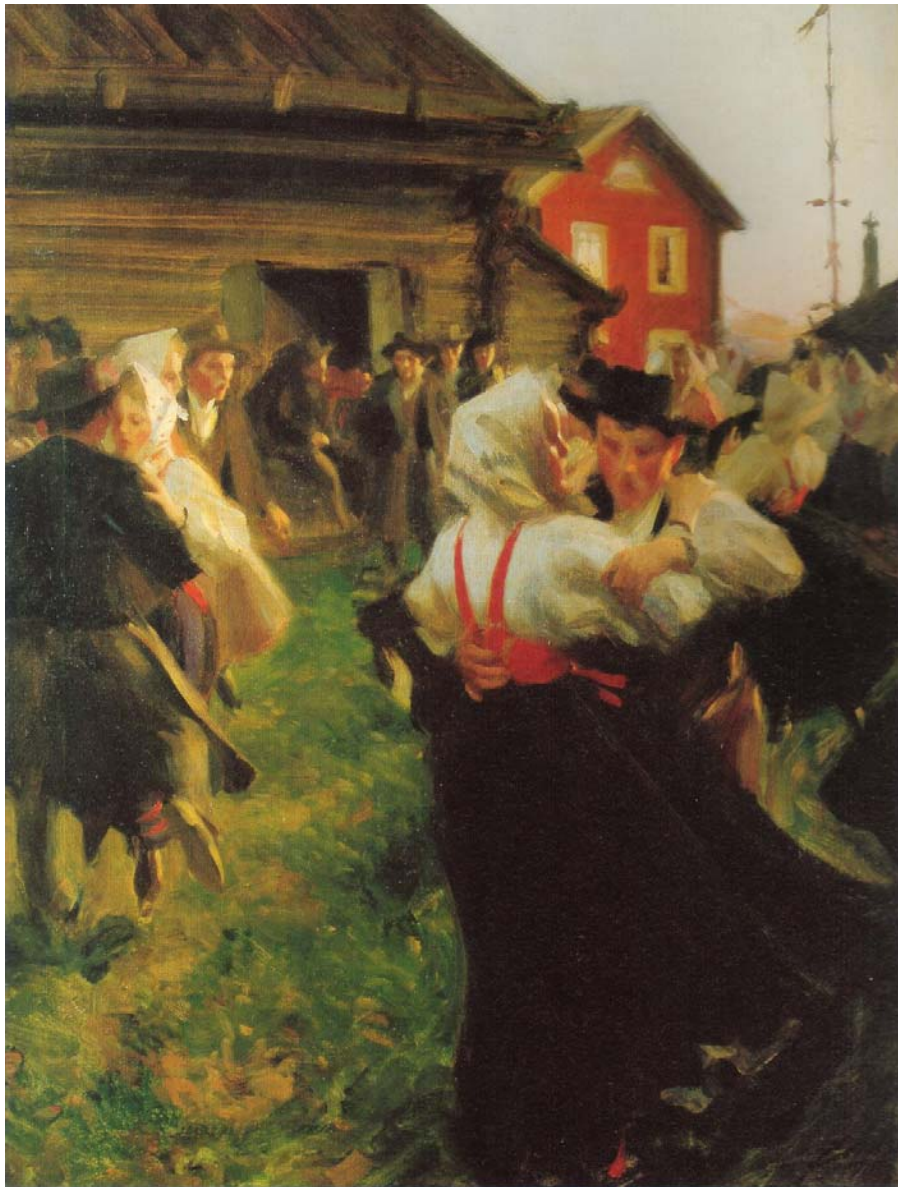


**Nation formation and global migration
- Sweden around 1900**

This paper concerns the development of the Swedish national around 1900 and how this trajectory needs to be interpreted against the background of global patterns of migration.



Introduction

The above painting, *Midsommardans*, by Swedish artist Anders Zorn is often described as “typically Swedish”. Painted in 1897 it depicts the celebration of midsummer in Dalarna, Sweden. In the far right corner of the motive one finds a decorated midsummer-pole crowned with the Swedish flag. The people, dressed in national costumes, are dancing a Swedish folk-dance outdoors in the Swedish nature. The last rays of light are reflected in the gable of a house painted in red with white corners – the quintessential Swedish house in the quintessential Swedish setting.

