one of the foundations for cooperation being defined as a “third way” politics, an ideology of its own. In Swedish the word *kooperatism* came to signify this ideology aiming for a decentralized society under a federative system.²⁹

The idea that society should be reconstructed through practical and cultural transformation rather than political reform or revolutionary conquest of power, was intimately related to a particular and integrated view of knowledge, education and practice.³⁰

[C]ooperators were engaged in education because inequalities in knowledge were as important as inequalities in production and consumption... working-class knowledge depended on association; theory was of little use unless it was linked to a liberating practice: intellectual and material liberation were intertwined in the cooperative project.³¹

Educational efforts were meant to nurture association and community by strengthening the bonds between members and nurture humanity’s social nature – as a way to overpower what was seen as an “increasingly individualistic, market-oriented, and competitive mode of production and consumption in eighteenth-century England”.³²

²⁴ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 9.

²⁵ Millbourn (1991), p. 90.

²⁶ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 8, Hilson et. al. (2012), p. 6, Hilson et. al. (2017), p. 7.

²⁷ Gurney (1999), p. 142.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 135, 139, 143.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 139, Millbourn (1991), p. 90.

³⁰ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 224, Aléx (1999), p. 245.

³¹ Gurney (1999), p. 148.

³² Ibid, p. 136.

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) was formed in 1895 to connect and represent the global cooperative movement. Viewing capitalism as a primary cause of war, ICA's long-term goal was to achieve a society marked by peace and harmony.³³ By the time of the First World War, the cooperative movement had grown larger than both the labor movement and political parties in membership.³⁴ The peak of cooperation in Europe is most often dated around 1880 and 1930. There are several accounts and theories about why and when the movement – and especially its ideological vision – declined. One theory is the increasing dominance and consolidation of the capitalist “profit and pleasure- oriented mass consumer culture”³⁵ and a transition from a “citizen consumer” to a “purchasing consumer”.³⁶ This new (still increasingly dominant) culture is characterized by individualization and a temporality that counteracts long-term and collective utopian planning.³⁷

2.3 Cooperation and class

Alongside trade unionism and party socialism, cooperation was primarily developed and carried by the working-class, and has been called the “third pillar of socialism”. Historiographically however, cooperative movement is usually not included as part of labour or working-class history which tends to focus on trade unions and socialist parties.³⁸

The ideological position of the cooperative movement made it simultaneously subject to collaboration, resistance, co-optation and tensions. It was socialist in the sense that it wished to abolish the capitalist system and replace it with a system rooted in collective association, but it also constituted a competitive challenge to state-centered social democracy and revolutionary socialism.³⁹ Parts of the labor movement were actively promoting cooperatives and in 1910, the Second International acknowledged and actively encouraged workers to join consumer cooperatives.⁴⁰ Workers were seen to have two forms of power, labour power and purchasing power. Where the labor unions pushed for workers rights and higher salaries, consumer cooperation sought control over distribution, price-setting and member dividends as a means of increasing purchasing power.⁴¹ While some socialists remained critical to consumer cooperation, social democratic parties attempted to control the

³³ Millbourn (1991), p. 96, Hilson et. al. (2012), p. 8.

³⁴ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 18.

³⁵ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 5.

³⁶ Cohen (2004), pp. 36, 49.

³⁷ Bauman (2007), p. 49.

³⁸ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), Hilson et. al. (2017).

³⁹ Millbourn (1991), p. 90.

⁴⁰ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 17.

⁴¹ Millbourn (1982), p. 44, Millbourn (1991), p. 97.

movement.⁴² Simultaneously, liberal reformers engaged in cooperation especially emphasised its educational aspects as a means of fostering inter-class collaboration. Such efforts were often carried by a dual agenda of addressing unacceptable inequalities and “civilizing” the working class.⁴³ The position of opposing and transforming capitalism was met with frequent boycotts, price wars and political lobbying by capitalist firms.⁴⁴ Yet, a recurring socialist critique against cooperation was that it was too compatible with capitalism, not leveraging sufficient political power, and failing to include large sections of the poor.⁴⁵

While the cooperative movement in some countries – notably England, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden – remained strict in their claim of (party) political neutrality, whereas in other countries – notably Belgium and France – *le socialism coopératif* integrated cooperation with socialist parties.⁴⁶ The principle of political neutrality allowed for the movement to grow substantially, while constituting a space for conflicting interpretations and tensions. The contradictions in the views on class conflict versus class collaboration split the working class constituencies of the movement, as did tensions related to the role of production as subordinated to consumption. Contrary to adopted principles, working conditions under consumer cooperative ownership were sometimes poor, and large scale federations were charged with compromising their democratic ideals.⁴⁷

2.4 Cooperation and gender

Similar to how labor history has tended to focus on unions and party politics, the historiography of the women’s movement of the early 1900’s has tended to emphasize issues of suffrage.⁴⁸ Although some historians define the women’s movement more broadly, including e.g. women-led organizations related to movements for peace, sobriety, labor, social reform and women’s sections of larger organizations,⁴⁹ women in Swedish cooperation – as well as women’s cooperatives more generally – are scarce in the historical literature.⁵⁰

Along with vastly increasing productivity and colonial world trade, political economic theory in Europe was shifting from classical (where labor regulated value) to neo-classical

⁴² Millbourn (1991), p. 90.

⁴³ Aléx (1999), p. 245, Aléx (1994), p. 141.

⁴⁴ Millbourn (1991), 90.

⁴⁵ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 14, Gurney (1999), p. 155.

⁴⁶ Strikwerda (1999), p. 74.

⁴⁷ Gurney (1999), p. 155.

⁴⁸ Manns (2000).

⁴⁹ See e.g. Östberg (1999).

⁵⁰ Hagström (2018). One exception is Peder Aléx (1994), whose study on KF includes sections analysing the role of women in the Swedish cooperative movement and the liberal and patriarchal civilizing mission of both workers and housewives, and briefly mentions Svenska Hem.

(where consumption, demand, quality and quantity were emphasized) theories. Thus, a theoretical focus in consumer cooperation was the idea that collectively organized consumption could affect production, and put consumers' needs before private profits.⁵¹ In the gendered context of capitalist production and reproduction, women were primarily assigned with the task of purchasing goods for the household.⁵² Thus, the role of consumer merged with the role of housewife, charging both with potential economic power.⁵³ This position in the cooperative movement – and the economy – was simultaneously used as a source of emancipation and discipline.⁵⁴ An overall understanding emerged, that it was women that constituted the cornerstone of the cooperative vision, and the generally patriarchal movement had to nurture women's loyalty to the cooperative cause.⁵⁵

The Womens' Cooperative Guild in England was founded in 1883. Other countries followed (the Swedish KF Womens' Guild started in 1907) and in 1921 The International Co-operative Women's Guild formed. The Guilds were important institutions for elevating the principles of social justice and equality within the movement and beyond, through women organizing and engaging in womens' rights issues as well as peace and disarmament.⁵⁶ Thus, the cooperative movement was an important platform for women's collective organizing.⁵⁷ At the same time, it was marked by paradoxical gender roles. The English Women's Guild, initiated by two men and implemented by their wives, indeed resembled the model of the patriarchal heterosexual marriage and the related ideas of public and domestic. Thus, men/husbands were the responsible executives of the "whole" organization and its resources, while women/wives were responsible for strictly limited areas *inside* that organization, largely depending on the goodwill of the male leadership.⁵⁸ The area of responsibility of women – in Sweden as in England – was the task of cooperative education. Women were seen as suitable educators due to their experience as mothers and were thought to best teach each other about their role in the cooperative project. Women could also be described as holders of moral ideals and virtue, "a stereotype that proved attractive to women cooperators as well".⁵⁹ Thus, the housewife-as-consumer was said to be in control of the future of the movement, but women were, in spite of nominal democratic ideals, rarely included in its institutions or

⁵¹ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 14.

⁵² Aléx (1994), p. 138.

⁵³ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 43, Aléx (1999), p. 256.

⁵⁴ Aléx (1994), pp. 212, 220.

⁵⁵ Aléx (1994), p. 139, Gurney (1999), p. 141.

⁵⁶ Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), pp. 43-45.

⁵⁷ Gurney (1999), p. 156, Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 160.

⁵⁸ Blaszak (2000), p. 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 13.

decision-making as equals.⁶⁰ The movement remained tightly controlled by men despite women's efforts to change this.⁶¹ Indeed, although the English Women's Guild was founded in 1883, women were for the most part formally and practically excluded even from membership in cooperatives until after the 1920's as it was usually the head of the household who was seen as the representative and thus member.⁶² This was also the pattern in Sweden.⁶³ There, The Women's Guild was an independent organization, and as it was prohibited by law to be a member of two cooperative associations (until 1951), the guildswomen had no formal influence over KF whatsoever.⁶⁴

Norms and ideas about the role of women – and the housewife especially – were at the center of both feminist and cooperative debates. Where some emphasized equal formal rights and access to all spheres of society, others emphasized the fundamental difference between women and men, reinforcing women's relation to the domestic sphere.⁶⁵ The strategy of building collectivity around the housewife identity served as a way to mobilize groups of women in order to gain collective leverage within public/patriarchal society.⁶⁶ This strategy has been defined as “redefining womanhood by the *extension*, rather than by the *rejection*, of the female sphere”, providing a bridge between “true womanhood” and “new womanhood”.⁶⁷ Such female institutions brought women together in a process of politicization nurturing social reform agendas to bring “female values to bear on the entire society”.⁶⁸

2.5 Food, prices and consumer cooperation in Sweden

Around the turn of the century 1900, the situation regarding food quality and hygiene in Stockholm was dire.⁶⁹ Due to liberalized trade laws and a rapidly increasing urban population, food became a commodity in a new sense, an object of profit and speculation, and related – unregulated – practices of cheating, adulteration and scams.⁷⁰ The years 1895–1913 was a time of continuous price increases caused by an interaction between business trusts monopolizing the market, and state customs.⁷¹ These factors significantly decreased living standards for working class families. Other factors affecting living standards were the degree

⁶⁰ Gurney (1999), Blaszak (2000).

⁶¹ Blaszak (2000), p. 18.

⁶² Ibid, p. 10.

⁶³ Aléx (1994), p. 101.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 214.

⁶⁵ Blaszak (2000), p. 12.

⁶⁶ Freedman (1979), 513.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 518, emphasis added.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 517.

⁶⁹ Eronn & Norman (1992), p. 5, Björk & Kaijser (2005), pp. 14-19.

⁷⁰ Hirdman (1983), p. 141.

⁷¹ Millbourn (1991), p. 93.

of organizing in labor unions and consumer cooperatives.⁷² In Stockholm, industrial workers' nominal wages increased by 64% during the years 1895-1909. In parallel, continuous price increases enabled by trust monopolies meant relatively stable or even decreasing real wages.⁷³ According to available research – although some suggest higher increases in real wages⁷⁴ – parts of the lower classes likely lived at or below minimum subsistence.⁷⁵ At the same time, there were vast differences between different segments *within* the working class. As one example, in 1905 for a household with four children, the share of income spent on food varied between 36-60% depending on whether the worker was unskilled, educated or a craftsman.⁷⁶ The challenge of making ends meet was met by women and children participating in wage labor (constituting 15-30% of household incomes), and by joining consumer cooperatives (which could bring down living costs by 20%).⁷⁷ As women's wages were approximately 55% of men's, a single mother of two children would spend 60-100% of her income on food.⁷⁸

In this context – in everyday language, the period was called “dyrtiden” (the expensive times) – the Swedish cooperative movement was seen as complementary to the labor unions. In 1899, The Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society (Kooperativa Förbundet, hereafter referred to as KF) was founded, and the number of consumer cooperatives grew rapidly.⁷⁹ In 1906 the KF publication *Kooperatören* estimated 600 consumer cooperatives around the country, equalling an estimated membership of 120 000.⁸⁰

2.6 The emergence and disappearance of Svenska Hem

In this section I will provide a brief overview of the major events in the history of Svenska Hem. The overview will serve as a historical backdrop for the empirical section below.

Described as a wholly unique phenomenon within the cooperative movement,⁸¹ Kvinnornas andelsförening Svenska Hem (The Women's Cooperative Swedish Homes, hereafter referred to as SH) was founded in 1905. The process was initiated by Anna Whitlock, a prominent political figure who at the time was chair of the Swedish Association for the Political Rights of Woman (LKPR), board member of the Center for Social Work

⁷² Millbourn (1991), p. 93, Hirdman (1983), pp. 23, 59.

⁷³ Millbourn (1991), p. 93.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Hirdman (1983), p. 18.

⁷⁵ Millbourn (1991), p. 94, Hirdman (1983), p. 69.

⁷⁶ Hirdman (1983), p. 23.

⁷⁷ Millbourn (1991), p. 93.

⁷⁸ Hirdman (1983), p. 28.

⁷⁹ Aléx (1994), p. 247, Millbourn (1991), p. 92.

⁸⁰ Millbourn (1991), p. 95.

⁸¹ Nilsson (1955), p. 4.

(CSA), the founder of a progressive and secular private school (initially for girls only, later for both boys and girls), and part of a network of well-known feminist, liberal and socialdemocrat social reformers, intellectuals and journalists.⁸²

In 1904, Whitlock travelled to England “to study the social movements in more detail”.⁸³ She learned about the cooperative movement, its theories and accomplishments in addressing issues of social disparity propelled by industrialization. Although opposed and discouraged by the male British cooperative leadership when presenting her idea, Whitlock decided to launch a women’s cooperative in Stockholm.⁸⁴ After presenting the idea in Stockholm to a group of 19 prominent politically engaged women and the (male) general secretary of KF, a committee was appointed to work out a plan.⁸⁵ The idea to only include women as member-owner-customers (and thus elected officials) was important to Whitlock but not shared by all initiating members charged with the task of establishing the organization. Whitlock’s arguments – a) that men don’t need the type of practice that women do as men already have the possibility to inhabit public and professional life, b) that men usually end up in leading positions even in the name of the women’s cause,⁸⁶ and c) that women need their own spaces and platforms to define and implement “their own” strategies – eventually won the majority vote.⁸⁷ At a later member meeting, it was decided that also the staff should, insofar it was possible, also consist of only women.⁸⁸ The bylaws instituted that 5% of economic surplus would be set aside for the building of a “Women’s House” providing housing and a meeting place for “less fortunate” women.⁸⁹ After mobilizing members through lectures and flyers, the cooperative was founded on the 5th of April 1905. The growing membership included “basically every well-known woman of the time” from all over the country.⁹⁰ Membership was dominated by educated and professional middle and upper class women, both married and unmarried, but also included working-class women.⁹¹ By late October 1905 membership had reached 508, and the first store, located in the wealthy Stockholm district of Östermalm, opened on November 8.⁹²

⁸² Björk & Kaijser (2005), pp. 19, 24.

