

## Chapter 6 : The nation state

*One country, one people, one religion.*  
Sweden (1914-1945)

The Swedish kings had for 1000 years legitimized their rule through religion, ancient authorities, more recent state philosophy, military successes & their illustrious ancestry, but not actually by being Swedish. The ideology of the French Revolution & the national mindset changed all this, but slowly. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a gradual transition from feudal to civic national sentiment.

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### A. BACKGROUND

I distinguish between state and nation. The state is the area controlled militarily by the central power. The Nation is the area with which the population feels affinity. The contemporary ideal is that these coincide in a nation state.<sup>1</sup> Before the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were states but no "national feeling". However, there was a corresponding "regional feeling". For example, the border provinces concluded their own peace agreements and the inhabitants identified themselves as "småläningar", "dalkarlar", "jämtläningar", etc. Loyalty to the state was conditional. The regions were amenable as long as it was to their advantage. Otherwise they must be bought.<sup>2</sup> It was only after the Union's dissolution that Sweden lost its sense of itself being a union of regions and became a nation state for real. Below is a sketch of how the Swedish national sentiment developed. Every 100 years something new is introduced. The subject is a historic kitchen midden:

- 16<sup>th</sup> century : The theocratic state = a God, a king, a people. "As in heaven so also on earth."
- 17<sup>th</sup> century : Common ancestry of the Goths
- 18<sup>th</sup> century : The country's proud history & the moral superiority of its inhabitants
- 19<sup>th</sup> century: The unreflective sense of cultural affinity, sense of participation in a historical heritage & sense of the country's nature and beauty.
- 20<sup>th</sup> century: One race, one language, one mentality.
- 21<sup>st</sup> century: Modernity, Solidarity & Participation. Everyone is loyal to the system by being involved in it.

It is not clear how such a multi-faceted process can be understood. The literature is a morass & a sample of approaches. The most common approach is an evolutionary model: Anarchy-feudal state-nation state, but with local features. "The Cambridge History of Scandinavia"<sup>3</sup> describes the Swedish development as the French Revolution's ideas of national sentiment being identical to civic spirit both required the country to come to terms with its past -

<sup>1</sup> Gellner 1983; Smith 1986; Anderson 1992; Hobsbawm 1994

<sup>2</sup> Eriksson 1949; Lerbom 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Pettersson 2016.

autocracy, the civil society & the military state, and with its contemporary counterparts - monarchism, peasant worship & hating Russia, and accepting its small state status. Which seems to be today's consensus. The Swedish nation building is considered over. The ambition of a Nordic superstate has long been off the agenda. The 1809 borders have been accepted as "natural". The king has done his duty. He should leave. Preferably voluntarily.

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## B. NATIONAL SENTIMENT - THEORY

Since the theories about the state, the nation and national sentiment are designed to legitimize the modern nation state, it has been difficult to extrapolate them forward or backwards in time. To include the feudal state, I start with the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century debate about corporate or organic statehood.<sup>4</sup> To include the present, I start with modern sociology. The terminology below limps, but hopefully it is understandable:

- Feudal national sentiment (chauvinism, patriotism, patriotism) is an instrumental relationship to the state or establishment - in Knut Wicksell's formulation: "The throne, the altar, the sword, and the money bag." The feeling is supposed to be imposed from above or by circumstances & manifest itself in fear, worship, reverence or personal loyalty. The affinity within the estates or corporations is stronger than the affinity within the state as a whole.
- Bourgeois national sentiment ideally includes all the citizens of the state & is defined as a feeling of belonging. In Benedict Andersson's formulation: "An imagined community." The feeling is supposed to arise from joint experiences or self-interest & to manifest itself in the ideals of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality & Brotherhood.
- Socialist national sentiment (internationalism, solidarity across national borders) is class-based, starts from the special interests of the classes & manifests itself in class struggle: "Proletarians of all countries, unite." The state is the instrument of oppression of the upper class or (when conquered) constantly threatened by class enemies. In fact, it bears some resemblance to the estates loyalty of the feudal society.
- A modern national sentiment does not exist. The corporations are dissolving. The relations between people are short-lived, of a commercial character & oblige to nothing. Each to his own. National sentiment has been replaced by a divisive identity policy. Possibly the postulated state individualism can be a substitute. No matter what they think about the state, everyone depends on it.