Zorn, one of the most well-known Swedish painters, had his home in Mora, Dalarna, and often invited fellow Swedish artists to stay in this “the most Swedish” landscape. The painting had its origin in a visit by Zorn’s colleague and friend Prince Eugen in 1896. Passing by Morkarby, Zorn sent after a fiddler and within shortly a “singing polka” was playing. The prince loved the scene and insisted on Zorn painting it. It took until the next year, when Zorn himself had given the people of Morkarby the midsummer-pole, that he finally set about to do so. According to Zorn, the pole was raised at midnight on the eve of midsummer; this being the time of the year with constant light, and thereafter a polka was played. The dance continued until the morning with “an endless snake of youth” dancing between the farms.¹

The painting was shown publicly for the first time at the Stockholm exhibition of 1897 and was given to the National Museum in 1903. It is considered to be one of Zorn’s most popular paintings. Of course, all the symbols recognised as “quintessentially Swedish” in the painting are quite modern “invented traditions”, to use Eric Hobsbawm’s and Terence Ranger’s famous phrase. It is during this last decade of the nineteenth century that much of what is still known to be quintessentially Swedish was actually invented and constructed. The new usage of the Swedish flag, the stereotypical image of the Swedish nature and the specific Swedish connection to it, the usage of national dresses and the celebration of Swedish midsummer are just some examples of this. To this list one could also add the invention of the national anthem, the erection of statues, the myth-making around the Swedish Kings, most notably Gustav Vasa, Gustav II Adolf and Karl XII, and the introduction of a national agenda in the education. That Zorn’s painting was first shown at the Stockholm exhibition of 1897,

¹ Hans Henrik Brummer. *Till ögats fröjd och nationens förgyllning. Anders Zorn*. (Stockholm, Norstedts, 1994) p.228.

intended as a grand display of Sweden, Swedish industry and Swedish culture is thus hardly surprising.

What is also striking with the painting is that the people look so homogenous. White-skinned, blonde and healthy looking they swirl around in the polka; impossible to differentiate from each other. This homogeneity, in a painting that was intended to depict the quintessentially Swedish, indicates that at the turn of the century the national was more than just symbolic representation - it was increasingly interpreted in the light of ethnicity and blood lineage. To be Swedish meant more than just being a member of a linguistic or a geographical community, to be subject to certain civil rights and duties; fundamentally it also meant to be part of a perceived ethnic community and to share a common (blood) heritage and a shared ancestry. In the Swedish historiography, this usage of ethnic stereotypes by contemporary agents is often just referred to as a result of the *Zeitgeist* and the break-through of racial biological theories in society. Though not unimportant, these explanations fail to take into account the complex setting in which these ethnic discourses originated and unfolded. By the turn of the century, nation-building and the construction of the Swedish was a process intimately entangled with the movement of people over national borders. Between 1860 and 1920 more than one million Swedes emigrated - at the same time as immigration created an influx of people to the country. The large majority of the migrants emigrated to America, but Swedish migrants also went to Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, East- and Central Asia, as well as to the European colonies in Africa. In addition to this, work migration between Sweden, the neighbouring Scandinavian countries and Germany took place on a large scale, as did exchanges and movements of people between Sweden, Finland, Poland and the Baltic region.

It is against this background of the movement of people over borders that Swedish nation formation should be analysed. Importantly, these global entanglements gave rise to an increased emphasis not only on the national but on the ethnic national. This becomes particularly apparent in the reactions to the migration, where the fear of the loss of good Swedish blood and the inflow of inferior foreign blood resulted in an amplified rhetoric where the ethnically pure Swedish national interest had to be protected. In order to understand how and why the national developed in this direction one must therefore turn to the larger, global, context. Sweden was taking part in exchanges on an increasingly global level and the particular form that the Swedish national took around 1900 needs to be understood in the context of these global interactions and entanglements. By situating the process of nation

formation not only in relation to internal developments but also in the global processes of migration, this paper offers an alternative reading of the construction of turn of the century Swedish national.

The rest of this paper is structured according to the following scheme; it introduces the topic with a short summary of how Swedish turn of the century nationalism is often portrayed and then turns to how global patterns of migration should be added to this picture. Referring to the various Swedish migration patterns, it points to how migration indeed was a global phenomenon. Thereafter the Swedish national counter-reactions, where the image of the ethnically superior Swede is used as an argument against migration, are looked upon. The concluding discussion makes the point that as migration resulted in a stronger emphasis on the national, the development of Sweden and the Swedish should be placed in the framework of global migration.