⁸³ Meddelanden från Svenska Hem: 1911 #1, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 19, Nilsson (1955), p. 8.

⁸⁵ Nilsson (1955), p. 8.

⁸⁶ A telling example at the time was that The Labour Union for Women Workers was chaired by a man, see Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 128.

⁸⁷ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 28, Nilsson (1955), p. 10.

⁸⁸ Nilsson (1955), p. 20.

⁸⁹ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 147.

⁹⁰ Nilsson (1955), p. 17.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, p. 25.

The path to getting to this point, however, was dominated by the fact that the influential association of (all male) traders – Specerihandlareförbundet (SHF) – launched a fierce and far-reaching boycott of all grocers that traded with SH.⁹³ The boycott was motivated by a combination of factors. First, unlike most other cooperatives at the time, SH had built a substantial share capital and could compete with the private grocers over the same middle and upper class consumers. Second, they were women – even feminists,⁹⁴ referred to as “these horrible women”⁹⁵ – who were suspected to work for free and thereby make competition impossible. Third, cooperation was generally considered a “leftist” idea, and the boycott could gain support as a means to defeat cooperation as such.⁹⁶ The boycott forced the SH board to build alternative distribution networks around the country and abroad. Contrary to the SFH intention, SH used the boycott to generate considerable media attention in favour of the women’s cooperative, which contributed to the successful launch.⁹⁷ By 1915, SH was the largest cooperative in Stockholm with five stores (in upper class Östermalm, in middle class Kungsholmen, lower middle class Vasastaden, working class Södermalm, and middle and upper class Lidingön), boasting around 3000 members (including members in other parts of the country who had their food delivered by train).⁹⁸ An Educational Committee (EC) produced publications, organized lectures, courses and social events, translated cooperative literature and hosted a library. SH managed well in competition with capitalist firms. However, the literature suggests that the growing trend of large-scale department stores – notably Nordiska Kompagniet (NK) – presented a challenge to SH towards the end.⁹⁹

The last chapters of the SH story are dominated by the question about merging with the newly formed KF Stockholm. After the merger in 1916, SH gradually dissolved. SH was offered 4 out of 15 seats in the managing council, although they had more than half of total membership. In 1917, two of the female store managers were fired by KF management and male managers were installed. All SH stores except one were shut down between 1917 and 1923, and the last one, in the district of Lidingö, lasted until 1954. SH was dissolved, or rather shut down, as a separate Women’s Section in 1920 due to organizational changes.¹⁰⁰ The narrative of the final years of SH as an independent cooperative, 1914-1917, differ in the literature depending on the angle from which the story is told. The male authors of the KF

⁹³ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 72.

⁹⁴ In the literature, the term most often used is “kvinnosakskvinnor”, e.g. “women’s issue women”.

⁹⁵ Gjöres (1930), p. 17.

⁹⁶ Nilsson (1955), p. 24.

⁹⁷ Eronn & Normann (1992), p. 11, Gjöres (1930), p. 19.

⁹⁸ Eronn & Norman (1992), p. 41.

⁹⁹ Nilsson (1955), p. 37, Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 259-262.

¹⁰⁰ Björk & Kaijser (2005), pp. 271-274.

publications emphasize the economic decline of SH and the rise of KF Stockholm.¹⁰¹ The merger is described as rational, as are the changes leading to the dissolving of the Women's Section. Gjöres (1930) claims SH enthusiastically embraced the idea of the merger,¹⁰² whereas the other three sources show deep disagreements within the SH board. The women's history perspective emphasizes that SH was the strongest part in the merger both economically and in terms of members, and points to disastrous financial management of other involved cooperatives.¹⁰³ They point to the 1916 results as well as the idea that centralization was the best way for cooperation to grow, as main arguments for a merger. They further highlight the dishonest and patriarchal methods used by KF management to actively shut down SH as a women's entity, aspects which are made invisible in the first sources.¹⁰⁴

3 Theoretical framework

In order to connect my analysis of the arguments, practices and choices in Svenska Hem's member magazine to existing research, I turn to the analytical tradition of social and economic reconstruction. The main analytical themes, democratic participation, asset-building and narrative representation, have been abductively produced both through a movement between inductively discovered phenomena and themes in the material and deductively defined categories and concepts from previous literature and theorizing. In addition, an analytical frame enabling a critical close reading of the material – drawing from intersectionality and critical theory more broadly – is outlined.

3.1 Social and economic reconstruction

A key concern of the analytical tradition of social and economic reconstruction is a focus on the building of alternative democratic institutions, processes of de-alienation and strategies for the long-term accumulation of emancipatory power.¹⁰⁵ Reconstruction draws upon “utopian realism” in its normative claim that (social) science should not only engage in a deconstruction of power and injustice but also in exploring *alternatives* to hegemonic power arrangements.¹⁰⁶ The contention here is that “[p]olicies without vehicles for accumulating power to sustain them would not go very far”.¹⁰⁷ The term “alternative institution” requires a

¹⁰¹ Gjöres (1930), Nilsson (1955).

¹⁰² Gjöres (1930), p. 42.

¹⁰³ Eronn & Norman (1992), Björk & Kaijser (2005).

¹⁰⁴ Eronn & Norman (1992), p. 21, Björk & Kaijser (2005), pp. 254-257, 266-275.

¹⁰⁵ Melman (2001), Feldman (2016).

¹⁰⁶ Feldman (2007), p. 145.

¹⁰⁷ Feldman (2007), p. 155.

brief definition. *Alternative* denotes a form of organizing that in means as well as ends intends to resist, challenge and eventually replace current systemic arrangements,¹⁰⁸ e.g. a women's cooperative simultaneously constitutes an alternative to systems of capitalism, patriarchy and non-democracy. *Institution* denotes the formal and informal organizing of certain values in practice, a political ethic if you will, aiming at the long-term integration of such values as foundational to broader society.¹⁰⁹ The alternative institution constitutes an arena of shared experience, culture and accumulation of resources making the organized group better equipped for dealing with inequality and oppression.¹¹⁰ Reconstruction thus emphasizes the organizational level. This meso-level engagement with power also emphasizes contingency, i.e. the possibility of *choice* regarding organizational designs and strategies.¹¹¹ The contention is that choices made within organizations – by representatives, staff, member-owner-customers – can affect both macro structures and micro behaviours in ways that individual choices cannot.¹¹²

To be sure, this limited case study will not be able to answer to which extent SH contributed systemic change in a broader sense. However, placing the case in such an analytical tradition serves, primarily, to frame the analysis of SH's own arguments, practices and choices and, secondarily, to do so in terms that can potentially generate further theoretical problems. In the following, I will explain how the concepts cooperation and separatism relate to reconstruction, and zoom in on a concept that connects the two, namely *de-alienation*.

3.2 Constructing the concept of separatist cooperation

Before moving on to crafting the relevant theoretical themes to be used in the analysis, the construction of the concept “separatist cooperation” will be discussed.

3.2.1 Cooperation

As cooperative theory and practice of the relevant period have been extensively covered in the background section, only a few remarks are required here. Cooperatives can be regarded as organizational attempts to enable “the democratic principle”, i.e. the idea that those governed or affected by an organization have the right to individually influence and collectively control that organization.¹¹³ This principle is reminiscent of the slogan “Nihil de

¹⁰⁸ Sørensen (2016), p. 9, Feldman (2016), p. 29.

¹⁰⁹ Liedman (1999), p. 104. See Namli (2014) on the notion of political ethics.

¹¹⁰ Sørensen (2016), p. 52.

¹¹¹ Gordon Nembhard & Haynes (2002), p. 111, Feldman (2013), p. 14.

¹¹² Feldman (2016), p. 29.

¹¹³ Ellerman (1997), p. 33.

nobis, sine nobis” (Nothing about us without us).¹¹⁴ Organizations that extend such a democratic principle, connecting affected groups of people with tools of decision-making power, can be related to the process of de-alienation.¹¹⁵

3.2.2 Separatism

As separatism is not a term used by the actors involved in the case, nor part of the usual repertoire of the reconstructive tradition, I will contextualize and motivate the usefulness of the term. In this paper, the term separatism will be used to denote a group organizing around an emancipatory, de-alienating, asset-building or democratizing purpose. The separatist group *maximizes* – by choice or by necessity – one dimension of collective identity (e.g. sex), while *minimizing* others (e.g. class), and sets organizational boundaries according to the maximized dimension.¹¹⁶ The type of separatism that I’m interested in here has been termed “non-segregationist separatism”, i.e. separatism limited to selected social spheres, such as women’s businesses, consciousness-raising groups, shelters for battered women, women’s political organizations, etc.¹¹⁷ Women’s separatism has been, and is, a strategy for women to deal with the blockages, objectifications and violence of patriarchal society:

...separatism has nothing to do with building walls which isolate and confine women. It is primarily a concept which has to do with loosening the confinement of women. It is the release of women’s energy and power ... separatism paradoxically removes that which is alienating.¹¹⁸

Separatism understood in this way is a means to expand physical and psychic space, to release energy that might otherwise be blocked – energy potentially contributing to the transformation of hegemonic power relations. Separatist practices can thus be defined as de-alienating in that they distance themselves from relations that degrade and objectify, diminish and hold back.

An obvious problem arising while maximizing one dimension of collective experience is that a certain degree of homogeneity and sameness is promoted.¹¹⁹ Differences in experience or material conditions risk being suppressed or ignored while power reinstates itself through intersecting power logics.¹²⁰ Such problems become explicit by asking questions such as “which women?” or, as in the emblematic speech by African American activist

¹¹⁴ See e.g. Charlton (1998).

¹¹⁵ Melman (2001), Feldman (2002).

¹¹⁶ Valentine (1997).

¹¹⁷ Howell (1989).

¹¹⁸ Ibid. (see comment on page numbers in the References section).

¹¹⁹ Valentine (1997), p. 65.

¹²⁰ Mulinari & de los Reyes (2005).

Sojourner Truth – dubbed by many to be one of the first recorded articulations of intersectionality – at the 1851 Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio: “Ain’t I a Woman?”¹²¹

3.2.3 Separatist cooperation

A significant articulation of a separatist cooperative practice can be found in W.E.B. DuBois’ work on “group economics” with regards to African American organizing in the context of US post-slavery racism and segregation.¹²² During the late 1800s, DuBois started studying cooperatives as a potential tool for Black Liberation.¹²³ Although alienation rooted in racism cannot be conflated with alienation rooted in sexism, DuBois’ theory constitutes a number of principles “logical and valuable for *any* group ... attempting to solve social problems”.¹²⁴ DuBois was inspired by the principles of Rochdale cooperation, but added the element of race as he promoted the idea of a segregated racial economic cooperative system.¹²⁵ The vision of such an alternative system was not only defined in relation to capitalist economy, but confronted the racism that permeated all spheres of society, including the cooperative movement. The project was to gradually realize a structure independent of the white world and economy.¹²⁶ DuBois rejected both communist struggle (designed for a majority rather than a minority) and Black Capitalism (which copied the hierarchies of whites).¹²⁷ For DuBois, separatist cooperation was a dialectical strategy of using “the advantage of disadvantage” i.e. to overcome segregation by strategically using it. In this way, African Americans would not only develop a separate economic structure, but be at the forefront of a whole new economic system.¹²⁸ Continuing the legacy of DuBois, Gordon Nembhard links cooperative economics, group liberation and community wealth. Rooted in her many empirical examples of Black Co-ops (including Women’s Co-ops) in the US, she develops a broad yet precise description of cooperatives that can serve to frame what is at stake:

Cooperative businesses are group-centered, need-based, and asset-building local development models based on the pooling of resources, democratic economic participation, and profit sharing. They are locally controlled, internally driven democratic institutions that promote

¹²¹ Nash (2019).

¹²² Contemporary examples like Mondragon also carry elements of ethnic-regional separatism related to Basque nationalist resistance to the Franco regime, see Gordon Nembhard & Haynes (2002), p. 111. There are additional examples of cooperatives based on ethnicity (e.g. Slovenian) and religious (e.g. Catholic) within the Austria-Hungarian Empire, see Furlough & Strikwerda (1999), p. 13.

¹²³ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 17.

¹²⁴ DeMarco (1974), p. 5, emphasis added.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 7, 10.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 8, 15.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

group learning, economic interdependence, consolidation of resources, development of assets, and ... civic participation.¹²⁹

Regarding the definition of “group”, cooperatives are defined as “relatively homogenous associations of people who have come together to address a common need or want, which ‘reduces to a minimum potential frictions and suspicions within the aggregate’”.¹³⁰ Shared culture is considered an important force of solidarity in cooperation.¹³¹ The term need-based is seen in contrast with a purely profit-oriented reason for running a business. Related to larger socio-economic and political patterns of group-based alienation, oppression and inequality, multiple needs such as access to healthy food, stable jobs to promote group economic independence and asset-building are addressed.

3.3 Three strategies of de-alienation

A key concept in reconstructivist thought is *de-alienation*. The following three themes have been abductively derived to frame and capture the processes relevant from the point of view of separatist cooperation.

3.3.1 Democratic participation

The term alienation can be defined in a broad sense as the *cutting off of decision-making power* over processes which fundamentally affect us, including a separation of knowledge from influence.¹³² Marx pointed to “the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production”.¹³³ This separation has also been described as workers lacking influence over how production is organized and resources distributed.¹³⁴ Outside the sphere of production, alienation has been defined as the “separation from access to ... networks and institutions” and further related to citizenship and consumption.¹³⁵ De-alienation thus means democratizing influence over fundamental processes of everyday life.¹³⁶ Further, practicing collective decision-making in functional, democratic associations has been shown to nurture de-alienating decision-making power and a sense of belonging and trust.¹³⁷

¹²⁹ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 14.

¹³⁰ Emelianoff quoted in Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 10.

¹³¹ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 214, DeMarco (1974), p. 12.

¹³² Melman (2001), p. 29, Feldman (2002), p. 12.

¹³³ Marx quoted in Feldman (2002), p. 66.

¹³⁴ Melman (2001), p. 29.

¹³⁵ Feldman (2002), p. 66.

¹³⁶ Melman (2001), p. 271.

¹³⁷ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 233, Pateman (2000), p. 27.