In the big picture, the debate is about the (modern) liberal state versus the feudal, corporate or organic state. The liberal state is assumed based on the individual, natural law, enlightenment and the state as a contract between rulers & citizens. The feudal state is assumed based on group affiliation, traditions, ties of loyalty & the state as a historical product. All evil within the liberal state is assumed to be due to remaining feudal structures or traditions.

- Since the Second World War, there has also been a left-right interpretation of nationalism. George Orwell (1945) distinguishes cultural & political nationalism:

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<sup>4</sup> Kjellén 1916; m fl.

Cultural nationalism (according to Orwell = patriotism) means cultural conservatism and homeland romanticism. Political nationalism (according to Orwell = activism) is attributed to movements such as Nazism, Fascism, Communism, Judaism, Christianity, political Islam, political Catholicism, “white power”, Zionism, and anti-Semitism.

- Yet another debate concerns the “religious heritage”: Everything that arouses strong feelings of community is usually described as a secular substitute for religion: modernity, the monarchy, politics & the Swedish *sonderweg*. The Marxist formulation is slightly different: *All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind*. This is usually interpreted as only the class struggle being real & lasting. Everything else is ephemeral.

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In political science, the death of the Swedish feudal state is usually equated with the abolition of the Estates based Parliament in 1865. In the field of mentality research, the collapse of the Union in 1905 is considered a more reasonable year, since Sweden then became a nation state. An alternative date of the feudal state's death is based on the oaths of loyalty. In order to impress the importance of loyalty, all government employees must swear allegiance to the state. The regent to the Parliament, the constitution and the nation. The ministers and princes to the regent. The others to the office. The change over time was that one should be loyal to the organization as a whole or its ”values”, not to any particular person. The dismantling of the custom of oaths began in 1868. The last of these oaths, the councillor oath, was abolished in 1974.<sup>5</sup>

Because the feudal state was a subordinate legal structure - the royal houses were more long-lived than the kingdoms themselves - the country's inhabitants invested a minimum of emotion in their feudal state & its constituent parts (cities, counties, provinces, possessions, vassal states, colonies, exclaves, etc.), which had its consequences. It was easy to integrate the former Danish & Norwegian counties into the Swedish state. However, it was just as easy to leave the Baltic provinces, Finland and finally Norway to their fate. These were primarily of strategic military and economic importance. Emotions were reserved for the religion, royal house, local community & family.

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## C. NATIONAL SENTIMENT - PRACTICE

### Sweden as a feudal state

One advantage of the state church was that the priests could be forced to do the states business. In the present case, by reading declarations before the Assembly. One recurring such was the annual edict ”His Maj:t Prayer Day placard”. The historian Joachim Östlund has studied the content 1660-1919, focusing on ”the legitimization of power”. The mixture of small and large makes the placards difficult to summarize. I concentrate on nationalism, megatrends & breakpoints:

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<sup>5</sup> Malmer 1996.

[During the rule of the Estates during the Age of Liberty, the prayer placards emphasized the role of the Parliament. Under the Gustavian Kings, a combined prince and citizen contract is emphasized. But during the first three Bernadotte a modern monarchism is emphasized = state & church with different responsibilities: The State Economy & the Church Morals. During Oscar II, "His Maj:t" changed significance from the king personally to the king as chairman of the State Council & the prayer placards' patriarchal formulations disappeared. The 1881 placard is the last in which the king speaks with a personal tone to his subjects. 1897 is the last occurrence of the phrase "our faithful people".]<sup>6</sup>

"In a historical context of ideas and related to the discussion of state ideology, the 18<sup>th</sup> century is often described as a period between the Gothic patriotism of the Empire and the idealist nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From my material, another image emerges. It is not an interim period, but rather a slow transition from a world of ideas anchored in a religiously motivated national sentiment to a community of citizens having Christian morality in common."<sup>7</sup>