Swedish nation formation in a global framework

Most scholars agree on the structural change that turn of the century Swedish nationalism underwent - from a small liberal elite movement to a mass phenomenon.² This transformation is often explained with references to the nation-building efforts by the Swedish state. Accordingly, the Swedish path is congruent with Eric Hobsbawm's claim that nationalism follows the state and not the other way round; (...) *for the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round.*³

Nationalism thus interpreted becomes a product of the state, of the working of (state) power. As such it is important to keep in mind that the Swedish state changed fundamentally in the nineteenth century with the loss of Finland. This state reconfiguration became the start of the construction of a national identity by Swedish intellectuals, often described as a recreation of Finland within the Swedish national border. As a result of these efforts, Sweden started to be imagined along a north-south axis instead of as previously along a west-east axis.⁴ Torkel

² In the rest of this text I am reserving the term *nationalism* for actions related to political movements justifying their action with nationalist arguments. See: John Breuilly *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993). The term *the national* is instead used to denote national symbols and national characteristics and the more widespread, "banal", everyday usage of these.

³ Eric Hobsbawm. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008) p.10.

⁴ Bo Stråth. "The Swedish Path to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century" in Øystein Sørensen (ed.). *Nordic Paths to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1994). p.55.

Jansson has, very adequately, summarised the consequent development of the Swedish nation-state thus:

Like Germany Sweden experienced a “Vormärz” of emancipatory national consciousness and a following era of state-centred nationalism. To keep to German expressions, ambitions to create Kulturnationen had to give way to Staatsnationen. When after the German-Danish war liberal “Scandinavianism” had been a fiasco, when during the last decades of the century the union became criticized and questioned by the Norwegian Left, when radical international ideas had gained a foothold in the country, which furthermore became more and more protectionist, conservative nationalists grasped the initiative and kept it. (...) To use the words of Eric Hobsbawm, “traditions” were “invented” on a grand scale, which had little or no historical support (...).⁵

This is not to say that nationalism on a mass scale was *purely* the result of a functional need from (conservative) Swedish state agents to address various socio-political issues. The spread of the idea of the nation and of national symbols was also the result of non-state agency related constructions and reconstructions. Zorn’s painting is for example one illustration of how non-state actors contributed to creating an image of what the Swedish was. Similar examples can be found in the literature and poetry of for example Verner von Heidenstam and Selma Lagerlöf. Thus, though the state-produced nationalism is the most important explanation to the spread of national thinking, the nation-oriented activity within civil society also contributed to this development.

The motive behind this increased emphasis on the national has often been located within the domestic frame. The conflicts and eventual breakdown of the Union with Norway, the failure of Scandinavianism and the fear of the emerging socialist movement, as well as the perceived Russian threat and the defence question, are some of the issues often referred to as triggers of an increased emphasis on the national. What should be added to this list is the migration of people on an increasingly global scale. Sweden in the 1890s and 1900s experienced unprecedented levels of migration. In 1900 the Swedish population was five million; between 1860 and 1920 one million Swedes emigrated, primarily to North America. At the same time immigration created an influx of people to the country. This context of movements over the

⁵ Torkel Jansson. ”En historisk uppgörelse. När 1800-talsnationen avlöste 1600-talsstaten” in *Historisk Tidskrift* (1990) p.356.

borders gave rise to a discourse where the national was put in relation to developments outside of the national setting. Sebastian Conrad has put it thus;

*the dynamics of nationalism have been located within the nation-states at issue: as long traditions and continuities of a national 'essence', as 'imagined communities', as reactions to the disruptive effects of modernization, as 'invented traditions', or as new departures by social groups that aimed at a different kind of modernity. (...) however, the particular form that nationalism and the representation of the nation took around 1900 need to be read in the context of interactions and entanglements on a global scale. The shifts and changes in the discourse of nationalism thus appear not only as effects of internal trajectories, as the familiar picture would suggest, but just as much of the larger process we retrospectively call globalization.*⁶

Swedish global migration

Migration was the process in which most Swedish agents first experienced these increasingly global entanglements. A contributing factor to this was of course the possibility of movement across borders. For mass migration to take place, state policies that allowed for people to leave their countries of origin have to have existed; which they did in this period. According to Ann-Sofie Källemark, Swedish emigration policies went from restrictive to more liberal at the end of the nineteenth century; a development that was in line with most other nation-states.⁷ Some ethnical groups were excluded from these liberal policies and restrictions also applied for soldiers and military recruits. For the large majority though, no formal restrictions applied and the general trend was an enormous increase in the number of people travelling across the Swedish border.

The largest migration stream, by far, was the Swedish emigration to America. Trans-Atlantic emigration from Sweden started in the 1860s, reached its high point in the 1880s and by 1900 it was said that every fifth Swede lived in North America. Bo Stråth has called this emigration of Irish proportions, and it seems undeniable that the emigration brought about fundamental

⁶ Sebastian Conrad. "Globalization Effects. Mobility and Nation in Imperial Germany, 1880-1914" in *Journal of Global History* (vol.3. no 1. 2008). p.64.