3.3.2 Asset-building

The second theme I will explore relates to alienation as the state of being cut off from *assets* in terms of different forms of power, or capital.¹³⁸ Asset-building as a concept, then, is used to describe the organized accumulation of various forms of capital: economic capital (economic conditions of members and economic power of the organization), social capital (the nurturing of relations, trust, solidarity and support networks), and human capital (knowledge and skills developed through practice and education).¹³⁹ These forms of capital are particularly developed through the collectivity of *democratic* economic organization.¹⁴⁰ Democratic economic organizations have also been described as particularly appropriate vehicles for accumulating, integrating and exchanging various forms of capital, and that “the joining of diverse forms of capital can create synergies that produce a new culture, political space and institutional space for projecting power”.¹⁴¹ Further, particular kinds of *collective energy and engagement* can serve as both capital input and output.¹⁴² These forms of energy are related both to the motivations underlying a cooperative enterprise (which are assumed to be different than for-profit firms as well as from wage labor), the social energy generated by working collectively towards addressing everyday needs and simultaneously as an act of “constructive resistance”,¹⁴³ and the energy released when working removed from alienating (e.g. sexist or racist) power relations.¹⁴⁴

3.3.3 Narrative representation

The third and final sphere of de-alienation regards the inclusion or exclusion from *narrative representations*, relating to the representation of experiences, problems, interests and conditions centered or marginalized through narratives, rhetorics and discourses.¹⁴⁵ The forms of narrative representation also constitute an arena for the articulation and analysis of the ideological or intellectual frames guiding and motivating arguments, practices and choices. Narrative, rhetorics and positionality produced through an organization matter for the production of collective needs, interests and solidarities.¹⁴⁶ Interpretations of how different ideals and norms – notably in terms of gender and class – emerge in these narratives will be

¹³⁸ Feldman (2002); 12-13, drawing from Bourdieu (1983).

¹³⁹ Feldman (2002), p. 69.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 233.

¹⁴¹ Feldman (2002), p. 80.

¹⁴² Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 87.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*; 87, Sørensen (2016).

¹⁴⁴ Howell (1989).

¹⁴⁵ Feldman (2002), p. 80.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

treated as an integrated aspect of organizational practice, as they are assumed to affect both members, potential members, and the wider social sphere onto which the messages were projected.

3.4 Critical perspectives on gender and class

Cutting through all three themes presented above, are implicit and explicit expressions of gender and class. Alternative institutions or emancipatory movements are not free from intersecting power dimensions reinserting themselves in various ways such as in organizational structures expressed through bylaws and policies, choices regarding economic priorities, representation in decision-making bodies, etc. Of special interest are the perspectives and interests conveyed through the member magazine's articles and communication with the members.

A theoretical approach, inspired by intersectionality and critical theory more broadly, is that a close reading of the material aims to render visible the unspoken/negative, identify underlying logics of power and problematize (and politicize) that which is constructed as normal, neutral or natural.¹⁴⁷ Expressions of interests and concerns, as long as they remain unproblematized and uncontextualized, are assumed to (re)produce dominant power relations, rendering interests and experiences of other groups invisible, objectified.¹⁴⁸ Objectification in this sense equals alienation, i.e. not considering the interests and needs of those affected.¹⁴⁹

4 Methodology and sources

4.1 Case study

Case studies strive to achieve a “deep understanding of particular instances of phenomena”¹⁵⁰ or “instances of a class of events”.¹⁵¹ Thus far, I have defined Svenska Hem as a particular instance of the phenomenon of separatist cooperation, suitable for investigating organizational practices addressing multiple power dimensions, specifically the intersecting systems of capitalism, patriarchy and non-democracy. That the cooperative was active during the historical “peak era” of the European cooperative movement clearly connects it to a broader utopian project of systemic change. This case study will be carried out through a close reading of the SH official prints in the form of a qualitative content analysis, “a research

¹⁴⁷ Macey (2001), p. 75.

¹⁴⁸ de los Reyes & Mulinari (2005), p. 93.

¹⁴⁹ Bergström & Boréus (2012), p. 135.

¹⁵⁰ Mabry quoted in Feldman (2017), p. 101.

¹⁵¹ Feldman (2017), p. 101.

method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”¹⁵².

4.2 Operationalization

In this section, I will break down the three themes of democratic participation, asset-building and narrative representation into more precise indicators that will be used to structure the empirical analysis. I then briefly explain how critical perspectives on gender and class will be applied.

4.2.1 Three strategies of de-alienation

The indicators defined under each theme below will be used in the empirical analysis as headings under which the relevant findings are established and anchored in the material.

- **Democratic participation:** The theme of democratic participation will be analyzed through the following indicators: a) forms of member influence, b) access to positions of leadership, c) composition of members, board and Educational Committee (EC), d) organizational centralization and decentralization and e) inclusion of needs and interests in organizational priorities.
- **Asset-building:** Under the theme of asset-building, each form of capital deemed relevant in the material contains several indicators: a) economic capital (economic growth, food prices, dividends and interest on share capital, staff and working conditions, and (re)distribution of capital related to organizational structures and priorities), b) social capital (number of members, group cohesion and support networks, and social effects of co-ownership), c) human capital (educational efforts, practice, and structures of increasing responsibility within the organization), d) signs of growth, integration and exchange of capitals.
- **Narrative representation:** Regarding narrative representation, I will analyze: a) ideas about gender, b) ideas about class, c) separatism: collaboration or antagonism, and d) collectivities of solidarity.

4.2.2 Critical perspectives on gender and class

As described in the theory section, this perspective aims to cut through the empirical findings related to each of the three themes/strategies in order to render visible the multiple dimensions of power at stake.

¹⁵² Feldman (2017), p. 37.

4.3 Empirical data and source criticism

The empirical material used for this study consists of the official prints of Svenska Hem, the member magazine *Meddelanden från Svenska Hem* (“Messages from Swedish Homes”),¹⁵³ distributed between 1906 and 1916. In addition, two official independent publications are analyzed, as well as flyers aiming at recruiting members, and printed bylaws. The material has been accessed at The National Library of Sweden (KB) in Stockholm, and was the only available archive material on Svenska Hem, due to the Covid pandemic. The material is relevant in answering the research questions on arguments, practices and choices as it constitutes the official expressions of SH’s purpose, aims and developments, and provides an image of the cooperative as a platform for heterogeneous discourse production. It also contains detailed organizational and economic data e.g. annual reports, enabling an analysis of organizational performance and choices in relation to the theoretical interests of the paper.

The fact that the empirical material constitutes a type of marketing – to members as well as potential members – is taken into account. To be sure, statements or narratives in official publications do not necessarily tell us about the underlying material realities or motivations for certain decisions or outcomes. Further, the main decisions regarding what should be published in the magazine were made by a relatively small group of people, often board members, with certain interests both individually and for the sake of the organization. Other kinds of information reporting facts, often quantitative, about e.g. economic results, prices, addresses and names, historical events etc, correspond with the secondary literature and I have not discovered any reason to doubt the reliability of such information in the prints.

4.3.1 Official prints of Svenska Hem

The member magazine developed from a single price list distributed in 1906, to gradually expand both in content and frequency. In 1909, the publication was named *Meddelanden från Svenska Hem*, and received the form that it maintained until the last issue in 1916. Published four times per year, the general form included an editorial, brief standardized information on the SH purpose and function, the addresses of the stores, information on home deliveries, recipes, list of (new) members and ads¹⁵⁴. “To observe!” (Att observera!) was a recurring section with information on pricing, specific products to pay attention to, member feedback, and other practical information for the members. Texts on cooperative movement and theory,

¹⁵³ Hereafter referred to as “the member magazine” or “the member publication”.

¹⁵⁴ The ads financed the publication and constituted a large share of the overall material. Members were recurrently encouraged to shop at the advertisers’ stores, in order for them to find it meaningful to keep advertising. According to Nilsson (1955), SH declined ads for tobacco, alcohol, patented medicines, and “carefulness items” (contraceptives).

quotes on cooperation etc., along with articles on different subjects (food, nutrition, prices, cleaning, etc) intended to support housewives in their work. Starting in 1912, a section called “Cooperative News” (Kooperativa notiser) was added. Selecting which material to focus on in relation to the research questions, I have excluded recipes, lists of members¹⁵⁵ and most ads (three specific ads will be mentioned). Given the limitations for this paper, I also decided to exclude the actual price list from my empirical analysis.

In order to obtain an overview of the material considering themes and content, I inductively created topical themes related to subjects treated. The largest category/subject dealt with is that of *Cooperative movement and theory* (61%, excluding texts about the history and role of Svenska Hem).¹⁵⁶ This category of articles includes reportages on cooperatives and federations abroad (mostly Europe, and sometimes [white] North America) and in Sweden, often with detailed information regarding organizational structure and economic results, as well as texts on cooperative ideology, theory and social aims, and international novelties such as cooperative kitchens. Spreading cooperative inspiration, ideals and practices in Sweden – a country that was generally considered “backwards” when it came to cooperation – was indeed expressed as a main function of the EC. This category of articles was quantitatively stable over time, but the imagined relationship between cooperation and peace increased during the war years, as did the focus on centralized cooperative federation. The second largest category is *Prices* (17%), clearly increasing in frequency as the World War started affecting food prices dramatically. This category of articles was at times related to specific products such as milk, butter or coffee, at times tips on how to keep the food budget under control, as well as articles on war time organization and policy of food distribution to keep prices down. The third category is *Nutrition and food* (9%) and deals with the quality and nutritional content of different foods, tips on how to replace expensive foods with other products of similar nutritional value, how to notice spoiled or manipulated products, how to take care of berries, mushrooms, fruit and vegetables from forests and gardens, etc. The fourth category, *Other housewife tips* (8%),¹⁵⁷ contains a type of text treating e.g. household budgeting, cleaning and organizing the home, etc. The fifth, *Other women’s issues* (5%), includes texts on e.g. the KF Women’s Guild, discussions on the employment conditions of maids as well as on women’s work. The sixth category, which I have excluded from the

¹⁵⁵ I have, however, come across working material by Eva Kaijser, co-author of the 2005 book about SH, which makes a rough mapping of the membership in terms of class. Kaijser’s analysis has used surnames as the main variable to determine class, and will be mentioned below..

¹⁵⁶ In five cases, I have included texts published in the section *Cooperative News*, when they have exceeded 1.5 pages in the magazine, as these notices have taken the more lengthy form of articles.

¹⁵⁷ It is labelled “other” as most of the texts are written with “the housewife” as the intended reader.

quantitative overview of topical themes, is *Autobiography of SH, annual reports and meeting reports*. This is a category that appears with some regularity, at times in editorials or news, as part of annual reports, or in relation to the celebration of an anniversary.

Alongside the member magazine, the following official prints have been included in the analysis. Two publications by the Enlightenment Committee, “Cooperation and women” (1911) and “Cooperation and Svenska Hem” (1913). They consist of already published articles from the member magazine, with some additions, notably a key text on Svenska Hem by the well-known author (and member) Elin Wägner. In addition, flyers and leaflets to potential members, bylaws (statutes) and terms of employment. I have excluded invitations to annual meetings, separate annual reports, and separate lists of members, as these are already included in the magazine.

4.4 Delimitations

Other dimensions relevant to the research questions could be further explored by putting into question a broader empirical material. First, internal debates, decisions and motivations are available in meeting minutes and other internal documents. Second, The SH Educational Committee published articles in other newspapers and sent publications to various media outlets, an analysis of which would further contribute to the understanding of the posed questions. The reasons for excluding this material are two-fold: the official prints were the only available material during the work due to Covid restrictions and the member magazine constituted a material vast and rich enough for the time limitations of the thesis.

Finally a note on the interface between primary and secondary data. As some of the secondary material, notably the booklets about SH, is directly reporting the primary material and has e.g. constructed tables of economic results, I will sometimes integrate such secondary material into the empirical analysis. At times I will also refer to said secondary literature (often based on meeting minutes which I have not had access to) in the empirical discussion, in instances where the discussed issues are not fully covered by the primary material.

5 Empirical analysis

The empirical investigation is structured thematically by the theoretical framework applied. In order to provide a background to the issues discussed in more qualitative terms, Table 1 below provides a quantitative overview of the development of SH.

Table 1. Number of members, employees, stores, and economic results.

Year	Members	Employees	Stores	Share capital (SEK)	Sales, (SEK)	Result, (SEK)	Dividend (%)
31/12							
1905	573	5	1	25 271	25 673	-700	0
1906	863	12	2	32 869	141 088	-517	0
1907	1 093	18		38 227	216 419	+3 349	1,5%
30/6*							
1908	1 194	20	3	41 837	254 276	+8 258	2%
1909	1 463	27	3 + depot	47 512	351 289	+15 223	2,5%
1910	1 623	26**		50 500	394 877	+17 459	2,5%
1911	1 909	31	4	56 080	485 533	+21 029	3%
1912	2 160			61 043	575 919	+31 490	3,5%
1913	2 468	50		66 509	680 122	+25 483	2,5%
1914	2 692		5	70 990	729 551	+32 138	3%
1915	3 059	60		73 691	742 375	+28 380	2,5%
1916	3 170			75 604	691 684	-4 127	0

Adapted from Eronn & Norman (1992).

* In 1907, the fiscal year was moved.

** In 1910, a restructuring was made, with new cash registers that decreased the administrative work and thus the need for staff.

5.1 Democratic participation

Analyzing processes that enhance or constrain democratic participation in SH, this section is structured around the indicators a) forms of member influence, b) access to positions of leadership, c) composition of members, board and EC, d) organizational centralization and decentralization, and e) inclusion of needs and interests in organizational priorities.

5.1.1 Forms of member influence

When presenting her idea to the founding members of SH, Anna Whitlock explained that the organization was to be built on the cooperative principle of allowing members “to exercise

control”.¹⁵⁸ The bylaws stipulated that all members, independent of capital share ownership, held one vote at the formal meetings. Apart from the Annual Meeting, one member meeting was held annually, to which members could address their concerns and proposals. Additionally, members could convene meetings.¹⁵⁹

Democratic principles such as electing one’s representatives was a less prominent argument for cooperation than cooperative principles such as fairness and honesty.¹⁶⁰ Member-customer ownership was meant to ensure that the interest to cheat with food quality, weight or prices, as well as the profit motive as such, was automatically abolished.¹⁶¹ The principle of member dividends based on purchases rather than capital shares was naturally an important argument for co-ownership in the efforts to lower food costs while simultaneously encouraging member loyalty to the stores. Management stated the goal that “[w]ithin Svenska Hem, everyone should be treated equally, independent of how much or little they buy”.¹⁶² Members were continuously – especially during the first years – encouraged to contribute proposals for new products, organizational ideas, answer member surveys and deliver feedback to the management. Feedback and questions from members were continuously treated in the section “To Observe!”. Management repeatedly asked for forgiveness when services didn’t function perfectly, or if prices had to increase.¹⁶³

For example, a proposal for business development was sent in by a member, published and responded to in the magazine. This idea gradually developed into being a key component of the SH activities: the structured coordination of berry, fruit and mushroom picking and pickling.¹⁶⁴ This line of business gradually developed to include in-store production of jams and juices using berries picked by members around the country (thus providing rural housewives with an additional income).

5.1.2 Access to positions of leadership

Seven board members were elected for two years, of which three – first time decided by lottery – were to resign or be reelected after one initial year to enable a system of overlapping rotation.¹⁶⁵ As opposed to some explicitly socialist cooperatives, SH had no time limit as to

¹⁵⁸ Meddelanden 1911 #1, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Bylaws (1906).