"The weakening of the kingdom during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the ancient and biblical virtues are gradually replaced by examples from Swedish history, help to emphasize "the Swedishness", "the Swedish people" or "Swedish heroes". From the description of Sweden as the primary bearer of the ideals of antiquity and Christianity, what is now regarded as specific "Swedish" values are instead celebrated. Looking back the historical kings become the symbols of Swedishness, and contemporary kings are mostly ignored because the old ones are considered the prime examples."<sup>8</sup>

The Bernadotte have always had difficulty in meeting the Swedish requirements. Already under Charles John there was a debate if a French dynasty on the Swedish throne was indeed legitimate. It was also demanded that the foreign queens should not only learn the language, but also become "Swedish". The Swedishness - or lack thereof - have made headlines ever since 1905. Victoria of Baden remained German. Margaretha of Connaught remained English. Louise von Battenberg & Sibylla of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha claimed to be "semi-Swedes"; Silvia Sommerlath, on the other hand, described herself as "completely Swedish" and that she even dreamed in Swedish.

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### Swedish traditions

From the 1860s, a new form of "democratic" nationalism grew, but from a low level. It began in the educated classes, spread and seems to have been related to the expansion of the road and rail network, newspaper reading and political interest. As long as the union with Norway lasted, Sweden was a state, but not a nation. Neither Gothicism, Scandinavism, nor Nordism emphasized any specific Swedish characteristic. Not so the "official" anthems of the time. According to the court's website, there were four: [Gustaf III's toast], the kings anthem, the national anthem & the student song.

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<sup>6</sup> Östlund 2007: ss. 221-228.

<sup>7</sup> Östlund 2007: s. 207.

<sup>8</sup> Östlund 2007: s. 245.

*Gustaf's toast* (1772) was the unofficial king's anthem until 1893 when it was replaced by the *King's anthem. Du gamla, du fria* ["old & free"] (1844; Until 1905 "old & healthy") is not formally an anthem, but has been accepted as such. It is said to have been Oscar II who rose on May 27, 1893, in Lund to mark the song's status. After the dissolution of the union in 1905, it became traditional to sing it on June 6. The Student Song (1851) is composed by Prince Gustaf (1827-1852) & usually sung on May 1 which is a national holiday. 1893 is also the year of Swedish flag-waving. The battle for Norway's right to fly its own colours without a union mark took place that year & the Swedish flag's day began to be celebrated at Skansen.

The songs hardly express any Swedish national sentiment (although they have since been used in such context). Rather they express nostalgia: Regret of the lost empire, apocalyptic Carolingian romanticism & hopes of a Nordic superstate.

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### Swedish indoctrination

The difference in patriotism, nationalism, etc. between generations & social classes led to an infected debate. The North American emigration was perceived as verging on treason & would be counteracted by allowing history teaching to inculcate a little patriotism. There is an often cited study by political scientist Herbert Tingsten (1969) "God and the Fatherland" about such tendencies in the Swedish school books 1850-1950. After World War I, this Swedish introspective "state nationalism" became an expansive "missionary nationalism" where Sweden had a special role in the world & after World War II to an "internationalism" where Sweden was or would be an international example. However, the book ends before that. According to Tingsten, the school books have in common that they offer a conservative, "apolitical" (=non party based) and for the Swedes extremely flattering package of views.

The effect of the school propaganda is said to have been that the monarchy between the wars, despite its political defeats, still had strong support. Historian Åsa Linderborg (2001) summarizes: "For the bourgeoisie, a nationalist history constituted an effective means of nurturing [conservative] love of the fatherland, subservient obedience and fidelity to authority, instead of solidarity within the working class."<sup>9</sup> After World War II, however, the effect abated. One can summarize the result as the Empire losing ground to Gustav Vasa, the yeoman & the Viking. Maybe a victory of sorts. Who knows.

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Folkhemsromantiken (homesteader romantics; a house of your own; support of patriarchal values; Sweden as an extended family; etc.) had the greatest impact. I quote a speech at Skansen 1910 "The Swedish Heart-land" by political scientist and member of parliament Rudolf Kjellén, allegedly the author of the concept:

"Sweden's body is *the kingdom*, surrounding us in all directions, waiting for spring, the large kingdom with its beauty, its treasures and even poverty, the people's home since times immemorial.

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<sup>9</sup> Linderborg 2001: s. 250.