⁷ Ann-Sofie Källemark. "Swedish Emigration Policy in an International Perspective" in Harald Runblom & Hans Norman (eds.) *From Sweden to America – A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976). p.94.

changes within Swedish society.⁸ Only in the 1880s did close to 350 000 people emigrate and between 1865 and 1914 the grand total was almost a million. Among West European countries only Norway and Ireland had, relatively, a larger emigration. Chronologically, the periods with the most emigration were 1868-1873, 1879-1893, 1900-1913. In three consecutive years, 1891-1892-1893, more than 40 000 people left Sweden annually. Thereafter, until 1900, the statistics went down to a yearly figure of 15 000-20 000 emigrants. After the turn of the century the figures increased once again, having between 20 000-30 000 subjects leaving Sweden each year.⁹

The large majority of emigrants that left Sweden before the 1890s were from the agricultural sector and had been forced to leave because of the land redistribution that had taken place earlier in Sweden in the nineteenth century (*det laga skiftet*). This shift changed the structure of most of the Swedish country-side and gave rise to a rural proletariat. As opposed to more industrialised European states, where families leaving their land could migrate to the city and find work within the industry, this option was not available to Swedish farm workers until very late in the nineteenth century. This land redistribution, in combination with population growth, was thus the most obvious background to the mass emigration that took place from the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Other more time-specific events also contributed to this emigration, like the penetration of the Swedish market by Russian and American grain in the 1880s. Between 1881 and 1887 the price of rye went down with more than 50% ,which resulted in a more than doubling of the number of bankruptcy applications in the country-side and thus in people being forced to leave their lands.¹⁰

This exodus of agricultural labourers has been immortalised by Vilhelm Moberg's four novels (*The Emigrants, Unto a Good Land, The Settlers, The Last Letter Home*) on Swedish agricultural emigrants Karl-Oskar and Kristina, who left the countryside of Småland for Minnesota. It is of course highly symbolic that they were described as coming from Småland – the region was heavily hit by the agricultural emigration. (The novels were later filmed by

⁸ Bo Stråth. "The Swedish Path to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century" in Øystein Sørensen (ed.). *Nordic Paths to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1994). pp.55, 60-61.

⁹ *Bidrag till Sveriges Officiella Statistik 1891-1900, 1901-1910* (Serie A. "Befolkningsstatistik", 1894-1912).

¹⁰ Sten Carlsson. "Chronology and Composition of Swedish Emigration to America" in Harald Runblom & Hans Norman (eds.) *From Sweden to America – A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976). p.125.

Jan Troell in the two movies of *The Emigrants* and *The New Land*, both reaching an international audience.)

The emigration after the 1890s was of a more industrial and urban character; the capital of Stockholm for example registered its highest emigration figures between 1891 and 1893. It is also significant that the emigration in this period started to reach beyond the United States, with migrants also going to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It is difficult to find the exact number of this migration, but a reasonable guess is that a couple of tens of thousands Swedish workers migrated to these destinations. The Swedish emigration to Brazil also took off in this period. Though substantially smaller than the US emigration it is still interesting because of its rather peculiar character. In terms of numbers, the emigration was at its highest in 1890 and 1891 when 2000 persons emigrated, and later between 1909 and 1911 when another couple of thousands left for Brazil. What is specific with this emigration is that the migrants were primarily from industrial cities in the north; Sundsvall and Stockholm in the first period and Kiruna in the second; and that the migrants got their funds to leave directly from the Brazilian government.¹¹

Sundsvall had traditionally been a stronghold for the sawmill industry and when this industry experienced a severe downturn in the early 1890s, what was called a “Brazilian fever” broke out among the workers. A number of public meetings on the possibility of migration to Brazil was organised by a special Brazilian committee and preliminary emigrant lists were drawn up. The Brazilian office, located in Malmö and with close contacts with the Brazilian office in Hamburg, kept the fever going by frequently advertising in the local newspapers. Whereas most of the migrants to the United States were agricultural workers, the migrants to Brazil were poor industrial workers who were recruited from the lowest social groupings. Few were skilled workers. In the later, 1909-1911 migration, the workers originated almost exclusively from the mining area in Kiruna where poverty was widespread. That these workers were able to migrate at all was because the Brazilian government subsidised the migration.