¹⁶⁰ Meddelanden 1909 #2, p. 28.

¹⁶¹ Flyer “Kvinnornas Andelsförening Svenska Hem” (1906)..

¹⁶² Kooperationen och kvinnorna (1911), p. 17.

¹⁶³ Kooperationen och kvinnorna (1911), p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Meddelanden 1910 #2.

¹⁶⁵ Svenska Hem Bylaws (1906).

how long a board member could stay in the position.¹⁶⁶ Reports from the annual meetings let the reader know when a board member resigned and was replaced by a deputy or a new board member was elected. The general tendency was to stay in the position until one had to quit, i.e. there was quite a slow rotation and the most common reason stated for board members to leave their assignment was that they were very busy with other assignments in professional life, civil society or municipal politics.¹⁶⁷ There are no signs of an election committee or similar, i.e. actively looking for potential representatives amongst the regular members, and the material contains no calls for members to run for board or EC positions. In general, then, there appear to have been limited mechanisms to broaden access to and representation within the cooperative leadership. Likewise, there were no explicit efforts at organizational regeneration – e.g. educating a younger generation or encouraging working-class women to step into positions of leadership – something mentioned by Eronn & Norman as a potential weakness in the face of the KF merger.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, one could say that a rather small group of people were in control of the executive decisions.

5.1.3 Composition of members, board and EC

Related to processes of democratic participation, it is relevant to look at aspects of representation with respect to both class and gender. The SH case shows, as we shall see, that such representation mattered much to organizational choices. Throughout its existence, SH communicated an ambivalent position regarding the class composition of their membership. While continuously stating that SH was “an association of women from all social classes”,¹⁶⁹ SH simultaneously acknowledged that they primarily had turned to “Sweden’s educated women” and “the housewives of the fortunate classes”.¹⁷⁰ Based on the material and research design, it is not possible to make an accurate estimate of how many members could be described as working class. A preliminary attempt was made by Eva Kaijser by counting the surnames in the member register that tended to be working class at the time, with a result of 312 members, which approximates 10% of the total membership of 1916.¹⁷¹ Another way of making a rough estimation is to combine the factors of the a) SH prices (which were more expensive than other Södermalm stores at the time), b) the general social composition of different Stockholm districts at the time, and c) the turnover of the different stores (see Table

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Meddelanden 1911 #4, p. 4.

¹⁶⁷ See e.g. Meddelanden 1912 #4, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ Eronn & Normann (1992); 22.

¹⁶⁹ A formulation appearing in various standardized information about SH, see e.g. 1906 #1, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Kooperationen och Svenska Hem* (1913), p. 26, emphasis added.

¹⁷¹ Working material, attained through private correspondence.

2 below). A resulting, albeit highly tentative, estimation is that around 10% of members represented an upper working class (primarily Södermalm) and 10-20% members represented a lower middle class of unmarried female administrators and secretaries, often not able to afford their own homes (primarily Vasastaden).¹⁷² Taken together, the estimate of members based on name and the overview of economic turnover in different parts of the city – approximately 10-30% represented an upper working class to lower middle class in a very loose definition – at least gives a very rough idea of the class distribution of members. The balancing act of simultaneously keeping the initial upper class members while attracting socially engaged middle class women and working-class housewives related both to the type of products sold in the stores and to the perceived ideological profile of the organization.¹⁷³

Table 2: Turnover of SH stores in 1914

Store	Turnover (SEK)	Turnover (%)
Main store, Mäster Samuelsgatan (Östermalm)	408,688:35 SEK	56% of total ¹⁷⁴
Karlbergsgatan (Vasastaden)	126,363:20 SEK	17% of total
Schéelegatan (Kungsholmen)	69,988:40 SEK	10% of total
Hökensgatan (Södermalm)	64,497:66 SEK	9% of total
Lidingö (Lidingön, newly established)	60,013:22 SEK	8% of total
Total	729,550:83 SEK	100%

Table constructed by author, adopted from the Annual Report of 1914.¹⁷⁵

When it comes to membership of *leading* women in the Swedish labor movement, the list is impressive: Kata Dahlström, Anna Sterky, Anna Lindhagen, Anna Johansson-Visborg and Maria Osberg Wessel.¹⁷⁶ Wessel was actively recruited before SH was formally founded and

¹⁷² Hirdman (1983), Björk & Kaijser (2005).

¹⁷³ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 262.

¹⁷⁴ The main store also hosted home deliveries to different parts of Stockholm as well as other parts of the country, a kitchen, production of juices, jams and preserved foods, coffee roasting, exhibition space and library (Eronn 1989; 26), which explains some of the large difference with the other stores.

¹⁷⁵ Meddelanden 1914 #3, p. 7. 1914 has been chosen as it was the year when all five stores had been established and one fiscal year before the economic difficulties of the war really started to affect business.

¹⁷⁶ Björk och Kaijser (2005); 37.

served on the board from start to finish.¹⁷⁷ Periodically she was part of the EC, and served as SH's representative at the KF national congresses. Johansson-Visborg, well-known for her tireless engagement in union organizing and the KF Women's Guild,¹⁷⁸ was on the board between 1910 and 1914 but both primary material and secondary literature indicates that she was simply too busy to contribute much of her time.¹⁷⁹ Secondary sources based on meeting minutes indicate that Wessel opposed the merger with KF on the grounds that SH was more well-organized and had better leadership, and that she was convinced that SH could survive on their own.¹⁸⁰ In terms of active board membership then, Maria Wessel was the only consistently active person that explicitly represented working-class interests. However, this representation was significant. According to Björk & Kaijser it was Wessel who made sure there was a possibility to pay the share capital (20 SEK) by installments of 2 SEK per month (with the right to shop at the stores already from the first installment), and it was she who proposed that SH should open stores in the working-class districts of Odenplan (Vasataden, where she lived at the time) and Södermalm.¹⁸¹

Regarding organizational regeneration, a wish was expressed at a member meeting in 1910, that the EC should educate association board members in rural areas and spread the word about SH amongst "working-class wives".¹⁸² This wish resulted in a special "Södermalm social event" ("Södersamkväm"), a sold out evening including coffee, tea and sandwiches and a lecture on the cooperative movement and SH, as well as musical entertainment: "The mood was very good".¹⁸³

From the perspective of gender, the member magazine's organization did not abide by the principle of women's separatism. Key founding member Ezaline Boheman – simultaneously active as secretary of LKPR and STF¹⁸⁴ – was editor of the member magazine between 1908 and 1913.¹⁸⁵ The women of the SH board and EC – notably Anna-Brita Bergstrand – as well as the general directors, first Ina Almén and later Hilda Carlberg – were frequent contributors. Members were invited to contribute texts and proposals, the editors and EC translated texts from international cooperative press and

¹⁷⁷ Björk och Kaijser (2005); 37.

¹⁷⁸ Höglund (1951).

¹⁷⁹ Nilsson (1955), p. 16. Höglund (1951) chronicling Johansson-Visborg, doesn't mention engagement in SH. Johansson-Visborg is only mentioned in the magazine by name in relation till Annual Meeting board elections.

¹⁸⁰ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 276.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 42, 113.

¹⁸² Meddelanden 1910 #2, p. 9.

¹⁸³ Meddelanden 1911 #1.

¹⁸⁴ Sweden's Tourist Association.

¹⁸⁵ Meddelanden 1908 #4, 1914 #3.

distributed study scholarships to visit particular cooperative firms or federations around Europe in order to write about it in the magazine.

Which platform did the SH publication and educational activities give to men? In 1907, before the member publication had achieved its final form, the EC translated, published and sold the booklet “The Twelve Virtues of Cooperation” by French economist Charles Gide.¹⁸⁶ In 1908 they published and sold a booklet by Swedish writer E.H. Thörnberg called “The Cooperative Movement – a brief and general overview”, and another one in 1910 called “Cooperative England”.¹⁸⁷ Thörnberg also held lectures for the SH members.¹⁸⁸ In 1911, the high profile cooperator Anders Örne – at the time, editor of the KF magazine *Kooperatören* and a central figure in KF who eventually co-wrote the agreement for merging SH with KF Stockholm¹⁸⁹ – contributed his first text, and was thereafter a frequent contributor.¹⁹⁰ As the main efforts of KF at this time were to build a strong centralizing cooperative federative structure, it is possible to trace a parallel increase in the publication’s focus on such issues alongside Örne’s entry as a contributor. In 1913, a male editor, R. L. Berglund, shows up in the Annual Report.¹⁹¹ Berglund is not mentioned in any other way, he does not appear in the secondary literature, and the material doesn’t mention how he was appointed for the job. Alongside Berglund it is noted that Mrs. C. Sahl von Koch – a member of the original EC and married to the KF founder and first general secretary G. H. von Koch – is editor of the “enlightenment section” (not clearly defined or delineated in the magazine). In sum, men were given increasing space in the member magazine, which, as discussed below, corresponded with subtle shifts in tone and content.

5.1.4 Organizational centralization and decentralization

As the cooperative expanded in membership, economic turnover, staff and number of stores (as well as number of pages in the publication), issues of centralization and decentralization of power became apparent. The most notable example of organizational centralization regards the EC. In 1907 it was made up of 26 members.¹⁹² With arguments of organizational inefficiency, the AGM of 1909 decided to dissolve the EC in its then current form.¹⁹³ At a 1910 member meeting a proposal of seven EC members including four representatives from

¹⁸⁶ Meddelanden 1907 #5, p. 45.

¹⁸⁷ Meddelanden 1908 #1, 1910 #2.

¹⁸⁸ Meddelanden 1910 #3, p.7.

¹⁸⁹ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 270.

¹⁹⁰ Meddelanden 1911 #4, p. 4.

¹⁹¹ Meddelanden 1914 #3, p. 6.

¹⁹² Meddelanden 1907 #6, p. 42.

¹⁹³ Meddelanden 1909 #4, p. 3.

the board was replaced by a counter proposal by the SH initiator Anna Whitlock: five EC members including three board members.¹⁹⁴ In 1914, another reorganization resulted in a new form: the board *plus* two additional members.¹⁹⁵ This gradual but quite remarkable centralization to the board happened in parallel with a growing membership that presented challenges to revitalizing membership interaction.¹⁹⁶ This can be interpreted as a failure to invite and activate new members in the collective pursuit and production of knowledge. Worth noting is also that this process happened in parallel with the appointing of the male editor R. L. Berglund, corresponding with a growing number of male writers in the magazine. This, in turn, coincided with a growing number of reprinted articles from *Kooperatören*, and an increase of articles arguing for the benefits of centralizing federations. The design of this study does not allow for claiming the sequence of causation here, but the correlation should be noted – especially since the importance of centralizing federations was an argument for the 1916 merger with KF.¹⁹⁷ In 1915-1916, however, a decentralizing organizational change was made, instituting local member councils affiliated to each store, see “Social capital” below.

5.1.5 Inclusion of needs and interests in organizational priorities

Whereas the establishment of the Södermalm store was preceded by a careful investigation where a certain number of members had to be secured before the decision was put forth to the members,¹⁹⁸ the establishment of the Lidingö store is described as a more self-evident development, as a *demand* from members.¹⁹⁹ This was connected to the general growth of membership in the wealthy suburbs²⁰⁰ following strategic investments in home deliveries by SH to achieve such a growth, along with explicit encouragement to members in these areas to recruit more friends as members.²⁰¹ The main store in Östermalm received the most attention in the magazine, it was indeed the “flagship”. There are also examples where the Södermalm members were excluded from developments benefiting members in the other districts. The most explicit is when SH introduced the opportunity to order fresh fish at cost price in 1913. Delivering fish to Södermalm was described as too costly and complicated, and “we don’t dare risk such long transports for a possibly relatively small return”, while deliveries to

¹⁹⁴ Meddelanden 1910 #3, p. 7.

¹⁹⁵ Meddelanden 1914 #3, p. 8.

¹⁹⁶ Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 9.

¹⁹⁷ Meddelanden 1916 #3, p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ Meddelanden 1909 #4, p. 3.

¹⁹⁹ Meddelanden 1912 #4; 29.

²⁰⁰ Meddelanden 1911 #4, p. 31.

²⁰¹ Meddelanden 1912 #2, p. 19.

Östermalm were organized twice a week.²⁰² Some products were only sold in the main Östermalm store and members from other districts were encouraged to come there, as “[t]he distances are not that long here in Stockholm and our main store is quite centrally located”.²⁰³ In addition to the admittedly quite costly (but seemingly profitable) efforts of home deliveries to members in remote wealthy suburbs and around the country, the issue of the fish sales is indicative of how *purchasing power* was a factor alongside, and in some sense in conflict with, the formal democratic structure and aims of a cooperative. For an effort that countered such tendencies, see “Economic capital” below.

5.2 Asset-building

The analysis of asset-building is structured around a) economic capital, b) social capital, c) human capital and d) signs of growth, integration and exchange of capitals.

5.2.1 Economic capital

The analysis of forms of accumulating and (re)distributing economic capital contains aspects of economic results, the effects on food prices, dividends and interest on share capital, as well as staff and their working conditions. An initial analysis of the economic results (shareholder capital, sales and result) in Table 1 above shows that SH had a positive and gradual development and expansion, with a stable result even during the tumultuous war year of 1914. Careful planning of building capital was combined with member/staff dividends of up to 3.5% of purchases/salaries. The turning point was 1915 and especially 1916, when the results fell drastically, with fewer new members and thus less new shareholding capital added. The economic difficulties panning out in 1916 are recurring in the source material in the discussion around reasons for merging with KF Stockholm.²⁰⁴

Membership was increasing steadily (apart from the last year), contributing capital and supporting the growth in number of stores. The initial, unusually large, share capital was essential for surviving the SHF boycott. Securing international trade deals in cash and building an alternative distribution system when most doors were closed clearly required substantial economic capital. The large share capital was made possible through the strategy of addressing women only, including educated and wealthy women, many of whom had no previous relation to cooperative thought or practice as it was considered a working-class and leftist phenomenon.²⁰⁵ Along with the growing economic capital, the “social energy”

²⁰² Meddelanden 1913 #1.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Meddelanden 1916 #3, s. 5.