Sweden's soul is *the nation*, inherited from generation to generation, the national character with its inherent virtues and errors, its small conspicuous errors and its great deep virtues.

Sweden's spirit is *its culture* in sagas and songs, science and art, society, church and state. The combined longings, thoughts and experiences of generations' since the beginning.

Sweden's *heart* is all this and yet something else. The kingdom would be fallow land and the people a society of drifters [if it lacked heart.]”<sup>10</sup>

The problem with this approach has been: (1) the difficulty of including new population groups with their own history; (2) The existence of social conflicts was contrary to self-perception. In Kjellén's world view, class struggle and social envy were a sign of degeneration. But...

”We believe and hope that the kingdom of Sweden will yet again rise. We will never abandon hope that the Lord of History may once again have use for us. Deep in our spirit, where reason does not penetrate, and all external senses sleep, dwells this spark of our faith. On this we live, and on this we will die. This great glorious kingdom, this highly gifted though groping and failing people, they cannot have decayed, they must still have much to give to the world. But everything comes down to our seriousness and sense of responsibility, we must prepare for our mission ourselves for nobody will do it for us ...”<sup>11</sup>

The Swedish spirit of world improvement would thus be the product of our former Empire. Maybe so. There is a combined royal-popular involvement in, for example, the Red Cross, which has made incomprehensible headlines in relation to what it has accomplished. Later came a movement about Swedish gutlessness during World War II, just as exaggerated. The League of Nations, the United Nations & third world romanticism seem to have been further outlets.

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### The National Day

Sweden's National Day was originally the flag day. This was celebrated from 1893. In 1983 it was declared a National Day. In 1996 it became a salute day. In 2005 a bank holiday. The date of June 6 is usually attributed to Major Tor Wibom who justified it with Gustav Vasa's election as king in Strängnäs June 6, 1523. Later, the date was also justified by the fact that both the 1809 and 1974 forms of government were issued on that day. In the beginning the celebration took place at Skansen, later at the stadium, and consisted of various associations parading with flags.

The 2005 upgrading from National Day to a public holiday met with an apathetic response. According to a Temo survey<sup>12</sup> 69 percent were in favour of the new holiday, but only 13 percent intended to celebrate it as a national holiday, for example by putting a flag on the balcony. The ethnologist Barbro Blehr (who studied the Norwegians' 17-May celebrations)

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<sup>10</sup> Kjellén 1914: ss. 198

<sup>11</sup> Kjellén 1914: ss. 200, 202.

<sup>12</sup> Modig m fl. 2005.

believed the Swedish disinterest was due to ignorance. Perhaps enthusiasm would increase over time

Since the head of state presided over the celebrations, Sweden's Republicans were no friends of the National Day. The organization Republican Sailors named it Day of the Republic. The Young Socialists (AFA) used it in 2007 to demonstrate their social contempt. However, the message was received with some confusion: "People don't seem to really know how to deal with cries such as "All of us who hate Sweden clap now!" and the like [...] At Mynttorget (below the castle) we make a break when further speeches are made and a Swedish flag is burned with great cheer."<sup>13</sup> Nazi groups such as the National Socialist Front, the Swedish Resistance Movement, Info14, Blood & Honour, the Nordic League and Free Nationalists were positive about the flag, although they also detested the state.

The celebrations eventually spread. In 2016, 31 percent of the population celebrated. It was most common, 51 percent, among those who sympathized with the royal house.<sup>14</sup>

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In addition to the National Day, 16 days are so-called flag days, among them seven for the royal house: Gustaf Adolf's Day on 6 November and the King's, Queen's and successor's birthdays. In 2007 Hillevi Larsson (s) & Lars Wegendal (s) took the initiative to abolish them. Larsson was at the time the chairman of the Republican Association, so the initiative may be interpreted as an expression of the association's "cheese slicer principle". In 2009, Wegendal submitted a similar bill. In 2019, a study by Björn von Sydow (s) suggested that the naming days should be removed. The reason was that they lacked popular support.

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<sup>13</sup> Mattias Sandberg. Här är hot mot kungafamiljen. Aftonbladet, 2010-03-03.

<sup>14</sup> Bové & Oscarsson 2017.

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