As the emigration to Brazil was stimulated by the immigration authorities in Brazil, the emigrants could not choose where to go but were assigned places of settlement. The emigrants of 1890-1891 were sent to the State of Rio Grande do Sul, an area which they adapted to very

¹¹ Harald Runblom. "Swedish Emigration to Latin America" in Harald Runblom & Hans Norman (eds.) *From Sweden to America – A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976). p.302.

poorly. Isolated from each other and with severe living conditions, quite a few of the emigrants died of hunger and disease. The next wave of emigrants in the 1910s crossed the Argentinean border to the area called Misiones. Life does not appear to have been any better for the Swedish emigrants in this region, and in 1912 about 500 Swedes were collectively sent back to Sweden through actions taken by the Swedish embassy in Buenos Aires.¹²

Less unfortunate were the emigrants who stayed in Europe. The most probable explanation to this is that if they did not take to life in their new home countries they always had the possibility of migrating back to Sweden at a low cost. This knowledge of an exit-strategy was probably the reason why thousands of Swedish people annually went to look for work within Europe. Most of the migration took place in the border regions between Norway and Sweden, Finland and Sweden, and Denmark and Sweden. Germany was also a main target for this Swedish work migration, especially the northern districts had a substantial representation of Swedish workers. The Swedish migration going to Denmark and Germany was actually quite considerable but has been somewhat forgotten in the history of migration. It could have involved as many as 400 000 Swedish workers, though it is hard to find any definitive figures. Most of these migrants worked within the agricultural sector or as maids in the bigger cities.

Outside of these labour migration patterns, migration of religious or more adventurous nature was also common. Selma Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem* was published in 1901-1902 and depicts the emigration of a group of farmers from Dalarna to the holy land of Palestine. The novel was inspired by the religious group *Helgeanerna* and their emigration to Jerusalem in the nineteenth century and is reflective of the importance of religious travel and missionary migration in this period. Swedish missionaries went to Africa, to South America and to Asia to "make Christians of the heathens". The large majority of these Swedish missionaries set up camp with other European missions, and co-operation was especially close with the Danish, British and German missionaries. On a similar note, Swedish explorers travelled the globe and sent home reports from the distant places they visited. Sven Hedin is probably the most well know of these, travelling widely in East- and Central Asia in the 1890s and 1900s. His many publications were immensely popular in Sweden and contributed to an increased knowledge of this region (though, of course, interpreted with the eyes of the male colonial agent). In

¹² Harald Runblom. "Swedish Emigration to Latin America" in Harald Runblom & Hans Norman (eds.) *From Sweden to America – A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976). pp.303-308.

Africa Swedish migrants took part of colonial projects like the Nordic mission in Congo and it also happened that members of the Swedish upper classes took advantage of the European imperialistic and colonial projects. One famous example is Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke from the south Swedish estate of Näsbyholm, who tried to set up a coffee plantation in Kenya together with his Danish wife, Karen. The coffee plantation was never very successful and the couple soon divorced, Bror instead setting up a safari guide and Karen returning to Europe and beginning her literary career.

The above examples should give an indication of the increasingly global entanglements that Swedish agents took part in at the turn of the century. Hundreds of thousands Swedes left their old home country for destinations all over the globe. One of the effects of this migration was the development of to what could perhaps be called a global consciousness among Swedish agents. Advertisements in the papers for travel agencies, active lobbying by agents and letters and photographs sent home from these new worlds contributed to creating an awareness of the world outside of the local and national setting. Newspapers written in Swedish from the new world in America were sent back to the old home country, and thus helped to describe the new world to those who had not yet made the trip. It is sometimes jokily said that in many villages in Småland, people had a greater knowledge of current affairs in Chicago than they had of events in Stockholm. Information on distant places was also provided by the missionaries who sent home reports and stories to the missionary houses in Sweden. Painted in bright colours the missionaries told their old congregations about these far away places and the work they conducted there. Sven Hedin's publications also helped to spread knowledge of the outside world and the culture and geography of non-Europe. Albeit heavily tainted by the imperialistic stereotyping these publications and reports still helped to increase the awareness of the outside world. Thus, though the actual number of migrants is important, the migration was not only of concern to those who actually set about to migrate but had much wider consequences. What is especially important to keep in mind is that it gave rise to an awareness of the global setting in which Sweden was part.