²⁰⁵ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 262.

associated with separatism and cooperation grew. As SH celebrated its fifth anniversary, the relation between different forms of capital was articulated explicitly:

There is something special about companies, in which a significant part of the share capital has been faith, enthusiasm and will. Since these have yielded interest, and the company is solid also in other respects, and there is time to look back and remember how it once was, one is happy to wonder when comparing past and present: “how could it go so well?” You remember the difficulties, you think that the conditions in money, in personal experience, in everything else, have been so limited, that it is almost inexplicable, that everything turned out so beneficial. ... If 'Svenska Hem' on its fifth anniversary, could teach those who were gathered to the simple [initial] meeting ... something, it is certainly the importance and power that lies in a strong belief in a rightly thought out, good and beautiful purpose. It spurs the power to conjure up from the utopian building of the mind, a healthy, purposeful building of reality.²⁰⁶

The binary of, and interaction between, “ideal” and “material” so common in the cooperative vocabulary of the time is striking, and the quote expresses how one of the SH initiators, Anna Glasell-Andersson, experienced the energy of collective engagement for a (multiple) cause.²⁰⁷

By 1916 the staff amounted to 60, almost exclusively women. This was no small achievement for a new cooperative at a time when many cooperatives did not survive, and in addition being the target of fierce attacks from organized (male) capitalist firms during its first years. Women employees were not uncommon in cooperative retail, or retail in general, but the fact that women occupied *all* levels of the organization, including management and board, was unique to SH in Sweden at the time.²⁰⁸ The management, especially general manager Ina Almén, continuously made clear that SH cared about the staff.²⁰⁹ Employments became permanent after a one year probationary employment. Benefits, Christmas bonuses, health insurance, stipends for rehabilitation after illness, contributions to personal savings accounts and education, transparent working conditions and a dividend salary equivalent to that of the member-customers.²¹⁰ Union engagement was encouraged and there were possibilities to advance within the organization.²¹¹ This aspect of separatism indeed seems to have provided a platform for asset-building both in terms of stable employment, organizational and financial skills and social benefits for a growing number of women.

The economic principles instituted by SH were standard amongst cooperatives. However, a rather large redistribution to the benefit of wealthy members was enabled by the

²⁰⁶ Meddelanden 1910 #4.

²⁰⁷ The term “ideal” (in Swedish, “ideal” or “ideell” are used interchangeably) is most closely related to the use of “moral” in the English literature on cooperative movement

²⁰⁸ Nilsson (1955), p. 45.

²⁰⁹ See e.g. *Kooperationen och kvinnorna* (1911), p. 18.

²¹⁰ *Bestämmelser angående löneförmåner m.m. för kvinnliga biträden i Svenska Hem* (1911).

²¹¹ See e.g. *Meddelanden 1911 #1*.

large differences in wealth amongst the members. For example, the statutes institutionalized a 4% annual interest rate on shares (lower than the 5-6% average at the time) and set a maximum number of shares for each member at 150.²¹² Thus, a maximum share ownership would give 120 SEK return on investment annually, equalling one monthly salary of an average worker in 1907.²¹³ This structure was probably meant, and succeeded, to encourage wealthier women to invest in the cooperative, as capital supply was one of the most fundamental challenges for cooperatives at the time.

Björk & Kaijser account for a price investigation carried out in 1909 (not mentioned in the empirical material) led by Maria Wessel, that compared the quality, weight and prices of eleven different stores around Stockholm, including high-end capitalist stores such as *Percy Luck* as well as the cooperative store *Thule* (owned by the workers of phone company L.M. Ericsson). The results varied for different products and gave indications such that the SH oats were both amongst the cheapest and with the highest quality, whereas the opposite was true for the rice. On average, the quality of most SH products was higher than in the “working class stores” and equal to the “upper class stores”, somewhat more expensive than the cheaper stores and cheaper than the upscale stores.²¹⁴ As a material outcome, then, SH seemingly did live up to the cooperative goal of lowering the price of high quality foods, making such high quality foods available for more people, although out of reach for lower working-class households. Regarding prices and geographical differences, SH’s policy to keep the same prices in all stores, gave uneven effects. SH prices were generally higher than many Södermalm stores.²¹⁵ On the other hand, SH prices were on average 2% lower than other stores on Lidingö. This competitive pressure pushed the other Lidingö stores to introduce general rebates which resulted in lower food costs for all consumers in the area. The SH management proudly calculated that their presence had saved the Lidingö inhabitants a remarkable 14,000 SEK in one year.²¹⁶ Thus, SH made life cheaper for middle and upper-class households and provided high quality foods to working-class families, albeit at a higher price than Södermalm stores. In 1913, the Annual Report explicitly mentioned a significant attempt to keep overall prices as low as possible; in the interest of all members, but also as a way to promote the Södermalm store specifically. The board had decided that SH as a cooperative could not have different prices in their different stores, which presented a

²¹² Nilsson (1955), p. 12.

²¹³ Hirdman (1983), p. 31.

²¹⁴ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 152.

²¹⁵ Meddelanden 1913 #3, p. 13.

²¹⁶ Meddelanden 1914 #3, p. 3.

challenge directly affecting the working class members of Södermalm. The strategic decision was then made – while asking for evaluative feedback from the members – to lower *all* possible prices, at the expense of a high end-of-year dividend.²¹⁷ This was a significant attempt at explicitly addressing such a trade-off through redistribution from members that could afford to get most of their groceries at SH (and thus reap most of the benefits of the dividend), to the poorer members of Södermalm.

The system of free home delivery was described as costly and complicated, but was never questioned. The service was usually mentioned in relation to Östermalm or wealthy suburbs such as Lidingö, or the rural areas. SH invested in one, later two, horses and later still, an automobile, and when the “in-house” organization did not cover the logistical coordination of member-customer demand, other delivery firms were hired. These types of investments, however, are also described as profitable and in high demand.²¹⁸ There are no similar investments made explicitly in order to expand in working-class areas. There are, however, several mentions of how more luxurious products provide a larger return on investment, as they are generally less heavy and less complicated to administer and allow for a higher profit margin.²¹⁹ Such instances of market logic, again, show a conflict between democratic ideals and purchasing power, negotiated throughout the time period.

A stated goal of the consumer cooperative movement at the time was to gradually start up and own the productive facilities of the economic distribution system. In the general (male) cooperative movement – mentioned e.g. in the many articles of the member magazine – such production was clearly industrial. What SH brought to this discussion and practice was directly related to the strategy of women’s separatism and ideas of womanhood, and therefore markedly different from the mainstream cooperative movement at the time. As we have seen, while building up its own distribution system in the face of the SHF boycott, SH not only engaged rural female food producers and estate owners with orchards as suppliers; it turned previously unpaid women’s house work such as berry, fruit, vegetable and mushroom picking, juicing and pickling into an additional income for rural women and started up in-store production in this sphere. This move was deemed to both stimulate economic benefits for the participating members as well as provide products of high, “home-made-tasting” quality at a cheaper price while addressing the importance of taking advantage of the free gifts of nature that would otherwise be wasted.²²⁰ Such innovations emphasised the underlying meaning of

²¹⁷ Meddelanden 1913 #3, p. 13.

²¹⁸ Meddelanden 1911 #4, p. 31.

²¹⁹ Meddelanden 1916 #3, p. 4.

²²⁰ Meddelanden 1910 #2, 1911 #3.

the cooperative's name, *a cooperation of homes*,²²¹ simultaneously addressing members as producers in a decentralized system of home industries as a de facto extension of the home, and the home as a women's sphere. This frame was markedly different from the dominant ideals of centralized and federative ownership over industrial production. In fact, in 1910 a male managing director proposed a collaboration around industrial production of lingonberry juice but SH was decisive in developing the idea of home production.²²²

Accumulated capital was also shared. For example, SH provided KF with extra support funds of 1500 SEK during the battle with cartels in the so-called "Margarine Battle" in 1909.²²³ Towards the end of 1914, *The Women's Array* (Kvinnornas uppåd) was a women's initiative for alleviating the needs amongst the unemployed, deepened by the outbreak of the World War.²²⁴ SH took a leading role in this initiative, both in organizing its distribution of food to people who had qualified for municipal food coupons, in terms of "lending" one of their store managers to manage the food depot of the Women's Array, and co-organizing courses in cheap cooking.

5.2.2 Social capital

As already noted, SH was initiated by a group of women who were deeply engaged in central networks of professionals, intellectuals, social reformers and political entrepreneurs. Most board members had leading roles within other organizations and movements: women's rights, social work and welfare reform, cooperative movement, peace movement, women's labor unions, etc. Such a position also brought the attention of well-known cultural workers, with Selma Lagerlöf and Elin Wägner being examples of such members. Altogether, SH possessed an unusually large social network capital from the start.

Discursively, texts in the member magazine and flyers continuously invoked notions of relationality, togetherness, affinity, belonging, solidarity, indeed, de-alienation. One such example relates to the collective ownership of one's store:

The feeling of solidarity has grown strong among our members, they feel that when they come into their own store, their own storage, when they come to Svenska Hem, they are not only customers but also owners, they have not only claims but also share their knowledge and experiences. It is this feeling which is the driving force for Svenska Hem and for which we, to our delight, receive more and more evidence every day.²²⁵

²²¹ See "Narrative representation" below.

²²² Meddelanden 1910 #4, p. 12.

²²³ Meddelanden 1909 #3, p. 8.

²²⁴ Meddelanden 1914 #3, p. 14.

²²⁵ Meddelanden 1913 #2.

This expression of the de-alienating aspects of cooperation is also expressed with respect to women specifically. General manager Ina Almén writes that “SH provides qualities, that women generally – especially the less young – often lack; a sense of camaraderie and the ability to cooperate”.²²⁶ Almén attributes such lack to less time in schools and education, as well as to the separation of women into the confinement of the home, whereas men work, often collectively, outside the home.

The growing number of members can both be defined as a growing capital in the sense that the collective increased, and ideally, more people were included in the building of relations and trust, social circles of the members could expand through social events and new contacts, etc. On the other hand, SH had to face the *challenges* of a growing membership: decreased personal communication, less direct social interaction, larger heterogeneity in motivations for membership and a weakened connection to the original causes, as well as the geographical dispersal of different member groups related to the five different stores. Such distances were described in terms of weakened cohesion, and a distance between members and leadership.²²⁷ Meeting such challenges in 1915, SH initiated local member councils connected to each store. The local councils organized social events and lectures which were reportedly experienced as a successful revitalization of the cooperative spirit.²²⁸

5.2.3 Human capital

Although the key members of SH were experienced movement organizers, starting up and running a cooperative business was an endeavor none of them had previous experience of.²²⁹ As for most cooperators, this meant that they had to learn by doing. Several members active on the level of the SH board and EC, moved on to become the first female politicians at municipal and, later, national levels. Although it is not possible to show exactly what role SH played in such development, the general trend is in line with the research showing that cooperatives often serve as training grounds for community and movement leaders.²³⁰ Regarding employees, SH provided a platform for skills development and occupational advancement, one example being that the first four clerks to be employed in 1906 were still in SH's service in 1911, having advanced to new positions within the cooperative.²³¹ Another

²²⁶ Kooperationen och kvinnorna (1911), p. 18.

²²⁷ Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 9.

²²⁸ Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 9.

²²⁹ Meddelanden 1910 #4.

²³⁰ Gordon Nembhard (2014).

²³¹ Meddelanden 1911 #1; p. 10. Note, however, that these employees are not named in the magazine, whereas Björk & Kaijser (2005) names three of them: Asta Johnson, Anna Strömberg and Anna Sandström, p. 163.

staff member to advance was Hilda Carlberg, from manager assistant to general manager.²³² Although not necessarily a general pattern, it is interesting to note that after the merger with KF, female SH store manager Signe Tydén became a KF store clerk, and male SH driver Gustav Karlsson became a KF store manager.²³³

As for the members, there is a very present focus on education in the form of lectures and presentations tied to social events, courses, cooking and cleaning demonstrations, stipends for study trips and of course, extensive text production to promote knowledge of cooperative movement and theory. The immensely active EC and its many forms of cooperative and housewife educational efforts, also directed at broader society, was acknowledged also by KF commentators as one of the most important contributions to the cooperative movement.²³⁴

5.2.4 Signs of growth, integration and exchange of capitals

As noted, the economic, social, and human capital of SH, or rather its initiating members, was substantial from the start which was unusual for cooperatives at this time. According to all sources, these factors were significant for its success. The quantitative and qualitative material analysed here shows a general awareness within SH of the asset-building aspects of separatist cooperation. Yet, including the signs of class bias and lack of initiatives to democratize the organization further, limits the claims of such positive effects extended to “women of all classes”, as it failed to extend substantive decision-making power to larger circles of the membership. The combined capital was necessary and sufficient to withstand the boycott simultaneously motivated by economic and patriarchal factors. However, the capital accumulated was not sufficient to, as such, stop the dissolving of SH after the merger with KF. To study the factors involved in the merging of the separatist group (SH) with the “general” movement (KF), would have been highly interesting, but would require different material and research design.

Different forms of capital were integrated and exchanged within SH. For example, the growing economic capital was used to finance expanded educational efforts and specific initiatives for women cooperators. The growing human capital – of management and staff learning how to deal both with market pressure and members’ wishes – especially during the first years, was exchanged for economic capital:

²³² Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 202.

²³³ Nilsson (1955), p. 48.

²³⁴ Ibid.

These are years that can be considered as school years, these five that have passed, and yet the single store has become four, bigger and more beautiful than anyone five years ago dared to hope. The number of three assistants has increased and increased, so that it is now tenfold.²³⁵

An aspect that has not been discussed is how SH's social capital related to media capital, and how SH could use its contacts with influential media outlets both to attract members and to promote cooperation – especially around the launch marked by the SHF boycott.²³⁶

5.3 Narrative representation

In the following section, I will critically analyze how arguments, practices and choices are represented in the narrative and rhetoric of SH. I will focus on how notions of gender and class emerge, which needs and interests are centered or marginalized and which forms of solidarity are expressed. Original quotes (translated from the Swedish) will be featured more extensively, in order to give a sense of the tone, style and worldview emergent in the material.

5.3.1 Ideas about gender

The views of gender, and womanhood in particular, emerging from the material are heterogenous and encompass different and sometimes conflicting standpoints. The figure of the housewife is contested and negotiated, but remains at the center of the SH project. In a 1911 text by Ina Almén, telling the history of Svenska Hem, the initial aims of Anna Whitlock are situated and described:

In addition to the practical side of the cooperation, Miss W. emphasized its great social importance, the ability to provide the wider strata of society with better living conditions, its importance to educate in thrift, honesty and a sense of solidarity. She pointed out that this was a field for women, for the housewives, where they could invest the power and ability freed by the fact that modern industry had reduced domestic work in the home. Would not the cooperation of homes be a natural area of work, in both moral and practical terms suitable for the special disposition of women?²³⁷

The quote tells us both that Whitlock subscribed to the belief that women relate to a particular disposition, especially suited for cooperation. In an interesting formulation, SH is referred to as “a cooperation of homes”. In this sense, there is a type of conflation between womanhood and the domestic sphere which overlaps the conflation of the housewife with the consumer undergirding theoretical assumptions of cooperative theory at the time. One of the most explicit examples of this idea is found in the section “Cooperative Quotes” in 1910:

²³⁵ Meddelanden 1910 #4, p. 4.

²³⁶ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 85.

²³⁷ Meddelanden 1911 #1.