Further, not only did the migration result in an increased awareness of the global framework of Sweden, it also had direct consequences for the formation of the nation. Two major developments can be discerned. The first was the tendency to create various national associations, whether in Sweden or by Swedes abroad, that had as their main purpose the preservation of the Swedish language, culture and race. The second development was a

growing concern over the emigration and a strong preoccupation by Swedish agents on how this emigration should be prevented. Migration, not only emigration but also the inflow of “foreign blood”, came to be regarded as a threat to the future of the nation. The resistance to it was consequently pursued with arguments emphasising the importance of keeping Sweden ethnically pure.

Migration and Swedish national associations

One of the most visible effects of the emigration was the founding of a large number of Swedish associations and societies for the preservation of the Swedish language, culture and race. Nils Elvander, in his study on Swedish conservatism, has for example argued that a new politically radical and rightist nationalism emerged at the turn of the last century as a reaction against changes in the geographical and political structure of Sweden. The Institute for Political Science at the University of Uppsala was a driving force behind this development, especially its *Professor Skytteanus* Oscar Alin. In Elvander’s work, the radical nationalism at the turn of the century is best described as a right-wing, primarily upper-middle class, political movement.¹³ An example of such a movement can be found in Vilhelm Lundström’s, Professor of Classics at Uppsala University, *Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet* (the National Society for the Preservation of Swedishness Abroad). Founded in 1908 it was a pan-Swedish movement that came to, primarily, include Swedish-speakers in Finland and Estonia and to a lesser extent Swedish speakers in the United States. The aim of the movement was to increase the Swedish influence in the Baltic Sea area.¹⁴ Like most other pan- movements, the pan-Swedish movement was founded on a common language and a perceived common race. Similar association could be found all over Sweden and their membership often consisted of conservative politicians and intellectuals.

The emigration also resulted in a large number of associations founded by the emigrants and one can discern how national organisations and societies spring up in all the places to which Swedes emigrated. These national societies also aimed at preserving the Swedish language, culture and race in the new home land. One example can be found in Hamburg where a Swedish society, named *Svea*, was founded in 1888. It was a predecessor to the Gentleman

¹³ Nils Elvander. *Harald Hjärne och konservatismen – Konservativ Idédebatt i Sverige 1865-1922* (Stockholm, HLS Förlag, 1961).

¹⁴ Bengt Kummel. *Svenskar i all världen förenen eder! Vilhelm Lundström och den allsvenska rörelsen* (Åbo, Åbo Akademis förlag, 1994) pp.279-281.

club that was founded in 1906 for representatives of Swedish business association in Hamburg. It was intended both as a meeting point for the Swedes in Hamburg and as a supporter of Swedish religious and social work in Germany. The co-operation with the Swedish Gustaf Adolf church in Hamburg was thus close. A highlight in the association's history appears to have been the summer celebration in 1906 where more than 700 persons took part and which ended with all the males walking through the forest of Sachsenwald with lit torches in their hands.¹⁵ A further example can be found among the Swedish immigrants in Brazil who founded their association, also named *Svea*, with the ambition to preserve the Swedish language, culture, and race among its members. In the former respect it appears to have been successful; church service in the area around Oberá, the place with most Swedish representation, was actually held in Swedish until the 1960s.¹⁶ These are only two examples of a large number of Swedish national associations that were founded in the Swedish migrant societies.

Migration and the “loss of blood”

The second form of national reaction to the migration can be found in the increased emphasis on the ethnic national in public Swedish debates. The *Emigrationsutredningen* (Survey into the causes and effects of the emigration) that was set up by Royal decree in January 1907 is an illustrative example of this. Its background can be found in Pontus Fahlbeck's, Professor of Political Science at Lund University, claim that the emigration was a real misfortune for the Swedish society that must be directed with public policies. As a consequence of Fahlbeck's rhetoric an association of provincial economic societies called *Lantbruksriksdagen* (The Agricultural Parliament) met in Stockholm where they voiced a grave concern over the loss of rural labour. They also signed a petition that was presented to King Oscar II in which they described the emigration as a danger to the Fatherland. This petition resulted in the decision to conduct a survey into the causes and effects of the emigration. Gustaf Sundbärg, Premier Registrar at the Swedish National Statistics Office (*Statistiska CentralByrån*) was appointed to direct it. Six years after its initiation, in 1913, Sundbärg published the final report. In between these years, a total of 20 sub-reports had been issued, totalling more than 3800

¹⁵ Ume Radbruch. “Svenska Klubben i Hamburg genom åren” in *Utlandssvenskarna* (nr. 5, 6 and 7/8, 1973).

¹⁶ Harald Runblom. “Swedish Emigration to Latin America” in Harald Runblom & Hans Norman (eds.) *From Sweden to America – A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976). p.309.

pages.¹⁷ One of Sundbärg's conclusions was that there was scarcely any question, political, economical or social, in Sweden that was not, directly or indirectly, negatively affected by the emigration.¹⁸

Sundbärg's reports initiated public discussions that would rage for years on how the problem of migration could be solved. Fahlbeck thought the solution could be found in a form of state socialism whereas Rudolf Kjellén, Professor in Political Science at Gothenburg University and founder of the term "geopolitics", instead wanted a national socialism that would make people feel at home in Sweden. Consequently, the nation would be organised like a *folkhem* – a home for the people.¹⁹ Bo Stråth has argued that this merging of the concept of people (*folk*) and *nation* was fundamental for the formation of the Swedish national identity. Somewhat ironically, this conservative concept was later appropriated by the Social Democrats who from the 1930s, set about to build the Swedish welfare state of the *folkhemmet* (people's home).²⁰

It is also important to remember that the emigration report had its origin in a growing concern that the emigration drained the Swedish nation of fresh blood. In the report it is obvious that this was a major concern for Sundbärg. Report number 16, *Det svenska folklynnnet* (The Swedish National Character), is entirely devoted to the racial and moral qualities of the Swedish national stock and the report reached an enormous popularity when it was published. Sundbärg emphasised the general Germanic blondness and long-headedness of the Swedish race and argued that, in general, the Swedish stock was shaped by martial and male virtues as well as by humanism, and that these traits would be diluted if emigration persisted. The same line of thinking can be found among most public intellectuals at the time. Rudolf Kjellén, who viewed the nation as a collective individuality and as a biological organism striving for integration of its parts, found that the emigration away from Sweden was a fundamental danger that risked the complete extinction of the particular Swedish nation. But it was not

¹⁷ Patrik Hall. *The Social Construction of Nationalism. Sweden as an Example*. Lund, Studentlitteratur, 1998) pp.224-225.

¹⁸ H. Arnold Barton. *A folk Divided – Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940* (Uppsala, Southern Illinois University Press, 1994) p.135.

¹⁹ Bo Stråth. "The Swedish Path to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century" in Øystein Sørensen (ed.). *Nordic Paths to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1994). p.61. See also: Nils Edling. *Det fosterländska hemmet: Egnahemspolitik, småbruk och hemideologi kring sekelskiftet 1900* (Stockholm, Carlsson Bokförlag, 1996).

²⁰ Bo Stråth. "The Swedish Path to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century" in Øystein Sørensen (ed.). *Nordic Paths to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1994). p.62. See also: Bo Stråth (ed), *Language and the Construction of Class Identities. The Struggle for Discursive Power in Social Organisation: Scandinavia and Germany after 1800*, (Gothenburg, Gothenburg University Press, 1990).

only emigration that was of concern to Kjellén, immigration also threatened the future of the Swedish nation.

In addition to the above described emigration, immigration to Sweden from the neighbouring Scandinavian countries, Germany, Finland, Poland and the Baltic region also took place on a large scale. Thus, at the same time as the emigration report is being conducted, fierce debates on the need to halt immigration are taking place - “Jews, Gypsies and organ-grinders” were to be kept outside of the Swedish borders. It is symptomatic that when the, in 1907 founded, *Nationalförsamlingen mot Emigrationen* (National Society against Emigration) received a large donation it set up a fund that would support remigration to Sweden. It was thus not foreign blood that one wanted to come into Sweden, but the remigrated Swedish blood that would give life to the *Volkgeist*.²¹ Consequently, the two issues of emigration and immigration and the consequent reactions to them can not, and should not, be analysed separately as they were part and parcel of the same kind of national thinking. Rudolf Kjellén described this duality thus;

*Thus the known evil of emigration is accompanied by the evil of immigration, and it becomes a clear political task to remedy in both cases – within reasonable limits to close both the doors, to attempt to prevent the pure stream from flowing out and the filthy stream from flowing in.*²²

Immigration as a threat to the Swedish blood

That immigration, and not only emigration, also gave rise to an increased rhetoric on the need to protect the ethnically pure Swedish can be illustrated by the reactions to the work migration of Polish workers to the south of Sweden in the early 1900s. The actual number of Polish workers in Sweden was quite modest, never exceeding 2000 Polish workers in Sweden per year, but the import still caused considerable controversy and led to substantial debates; locally as well as nationally. In these debates what emerged was a discourse where the interest of the nation was put in relation to this import.

²¹ Patrik Hall. *The Social Construction of Nationalism. Sweden as an Example*. (Lund, Lund University Press, 1998). pp.228-230.