Cooperation – at least consumer cooperation – is to such an extent a women’s special interest, that it can seem somewhat surprising, that it was not a woman who first invented it. The good house mother, who has an interest in her calling, should in truth be the real cornerstone, on which the cooperative building rises. If once such support is absent, the building is bound to collapse, and this will be also true for the most well-organized cooperative association.²³⁸

The quote comes from a lecture by Mrs. Treub-Cornaz (chair of the Dutch Cooperative Women’s Guild) on women in cooperation at the ICA conference of 1907 which highlighted the newly formed SH.²³⁹ The quote exemplifies the idea of the “natural” role (“her calling”) of women as “house mothers”. The way that this women’s sphere is described is more or less stable, as being a “cornerstone” of a movement aiming at economic systemic change. This idea is reproduced in texts aiming at upgrading and rationalizing housework along with rapid technological change – promoting a progressive attitude to change in the forms of women’s labor, whereas not challenging the relation between women and the domestic sphere itself.²⁴⁰ Domestic work was also described in terms of an inherently gendered knowledge, believing “[t]hat there are many things that a man and a woman can do equally well, but to create and nurture a home, only a woman can do”.²⁴¹ Much of the text material, then, runs along the aims of SH *supporting* housewives in this role:

The incredible price increase of the necessities of life – in some cases even up to 50 percent – which has taken place during the last decade, especially in the larger cities in our country, is especially noticeable for those who take care of the household finances, the housewives. Since in most cases the family father’s income has not increased comparably, it becomes a matter of utmost importance for the housewife how she is able to manage the household money so that she receives not only the most possible but also the best possible.²⁴²

The paragraph provides an example of maximizing the shared identity of the *housewife-as-consumer* and related challenges, while minimizing class difference. As noted in previous research, the role of the housewife could be charged with both empowering and repressive dimensions.²⁴³ This is true also in the case of SH. Although the position of supporting and empowering the housewife is clearly the most present, there are, towards the end of the studied period, some examples of a more disciplinary tone. This slight shift of tone corresponds in time with the appointment of a male editor in 1913 and the increasing number of men writing for the magazine, although these opinions were expressed by both male and female writers: high infant mortality rates are blamed on the “mothers’ incomprehension and

²³⁸ Meddelanden 1910 #1.

²³⁹ Meddelanden 1907 #4.

²⁴⁰ Meddelanden 1915 #4; 17

²⁴¹ Meddelanden 1914 # 1: p. 3, emphasis added.

²⁴² Flyer: “To the housewives of Stockholm!” (1911).

²⁴³ Aléx (1994).

ignorance”.²⁴⁴ Women are described as “quite ignorant” for not “sufficiently realiz[ing] the importance of preparing carefully for the most important of the woman’s tasks, namely to take care of a home.”²⁴⁵ In another text on the negative economic effects of importing foods that could be produced within Sweden, the male author notes that “[i]n not so few cases, the import of these goods probably stems from the housewives’ negligence in utilizing the edible products of the garden and the forest”.²⁴⁶ This tone is reminiscent of the patriarchal disciplinary tendencies within KF at the time.²⁴⁷ But then again, the tone becomes more supportive:

...the Swedish housewife has now proved able to overcome great difficulties. Her extraordinarily demanding, responsible and blessed work in the home during the expensive period has appeared in a clearer light and has begun to be valued more generally. It has been understood that her work is of crucial importance not only for the individual homes, but for the economy of our whole country and the health of our people.²⁴⁸

Thus, we are reminded that the magazine was not a platform for a particular position, but reflected a range of attitudes and ideas. The secondary literature claims that one reason for Anna Whitlock to initiate SH was to reach out to married housewives – generally underrepresented in social movements – and connect them to the movement for women’s suffrage.²⁴⁹ Although this claim might be based on sources outside the grasp of this study, it is surprising to find that the member magazine does not once mention the issue of women’s rights. Indeed, feminist discourse in the sense of political, social and economic equality or justice, is absent. Apart from three ads relating to the women’s movement (i.e. not with SH as the sender)²⁵⁰ there is one exception, a 1907 flyer specifically distributed to participants of a Women’s Course in Municipal Knowledge:

...the various social issues are no longer regarded as something exclusively concerning men. Women have the insight that they too are citizens. They demand the right to participate in the work of the public sphere and strive to jointly educate themselves for their future rights and obligations. They join together in a number of associations and companies. Some of these associations pursue a purely intellectual education as their goal, while others combine this with

²⁴⁴ Meddelanden 1914 #1, p. 5

²⁴⁵ Meddelanden 1914 #4, p. 6.

²⁴⁶ Meddelanden 1915 #2, p. 3.

²⁴⁷ See e.g. Millbourn (1982).

²⁴⁸ Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 9.

²⁴⁹ Nilsson (1955), p. 6, Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 22.

²⁵⁰ 1) Ad from the publisher EOS, displaying “Excellent books”, e.g. about cooperation, the educational publications on cooperation produced by Svenska Hem, pamphlets on women’s suffrage by LKPR and other literature on women’s suffrage (1909 #1). 2) Ad from the magazine Dagny, “the organ of the Swedish women’s movement”, working for the “raising of woman’s standing; politically, socially, economically and morally” (1910 #2). 3) Ad from The National Association for Women’s Suffrage (LKPR), about their new publication. (1912 #1).

practical purposes. Addressing economic injustices is probably the most urgent of the current social problems, and *cooperation* stands for many, as the best way to achieve this goal.²⁵¹

Here we can see several ideas that differ from the overall SH discourse. The formation of a separatist women's institution, a women's public sphere, is related both to women's rights as citizens and to the perceived need for practice in order to inhabit a world to come, where rights will be increasingly substantiated. This discourse is detached from that of the housewife, and resembles the ideas presented by W.E.B. Du Bois in the African American context.²⁵² Apart from this specific message, directly aimed at women with an expressed political engagement, the general discourse relating to women's rights and asset-building is implicit rather than explicit in the SH material. The fact that SH is run by and for women is the message in and of itself. An example that connects these approaches is provided in text by Emilia Broomé, celebrating the resigning general manager Ina Almén. Broomé makes the connection, in rather vague terms, between women's *achievements and capabilities* and the political aspect of women's rights, "as women's work requires increased appreciation and increased opportunities for women to assert their influence in the general development".²⁵³

By focusing on collective action in the name of the common interests of cooperative development – and pointing out these achievements – SH aimed to show that women were indeed capable of "running things". One example of such a strategy was to point to SH as a forerunner and an inspiration to women:

Svenska Hem should thus, in its capacity as a cooperative company, be able to count on housewives' attention. But in addition, there is another circumstance which to some extent should contribute to increased further interest. It is the only cooperative company in the whole world, started by women, led by women and whose members are exclusively women.²⁵⁴

In a similar vein, well-known author and feminist Elin Wägner described Svenska Hem as forerunners "clearing the way" not only for other women, but being the spearhead of the whole cooperative movement:

Sweden can, as we know, not boast of having come very far in cooperative terms as e.g. England or Denmark. But in one respect, Sweden is a pioneering country, namely to the extent that it can show an independent female cooperative effort: Svenska Hem. What is important in this respect is not *that* the women made an effort, but *how* they made it. This is evidenced by such eloquent figures that Svenska Hem, now in its eighth year, owns a membership of around 2,500 housewives from various layers of society and has a [constantly rising] turnover... [T]he last word has not yet been said on the present organization of the food trade ... there are other

²⁵¹ Flyer: "Till deltagarna i Kvinnornas kurs i kommunalkunskap" (1907), emphasis in original.

²⁵² Gordon Nembhard (2014), p. 187.

²⁵³ Kooperationen och Svenska Hem (1913), p. 18.

²⁵⁴ Flyer "To the housewives of Stockholm! (1913)

things to do than to be driven without resistance towards the dreaded point where the mountain of impossibility closes the way. There is a way past, and Svenska Hem, the women's own work, has been involved in clearing it.²⁵⁵

Other examples emphasizing SH as unique to the Swedish cooperative movement, were reported in 1911, when employee Valborg Chron was sent to study the Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Society. Chron was impressed by the achievements of the Scottish movement, but when she told her Scottish comrades that SH “was started, and is managed by only women, this awakened their enormous surprise, as nothing similar was to be shown there”.²⁵⁶ In 1912, it was noticed that SH had been mentioned in the English cooperative press following a study visit in Sweden: “In Stockholm there is a women's cooperative society named Svenska Hem, with over 3000 members, and all of its managers and shop assistants are women”.²⁵⁷

Regarding women and wage labor, it was acknowledged that part of the SH membership consisted of women in wage labor, both unmarried and working class. However, as SH's main point of connection was the role of the housewife, wage labor is not explicitly expressed as something to strive for. A range of positions emerge; from wishing to modernize and rationalize housework,²⁵⁸ lamenting the lost knowledge of previous generations of housewives,²⁵⁹ proposals of a new type of educated “home nurse” paid by the hour (that would replace the full time maid or servant).²⁶⁰ As we have seen, for Anna Whitlock, (consumer) cooperation was a suitable arena of work for women as technology lessened the burden for housewives. Some texts explicitly oppose women in wage labor and “the danger that would lie in the woman being dragged away from home” since “[c]aring for the home ... is a woman's societal duty, not her only, but well her most important”.²⁶¹

[If women] voluntarily go out in search of money in other areas of work, [this] may eventually lead to *the dissolution of the home*. We see daily how women's eyes are increasingly opened to the social and economic benefits that are available to them outside the home, and in the near future all working women will probably apply for such jobs, if not a renewal of housework and its value takes place. Under transformed and improved conditions, most women would work at home, which they love.²⁶²

In addition to reproducing the naturalized bond between women and the domestic sphere, writer Ester Norén describes working outside the home as a choice which rendered invisible

²⁵⁵ Kooperationen och Svenska Hem (1913), p. 26.

²⁵⁶ Meddelanden 1911 #3, p. 11.

²⁵⁷ Meddelanden 1912 #4, p. 15.

²⁵⁸ Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 17.

²⁵⁹ Meddelanden 1914 #1, p. 3.

²⁶⁰ Meddelanden 1913 #3, p. 3.

²⁶¹ Meddelanden 1914 #1, p. 3, emphasis added.

²⁶² Meddelanden 1913 #3: p. 7, emphasis added.

most working class women that had to earn money outside the home in order to feed their families. Worth noting is that Norén also offers the only instance of responsabilization of men is in relation to domestic work. Starting from the observation that in the future, industrial and economic transformations will make servants and maids redundant:

It is the homes as well as the schools that should ... prepare children to meet such a future. *Both boys and girls* should, from the earliest childhood, be raised to self-help in the home which will strengthen their physical forces and their faith in themselves.²⁶³

When describing the practice of SH, feminine ideals (often implicitly bourgeois)²⁶⁴ were sometimes invoked to articulate the specificity of the cooperative. For example, the stores are repeatedly referred to as more tidy, pleasant, hospitable, tasteful, hygienic and homely than other stores at the time.²⁶⁵ Organizationally, the management repeated female virtues of being *careful* in relation to the cooperative's expansion.²⁶⁶ In a text articulating the vision of expanding the coordination and production related to berries, fruit and home industries, Ina Almén formulated what she saw as a particularly female contribution to political economy, to value "the small results, the small merit ... the saying that many small streams make a big river".²⁶⁷ Taking advantage of such small streams, taking care of nature's gifts and organizing a decentralized network of home industries (rather than large scale centralized industrial production) was suitable for women, because "[w]e women generally move in smaller conditions".²⁶⁸ In a similar vein, Elin Wägner writes about SH's "own particularly feminine way of applying ... the principles of cooperation", notably "the great unpretentiousness with which one began", with a "managing director receiv[ing] visits to a storage room, sitting on a sugar box".²⁶⁹ Another way of nurturing community among members was to joke about stereotypes. In 1909, Ina Almén reported the quantities sold of the most popular products:

"[T]hat we sold 14,500 kg of coffee is not something to be surprised about; we are a specifically female company, and coffee is the comforter and enjoyment par préférence. But 11 kg of coffee on average – that covers many moments of joy and quite a lot of gastritis."²⁷⁰

Wrapping up the report, she writes: "[b]ut enough now with the numbers; numbers are considered boring, and especially women are said to hate them".²⁷¹

²⁶³ Meddelanden 1913 #3: p. 7, emphasis added.

²⁶⁴ See e.g. Blomqvist (2017) for a different perspective on working-class women's participation in protest movements related to food.

²⁶⁵ Nilsson (1995), p. 32.

²⁶⁶ Kooperationen och Svenska Hem (1913), p. 26.

²⁶⁷ Meddelanden 1910 #4, p. 11.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Kooperationen och Svenska Hem (1913), p. 27.

²⁷⁰ Meddelanden 1909 #4, p. 34.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

5.3.2 Ideas about class

Although the housewife remains central in the narrative, several ways and conditions of female life are acknowledged in the material; the married housewife and the married female industrial worker, the unmarried clerk or secretary, the female teacher, the socially engaged and the educated woman, the fortunate and the poor, the matron and the maid.²⁷²

However, the “we”, the sender or the imagined receiver, seems most often to be speaking *about* rather than *with*, the working class member. One subtle example is when the editor asks members to send in their favourite recipes:

It can be a dish that stands out for its delicacy, or one that is practical and cheap, yet good and nutritious – *keep in mind that we have members in all financial situations*. It can e.g. be a wise piece of advice on how to use leftovers from this or that, or a little hint of a neat detail when arranging the dinner table or serving the food. Everything can be welcomed.²⁷³

Other examples include dramatized texts of housewives talking to one another about the working conditions of store clerks, clearly separating their position from “these girls”, working hard to realize the housewives’ Christmas plans. Statements such as “I have gotten to know some clerks” gives an image of otherwise deep class divisions and gives the impression that the text is not meant for the store clerk, i.e. readers with working-class jobs.²⁷⁴

Although maintaining that SH was a cooperative of women from “all” or “different” social classes or strata (samhällslager), there was simultaneously an outspoken understanding that the bulk of the members were positioned in the middle and upper classes:

[Our] growth shows that the economically and socially sound and auspicious basic ideas that underlie cooperation are gaining more and more dissemination and appreciation also among the bourgeois circles in our capital.²⁷⁵

As another example, the 1915 Annual Report comments that the relatively stable results given the tumultuous markets “should be seen as a significant victory for cooperation, of importance perhaps not least because it was carried mainly by the educated and economically more fortunate layers of society”.²⁷⁶ Thus, the purchasing power of the membership is expressed as an asset to the cooperative as a whole – and in turn the promotion of the cooperative idea as such – while the same purchasing power in other respects, as we have seen, compromised some of the democratic principles of the cooperative.

²⁷² Meddelanden 1909 #4, p. 33.

²⁷³ Meddelanden 1910 #1.

²⁷⁴ Meddelanden 1912 #4, p. 60, emphasis in original.

²⁷⁵ Meddelanden 1909 #3.

²⁷⁶ Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 30.

Another aspect of representation relates to the different opportunities for social engagement related to class. In a text about the KF Women's Guild, its secretary Agnes Jonsson gives a perspective of a growing movement carried by working class women "whose time is extremely busy with household management, children and home care in general and perhaps also with work outside the home."²⁷⁷ Apart from Jonsson's article, the perspective of different conditions for engagement, and working-class perspectives more generally, are absent in SH's text material.

Throughout the whole period, there is an assumption that most members have access to a country house and that they spend long summer holidays there. This is visible in most of the spring issues of the magazine when tips and requests are articulated directly to the members planning to leave the city for the summer. The message was further reinforced in a 1912 issue, where management reports that the staff had used the summer weeks, due to their significantly decreased business activity, to make repairs and other updates to the stores.²⁷⁸ Considering that most workers (e.g. the SH staff) had no more than 8-14 days of paid vacation during a whole year, this recurring positionality of the country home owning housewife is a telling one. Regarding the actual food, the higher profit margin of luxurious products affected which products were highlighted to the members:

Regarding the upcoming dinners, we have filled our stock with such delicacies as rooster combs, turtle meat and turtle soup. We have also brought in some new kinds of foie gras and mushrooms, as well as French peas, which are considered by many cooks to be indispensable for a finer dinner. ... We still welcome orders for foie gras en croûte and Russian caviar.²⁷⁹

Other examples show that bulk products such as oats and grains were amongst the most popular, and there are certainly texts that recognize differing material conditions and related challenges. In a transcribed lecture on "rational cleaning" Kerstin Hesselgren addresses the fact that hygiene and cleaning constitute bigger challenges where apartments are small, where houses are built tightly together, where many people live in the same apartment, and in apartments several floors up. Other difficulties are due to bad architectural planning, which in turn is related to a lack of applied scientific research on hygiene. Thus, the blame for bad hygiene and related health issues is not put on the women themselves but on structural issues, in a discourse otherwise saturated with ideas of capability (*duglighet*).²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Meddelanden 1913 #2, p. 5.

²⁷⁸ Meddelanden 1912 #3.

²⁷⁹ Meddelanden 1913 #1, p. 20.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

In some texts there is a very explicit class positionality, crossing the line of contempt for working-class tasks. Here, “[r]aising, teaching, and overseeing a maid is time-consuming, patience-demanding, and tiring” and housewives are described as “ashamed to do the homework, which includes quite a lot of physical labor”.²⁸¹ Although the text is concerned with raising the value of housework and proposing the, at the time, progressive idea of an hourly wage for educated maids or “home nurses” (hemsköterskor), it is clear that the intended reader is the housewife with maids or servants – not the maid. In a text focusing on the technological development, a similar position is taken:

Now you have e.g. heat conduction, gas, electric light, a vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, elevator, telephone, etc. etc. and all this means that you can more or less stand independent of servants. You have no fires to light, no stove to light, no lamps to fill, no carpets and furniture to whip, everything can be done by pressing and turning buttons, and in addition you can by phone request the groceries you need and have them sent to the kitchen. It seems that not much would be left for a maid to do in such a modernly furnished home.²⁸²

Yet there are numerous expressions of the ideal of class collaboration through cooperation, nurturing solidarity. In the text “Affinity”, chair Emilia Broomé writes that she is “convinced that it is precisely such collaboration which needs to take place between the various classes of society – cooperation to remedy injustice and to mutually assist each other”.²⁸³ Elin Wägner gives us another formulation of justice, as well as displays a general absence of antagonism that characterizes this form of cooperative anti-capitalism:

... as a lay person, it seems that cooperation is a means of successfully outsmarting capital, depriving it of its fatal qualities and letting it – as has never happened before – serve the beautiful slogan: “Us well and no one bad” [Oss väl och ingen illa]. Yes, it seems that in the present society it would be the preacher in the desert who will teach and prepare us for a time when togetherness will have permeated all of us, and when effort and profit will be in fair proportion to each other.²⁸⁴

The paragraph is dense with meaning. Capital is to be “outsmarted”, not fought antagonistically. Cooperation is meant to also outsmart class exploitation by building a system where no one gains on behalf of someone else’s loss. But simultaneously, justice is defined as a relation between “effort” or “input” (in Swedish, “insats”), not as equality in outcome related to needs or preconditions.

In sum, although there is an awareness of different living conditions – indeed, cooperation was invoked as the best way to address social inequalities and injustices – and the

²⁸¹ Meddelanden 1913 #3; p. 3.

²⁸² Meddelanden 1915 #3, p. 20.

²⁸³ Meddelanden 1909 #2, p. 29.

²⁸⁴ Kooperationen och Svenska Hem (1913), p. 26, emphasis added.

narratives are heterogenous, the overall voice of the member magazine carries the positionality of middle and upper class women. This renders working-class needs, experiences and interests – as well as instances of class and colonial exploitation – invisible. Contrary to Maria Wessel’s pronounced role to represent working-class interests in the SH board, there is no equivalent representation of voices in the member magazine. It is likely that this positioning had the effect of alienating working-class women as it was not speaking directly to their needs or experiences.

5.3.3 Separatism: collaboration or antagonism

Although SH experienced fierce resistance seemingly motivated both by economic competition and misogyny, they remained thoroughly non-antagonistic in their relation to, or expressions about, men. Although not specifically related to SH, Anna Whitlock’s speech at the International Suffrage Congress in Stockholm 1911 perhaps gives us a clue: “[w]e don’t want anyone to give up their seat for us, we merely wish to expand the limits”.²⁸⁵ This is in fact also what happened as SH merged with KF: four seats were added to the managing council. Elin Wägner articulates several key perspectives regarding both different modes of women’s separatism and its relation to men (where KF represents a man):

Svenska Hem does not want to be isolated in any way, the leaders realize very well that within cooperation, in its truest sense, cooperation between men and women is needed. Svenska Hem also belongs to KF and wants to be part of it. One might then think that a purely female company like Svenska Hem therefore did not have its significance in this capacity but only the importance that a well-managed cooperative always has. But I think that precisely when it comes to winning over women, especially middle-class women, to the cooperative ideas, Svenska Hem has done a job that only it could have done in its capacity as a women's company, and will do even more. Say what you will, but women have begun to feel a certain solidarity among themselves, and this has led them to Svenska Hem...²⁸⁶

Like Wägner indicates, SH had close relations with parts of the KF leadership from the start. KF Women’s Guild secretary Agnes Jonsson admits in her article that the idea of a separate Women’s Guild within KF was met with varying levels of support from men within the movement:

In some places, it was understood that one should appreciate the value of women’s participation. It was realized that the existence or non-existence of cooperation depended largely on women, which is why the small organizations were nurtured in every way. But in other places, it was difficult to get used to working with women; their organizations were considered redundant, and the small guild did not receive the support it initially needed. This

²⁸⁵ Björk & Kaijser (2005), p. 194.

²⁸⁶ Kooperationen och Svenska Hem (1913), p. 26.

indifference, which is often shown by men when it comes to women's contribution to social movements, seems like a hindrance when we begin to take our first steps to accomplish something together.²⁸⁷

The resistance described by Jonson serves as a backdrop as to why SH started in the first place. On the other hand, Wagner's emphasis on collaboration is in stark contrast to leading women's rights leaders in the US at the time, who, indeed separatist, believed that "[w]oman must lead the way to her own enfranchisement [and] not put her trust in man in this transition period, since while regarded as his subject, his inferior, his slave, their interests must be antagonistic".²⁸⁸ The merger with KF, not covered by the primary material, uncovers a range of relevant questions related to the questions of separatism, antagonism, collaboration and transition periods, but further exploring such questions falls outside the scope of this paper.

5.3.4 The collectivities of solidarity

Besides the centering of middle and upper class voices in the magazine, it is possible that the ambivalent communication regarding class was an expression of the tensions of aiming at, on the one hand, solving social problems of inequality "for the wider strata" through cooperation and, on the other hand, running a business enterprise subject to the crass reality that some members yielded a higher return on investments than others.

As bringing down food prices, and the costs of living in a broader sense, is described as the main economic aim of SH – and a way for consumers to act in solidarity with each other – this was indeed also a main theme in the written material. The magazine consistently and thoroughly describes why some prices were changing (usually becoming more expensive), which included extensive explanations of how prices relate to both political economy such as international trade, capitalist businesses teaming up to monopolize markets and cooperative federations "blowing up" corporate trusts and cartels, leading to lower prices. Other texts educate the reader by investigating *if* prices are changing over time, and if so, how much.²⁸⁹ As prices go up, cooperatives have to look for ways to make clear to their members that the food would have been even more expensive without them. When this is difficult they can point to the total sums returned to members in the form of dividends and interest on share capital.²⁹⁰ In this sense, the magazine – beyond its mission to spread the gospel of cooperation – worked hard to educate consumers, supposedly in their best interest.

²⁸⁷ Meddelanden 1913 #2, p. 4.

²⁸⁸ Freedman (1979, p.; 516, emphasis added.

²⁸⁹ Meddelanden 1911 #4.

²⁹⁰ Meddelanden 1911 #4, p. 16.

As summarized in the text “Thrift” by Gertrud Bergström,²⁹¹ cooperation is but one of many ways to bring down prices. For individual households, planning purchases and organizing the housework in general is another, using time-saving technology a third, as well as organizing your home in a way to make space for storage, in turn enabling larger purchases, etc. This theme also takes the form of information about nutrition in relation to price and kinds of food, tips on how to replace expensive products with cheaper ones, ways of saving money through saving energy (gas, firewood, electricity) while cooking and cleaning, ways of saving time in the housework, using and preserving foods that can be found in forests and fields, making sure that nothing goes to waste and planning the housework – as working at night requires extra costs for light.²⁹² The focus on lowering prices is related not only to the financial and social aims of the consumer cooperative movement but to the idea professed by some strands of the movement, that *consumers constitute a collectivity with a shared interest*. And as the consumer – in cooperative economic theory as in SH – coincides with the housewife, this shared interest forms the discursive basis relating to notions such as solidarity (solidaritet), affinity (sanhörighet), collaboration (samverkan), and the like.

Although the statement that all people share the interest of lowering the costs of life is true in some crude – or highly abstract – sense, the *maximizing* of the consumer and the housewife as community at best *minimizes*, at worst ignores or wishes away, real structures of class conflict and exploitation (certainly including the modernity/coloniality ideology and practice which falls outside of this study). Despite the sincere wish to address social problems like poverty, inequality and unjust economic flows, relations of exploitation and coercion are never quite addressed. One of the most crystallized expressions of this approach of the common interest, is found in a quote by the Swiss Dr H. Müller:

Consumption is something universal and consumer interest is therefore also a common economic interest for all classes and estates. The poor as well as the rich, the worker as well as the capitalist, the merchant as well as the civil servant – they all want, when making purchases to satisfy their needs, to obtain good, unadulterated and valuable goods for their money. It is therefore incorrect to regard the consumer associations as class establishments or to artificially make them such.²⁹³

These are interesting statements, considering that the first cooperatives were clearly working-class establishments, with working-class interests, and that one of the main goals of the international cooperative movement was the displacement of capitalism. The ideology as

²⁹¹ Meddelanden 1914 #2, p. 3.

²⁹² Meddelanden 1915 #4, p. 8.

²⁹³ Meddelanden 1911 #2, p. 7.

articulated by Müller seems to be one articulated more often by liberal political economists and social reformers than by cooperators themselves. It rests on the assumption that class conflict or relations of exploitation would somehow cease to exist within the consumer cooperative movement if the common interest of consumers can instill the *feeling* of solidarity or affinity with other consumers. Similar thoughts are expressed in a quote by German Dr B. Harms, who points out that lowering the costs of living is also in the interest of the employer, as salaries won't have to be raised to the same extent.²⁹⁴

In their own texts, SH does not express the type of “extreme” position proposed by Müller and Harms, but it is expressed in more subtle forms. The most prominent is that the cooperative form eliminates a) private profit and the exploitation happening through capitalist ownership and b) the incentive to cheat with quality and weight, when the customers themselves are the owners. The basic idea was that no one gains anything on someone else's behalf, and that otherwise conflicting interests can be brought into a harmonious common good. Thus, “[t]he benefits that the individual receives [in cooperative associations] not only accrue to himself, they also benefit all the other members”, and “[a]s [the individual] strives to improve his own position, he also helps his fellow human beings”.²⁹⁵

However, although the idea that a common interest to some degree rendered invisible relations of exploitation, they simultaneously seemed to rest on a genuine ambition to “build away” (rather than negotiate, like e.g. labor unions) the greedy capitalist as a function in the economy. Likewise, the individualistic and competitive abstract homo economicus model for economic behavior and the associated culture of capitalism would disappear.²⁹⁶ This ambition or threat was certainly taken seriously by the private businesses using highly aggressive tactics to destroy cooperation, including SH. Further; it is important to note the analytical connection between the organizational meso level and the view of the single organization as a potential *model* for society as a whole. When speaking about “the common good” or “the common interest”, it seems to refer to the members of the particular organization but simultaneously projects such a logic onto a larger social whole.

The idea of a common interest and practical association bridging difference is implicitly related to the principle of political neutrality. In some contexts, “political” referred to political parties, in others it is understood more broadly. One “cooperative quote” e.g. points to cooperation's ability to foster collaboration that can replace individualism and

²⁹⁴ Meddelanden 1913 #1.

²⁹⁵ Meddelanden 1910 #3.

²⁹⁶ Flyer (1909).

competition and bring people of different political and religious views together to cooperate for the common good.²⁹⁷ As expressed by a Mr. A. Ribot, “[t]he more they understand how to stay out of class disputes, the political and religious discussions, the faster the development of cooperative associations will take place.²⁹⁸ In this quote, there might be a clue as to why there is such a speaking silence around women’s rights in the SH material. In the cooperative’s own material, the position of political neutrality is mentioned explicitly only once and tellingly, regarding the magazine itself:

We hope that the ‘*Messages from Svenska Hem*’ will eventually develop into a real organ for the cooperative movement by, without political positioning, announcing the achievements of this movement at home and abroad, new ideas in the cooperative area, etc.²⁹⁹

In describing the internal organization of KF, Anders Örne explains that opponents of cooperation have begun charging KF for being a political organization and his response is that such accusation has “not the slightest hint of justification” as “[c]ooperation in Sweden – as in England, Germany, Switzerland and most other countries – is a purely economic movement with the sole purpose of safeguarding consumers’ best interests”.³⁰⁰ Örne later reports from the British Cooperative Union congress in 1914, the importance of maintaining the “absolute neutrality of the movement”, but adds that the cooperators themselves should be encouraged, as it was a “duty of every citizen to participate practically in state and municipal politics”.³⁰¹ Even if cooperation has its roots in a critique of capitalist political economy as supposedly “value free”, and the forming of a “new moral economy”, economy as such was not defined as political. A key here is in the focus on a collective and practice-based transformation of habits – “the long revolution”:

[The cooperative associations] eventually bring about a peaceful transformation of people’s mindset, habits and upbringing. Without violence, they contribute to the creation of a new order of things, based on freedom, initiative and the capacity for self-government.³⁰²

However, the distinction is not so easy to make. In writing about the explicitly socialist cooperatives of Paris, contradictions emerge as the political affinity affects *how* to organize the “politically neutral” activities of a cooperative: how to organize the internal democracy, how to distribute profits and so on.³⁰³ Ideologically informed organizational choices were pointed out as obstacles to a stronger expansion. In other texts in the magazine, it is pointed

²⁹⁷ Meddelanden 1912 #3.

²⁹⁸ Meddelanden 1912 #2.

²⁹⁹ Meddelanden 1912 #1: p. 3.

³⁰⁰ Meddelanden 1912 #4, p. 12.

³⁰¹ Meddelanden 1914 #4, p. 71.

³⁰² Meddelanden 1912 #2.

³⁰³ Meddelanden 1911 #4: p. 4.

out that the cooperative federations in countries marked by a strict following of the rule of political neutrality tend to grow much bigger.³⁰⁴

Another formulation relating to shared interest, is that “the expensive times” (dyrtiderna) indeed were a real challenge not only for working class families, but also for the middle classes. As Hirdman shows, also a middle class family with a more expensive apartment, could live on the verge of starvation.³⁰⁵ The idea that is transmitted could be understood as middle and upper class households learning the techniques and related values rooted in collectivity developed within the working class:

Where the lonely one can do nothing, the many who work together, who *cooperate*, succeed. *Association* has also become the solution of today, but this movement is no untried novelty. In many areas it has long asserted itself, whether the aspirations have been for spiritual elevation or material improvements. ... Until now, it has mainly been the physical laborers’ domain to realize the educational influence of these associations and their importance as a strong lever for economic emergence. However, it is by no means the physical laborers alone who are pressed by the expensive times. Within *all classes*, the price increase is noticeable. Wages are usually fixed, while year after year the necessities of life command a higher price.³⁰⁶

Considering the literature emphasizing middle class reformers aiming to “civilize” the working class, there is a switch of perspectives hinted at in the material. Underlying actions of solidarity, in contrast with individualist competition for private gain at the expense of others, is the sense of *affinity* (samhörighet). Considering the general class positionality of SH, it is interesting first to notice that rather than “civilizing” or doing good *for* the working-class women, it seems as if part of the SH mission was rather to promote working-class values within the middle and upper classes. There are passages in the material that describe bourgeois people as more individualistic in disposition,³⁰⁷ whereas the working class – both by working together and by organizing for improved conditions – was perceived to have developed a *stronger sense of solidarity*.³⁰⁸ It is precisely this sense of solidarity that SH wishes to promote. Such an interpretation makes sense also when returning to the several expressions of pride in expanding the cooperative interest amongst “the fortunate and the educated”. As promoting cooperation meant promoting certain values and a social sense of affinity, reaching more people amongst the more privileged could only be a good thing:

³⁰⁴ Meddelanden 1913 #2.

³⁰⁵ Hirdman (1983), p. 33.

³⁰⁶ Flyer (1906), emphasis in original.

³⁰⁷ Meddelanden 1909 #4, p. 27.

³⁰⁸ See e.g. Meddelanden 1909 #2, p. 29.

That the cooperative idea that emerged from the working class and for a long time was embraced with warm interest, is now starting to win enthusiastic supporters here in other sections of society as well, is a gratifying sign of the times...³⁰⁹

So, which were the collectivities invoked in the use of terms such as solidarity or affinity? As Liedman remarks, solidarity is an immensely flexible and vague concept, powerful yet elusive, and carrying many different meanings.³¹⁰ In formulations claiming that joining Svenska Hem is “an opportunity ... to show solidarity in action”³¹¹, it seems to arouse a kind of open-ended engagement. The imagined community of solidarity in action however, remains unclear, or rather, multiple. There are simultaneously several intersecting communities at stake – women as economic agents and organizers, housewives as isolated yet founding members of the nation, consumers forming a community that transcends class conflict, cooperators promoting social justice and international peace, society as an organic whole in which everyone is interdependent.³¹²

7 Summary and concluding discussion

This thesis started from an interest in investigating separatist cooperation as an organizational and economic strategy for simultaneously addressing multiple forms of alienation and inequality. To this end, I have interpreted arguments, practices and choices of The Women’s Cooperative Society Svenska Hem, active in Stockholm 1905-1916. Putting the case in relation to the analytical tradition of social and economic reconstruction, the term separatist cooperation has been conceptualized and contextualized. Using de-alienation as an overarching theme, the three strategies of democratic participation, asset-building, and narrative representation have been abductively derived to structure the analysis. In order to render visible power dimensions that cut through the three main themes/strategies, a critical close reading inspired by intersectionality has constituted an additional perspective. The critical reading has emphasized implicit and explicit ideas about gender and class, as well as forms of group solidarity. After summarizing the main findings, I will discuss some theoretical reflections and potential further research.

³⁰⁹ Meddelanden 1909 #2, p. 29.

³¹⁰ Meddelanden 1910 #3.

³¹¹ Flygblad “Till deltagarna i Kvinnornas kurs i kommunalkunskap” (1907).

³¹² See Liedman (1999).

7.1 Three strategies of de-alienation

7.1.1 Democratic participation

Regarding forms for member influence, SH had thorough mechanisms for formal internal democracy. There were also ways for members to continuously interact with management in the form of feedback and proposals. Democratic co-ownership was not only framed as a matter of democracy, but also as a means to promote fairness and honesty, cancelling the interest to make a profit by cheating. Access to positions of leadership were formally in place, but power remained rather concentrated to the board and no active work for educating or recruiting members, be they younger or working-class, is visible in the material. This lack of strategies for regeneration and the broadening of knowledge was potentially a constraint for the development of the organization. The composition of members, board and Educational Committee remained over-represented by middle and upper class members which is related to recurring class bias reflected in arguments, practices and choices. At the same time, working-class representation in the board made a significant impact on the development of the organization, making SH more relevant to working-class women. The organization of the member magazine did not abide by the principle of women's separatism, as an increasing number of men participated both as writers and editors. Although factors external to the organization were also likely to have affected the content of the magazine, the increasing presence of men corresponds with subtle shifts in the tone, tending more towards disciplining housewives, voicing a less enthusiastic sense of collective women's engagement, and more articles reproduced from other magazines. The organization of the EC was subject to a significant centralization, from a large group of members to gradually coinciding with the board. There are signs that stores affiliated to wealthier members and areas were prioritized, partly because these generated more return on investment, i.e. the purchasing power embedded in consumption was a constraint for democratic expansion.

7.1.2 Asset-building

In terms of economic capital, using women and housewives as a maximized identity enabled a bridging of values drawn from working-class culture into a social sphere of wealthy and socially engaged women who could provide more capital than other cooperatives at the time. This proved vital for the launch, survival and growth of the first years. Social energy, most likely related to the combination of cooperation and separatism, is described as an asset generating interest and solidity. Significant attempts at redistribution aiming to benefit

working-class members is exemplified by the decision to lower all prices at the cost of lower net profits and thus member/employee dividends. SH employed 60 people, most of whom were women, and valued transparent and decent working conditions. A company of this size, where women inhabited all positions, was unique at this time. Some standard cooperative principles, such as an instituted interest rate on share capital, potentially had regressive effects given the differences in wealth amongst members. SH prices made high quality food available to more people, but stayed beyond reach of lower working-class families. The intersection of geography and class, along with the SH policy to keep the same prices in all stores, made SH more expensive than other stores in the working-class district of Södermalm, but cheaper than other stores in wealthy Lidingö. A decentralized system of home industries and in-store production related to berries, fruit and vegetables emerged, providing rural women with additional income and local products to other members. Accumulated economic capital was also used in order to support KF as well as the relief efforts during the war.

In terms of social capital, leading SH members were already part of influential social networks which contributed to the launch and success of the cooperative. Discursively, SH worked actively in the member magazine to promote values such as solidarity, affinity and cohesion. Part of the alienation addressed regarded women's isolation and separation, and a related lack of practice in collective organizing. The growing membership also challenged the initial sense of collective engagement and personal interaction, and this development was countered by instituting local councils attached to each store. As for human capital, the simultaneous educational ambitions of supporting housewives and spreading the gospel of cooperation permeated the activities from start to finish. The Educational Committee produced an impressive number of publications and educational events for both members, staff, and the public. Like other cooperators, the initiating members had to learn by doing, although many of them were experienced organizers from the start. Analyzing SH lends general support to existing research that shows that cooperatives can provide structures both for occupational advancement and that leaders move on to become leaders in the community. Different forms of capital accumulated were integrated and exchanged, e.g. economic capital to human and social capital, media capital to economic capital, etc. However, considering the signs of class bias and democratic constraints, limits the claims of such positive effects that would extend to "women of all classes" and the broader membership. The combined capital was indeed necessary and sufficient to withstand the boycott motivated both by economic and patriarchal factors, but it was not sufficient to, as such, stop the dissolving of SH after the merger with KF.

7.1.3 Narrative representation

Rather than classifying SH as promoting a certain feminist tradition or strategy, it is best described in terms of a space of negotiating seemingly contradictory positions through the collective doing of a perceived common need. The general absence of a women's rights discourse – and the focus on the effects of a collective doing rather than ideological positioning – can be interpreted as in alignment with the cooperative ideal of “political neutrality”. However, the material is ripe with ambivalence and paradox, often naturalizing and collapsing the role of women with the domestic sphere, and the role of the housewife with the consumer as the “cornerstone of the cooperative building”. Housewives are given empowering support in their everyday challenges, but are also disciplined and blamed. SH was often described by words that implied a particularly female way of doing things and, as a women's public sphere, this specific women's culture could bring “female values to bear on the entire society”. Though acknowledging women's differing conditions, it is clear that the intended reader was a middle or upper-class woman. Texts are sometimes marked by a benevolent inclusion of working-class women, and at other times cross the line of contempt for servants, maids or physical labor as such. On the other hand, the working-class was ascribed with having a more developed sense of solidarity – through collective labor and union organizing for their rights – than the individualistic middle and upper classes. These are values that SH sought to promote to the upper classes, through cooperation. The pronounced goal was social affinity, but a general focus on class collaboration simultaneously invisibilized real class conflict and exploitation. There was no visible, equivalent representation of working-class interests and perspectives in the organization of printed materials and it is likely that the overall perspectives and interests emerging from the official prints contributed to alienating (potential) working-class members.

As previously mentioned, the term separatism was not used by SH. Indeed, the founding idea itself, of running a cooperative exclusively by and for women, was not shared by all initial members. Some texts express a thoroughly non-antagonistic rhetoric, well in line with the general ideals of affinity and collaboration. The focus lies in describing SH as a women's collective achievement related to the role of the housewife rather than as a vehicle for promoting equal rights. Private capitalists, however, do constitute a clearly antagonistic force, but one that is to be “outsmarted” and “built away” rather than negotiated with. A primary collectivity of solidarity invoked is that of the consumer. An underlying idea is that

the pressures of “the expensive times” were shared by all, thus, a clear focus throughout the period is on lowering the costs of living in various ways.

7.2 Theoretical reflections

Using a theoretical framework drawn from social and economic reconstruction, the study has, beyond developing tools of this case study analysis, attempted to (re)connect the strategies of cooperation and separatism with long-term collective “utopian realism”. Adding critical perspectives inspired by intersectionality, it has aimed at producing a nuanced analysis of multiple dimensions of power at stake in organizing alternative institutions. The strengths of this strategy has been the possibility to grasp, structure and articulate complex and intersecting processes of power and inequality. A weakness has been its general wide range, making the empirical process sprawling and time-consuming. It would be interesting to apply the model developed in this study to a different case, and further discuss its applicability for contributing to understanding de-alienating organizational strategies.

The concept of separatist cooperation has potential to promote further studies of cases fitting the description developed in this study. A strength of the concept is that it describes a specific organizational strategy addressing multiple forms of power, connected both to addressing everyday needs and long-term systemic change. A weakness is the limits of the term “separatism”. As we have seen in this study, separatism didn’t accurately capture the actual practices of SH, although they called themselves a women’s cooperative. On the other hand, such permeability has constituted part of the analysis. Further, the structural conditions related to de-alienation, exploitation and discrimination vary to such a degree between instances of separatist cooperation so that the question should be asked – to what extent can they be analytically compared?

7.3 Potential questions for further research

During the work process of unpacking Svenska Hem through it’s member magazine, a number of questions beyond the scope of this study have emerged. Several of these deserve further research in order to get a more precise, nuanced and grounded understanding of different aspects of Svenska Hem, its members, its relation to other actors and its strategies for dealing with various challenges and crises. Some examples are:

- The relationship and interaction between SH and KF, the KF Women’s Guild in particular. Such a study could be attached to the theoretical question of comparing different modes of group organizing – inside or outside a larger “general” movement.

- The KF Women’s Guild is in itself worthy of further study – compared with the English cooperative literature, where the Women’s Guilds have been studied in depth, the Swedish Women’s Guilds are quite invisible in the academic literature.
- An additional dimension to the term “separatist cooperation” not treated in this thesis, is the expanded meaning it carries in the relation between the structurally subordinate group, and the surrounding hegemonic society or organization. Asset-building and de-alienating strategies in relation to the possible integration of a separatist organization into a larger “general” whole, governed by a dominant or hegemonic group, is an area ripe with questions that seem as acute today as in 1916. The case of SH and KF has to be defined as an example of when such integration failed, if the aim was to expand women’s decision-making power and affect the larger organization. At the same time, SH momentarily achieved a seemingly more significant formal influence over KF management than did The KF Women’s Guild. A comparative study looking at different cases of similar attempts of “integration” could be highly relevant in terms of understanding more about which conditions, terms of negotiation and strategies affecting the chances of expanding group leverage and influence. To this sphere belongs the idea of “transition period” in relation to accumulating various forms of capital.³¹³ A relevant contemporary example is the Kurdish Women’s Movement, which has developed distinct forms for women’s representation and decision-making, including shared leadership with men on key positions, and Women’s Councils integrated into the whole organizational structure charged with the mandate to veto all decisions of any equivalent general committees.³¹⁴
- Looking closer at Svenska Hem and the history of Swedish cooperative movement from a *decolonial* perspective would be a highly relevant project. European cooperation expanded as part of colonial and racist imperialism, and the associated world view was often embedded in Swedish social movements at the time.³¹⁵

³¹³ Freedman (1979), p. 517.

³¹⁴ Dirik & Staal (2015), p. 50.

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