²² Rudolf Kjellén (1907) quoted in Patrik Hall. *The Social Construction of Nationalism. Sweden as an Example*. (Lund, Lund University Press, 1998). p.230.

The import of Polish workers to the south of Sweden began in the spring of 1904 when the (Danish) management at Helsingborgs sugar-fabric employed the first group of Polish workers and the import then grew successively. In 1907 a total of 1489 persons were included in the statistics for this form of work immigration and most of them were found on south Swedish farms.²³ The average number of workers per farm was 21, with the largest estates (Säbyholm, Stora Markie, Axeltofta, Halmstadgården) employing up to 60 foreign workers each.²⁴ The import was organised along strict gender lines; the women were recruited to work on the beet fields whereas the men were recruited to work in the kaolin pit mining at Ivö and in the chamotte fabric in Bromölla. This division of labour appears also to have been the case in Germany and Denmark where Polish work migration was also common.²⁵ The import of Polish workers to the beet fields of Sweden was actually reflective of a more general work migration pattern - between 1860 and 1914 Polish migration movements involved a total of 10 million people.²⁶ Within Europe the large majority of the Polish workers went to work on German lands. In Scandinavia, Denmark had the most experience of this economic migration, using Polish agricultural workers between 1893 and 1929. These workers often replaced women from the Swedish region of Småland, who previously had been called in to work on the Danish beet fields.²⁷

The import of Galician workers gave rise to a discussion that very much resembled that found in relation to the emigration. Whereas the large majority of conservatives originally supported the import on the grounds of economic interest, the liberals and socialists were strongly against it and in the public debates a polarisation between the two factions can be detected. Both the liberals and the socialists criticised the conservative camp heavily for their supposedly lack of patriotism. The south Swedish newspaper *Arbetet* wrote that *when*

²³ Göran Rosender. "Galizier" in Ingvar Svanberg & Harald Runblom (eds.) *Det mångkulturella Sverige – En handbok om etniska grupper och minoriteter* (Stockholm, Gidlunds Bokförlag, 1988). p.134.

²⁴ See Lars Olsson. "Skånska godsägare och galiziska betflickor" in *"Sicken turk" – om invandrarnas svenska historia* (Stockholm, Riksförbundet för Hembygdsvård Årsbok, 1990).

²⁵ Lars Olsson. "Nya grepp på den historiska migrationsforskningen i Växjö" in *Tvärsnitt* (1:05, 2008). See also: Simon Constantine. "Migrant Labour in the German Countryside: Agency and Protest, 1890-1923" in *Labor History* (47:3, 2006); Henrik Zip Sane. *Billige og villige?- Fremmedarbejdere i faedrelandet ca. 1800-1970*. (Naestved, Farums Arkiver og Museer, 2000).

²⁶ Ewa Morawska. "Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 1880-1914" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (31:2, 1989). p.247.

²⁷ Henrik Zip Sane. *Billige og villige?- Fremmedarbejdere i faedrelandet ca. 1800-1970*. (Naestved, Farums Arkiver og Museer, 2000).

*capitalists bring in foreign labour to the Swedish principal industry, their true patriotism is revealed as they betray the home nation.*²⁸

At a socialist meeting in Malmö arranged as a protest against the import, Bengt Lidforss and Knut Wicksell called the import of Polish workers a *heinous treachery of the home country*.²⁹ At the centre of the argumentation one thus finds the national and even among the socialists the arguments centred not on class solidarity but on the national interest. Within shortly, Conservatives were shifting sides and in their reactions one can detect an emerging concern for the national and the fear of diluting the Swedish blood with foreign. Thus, despite these initial internal debates and the polarisation between a Liberal-Socialist and a Conservative camp, the main criticism and the bulk of the anger were soon directed against the foreign workers. Increasingly the slogan “Sweden for the Swedes” was being used among Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives alike.³⁰ In their reactions to why the import was harmful and should be stopped it appears as if the national was the strongest political argument that could come to use, triumphing any other form of political justification.

Following from slogans like “Sweden for the Swedes!” racial invectives were used to separate the foreign workers from the Swedish and demonstrate the superiority of the latter. It is interesting to note that the most ardent opponents to the Polish workers and the most aggressive rhetoric were found among the socialists. In the workers’ press these imported workers were described as alien intruders and their inferior racial and moral level was compared with the Swedish workers’ much higher standing. Thus, in the face of this perceived foreign threat, international worker solidarity was utterly defeated by national solidarity among the socialists. Especially *Arbetet*, the social democratic newspaper under the direction of August “Kabbarp” Nilsson, frequently used these racial assaults in its texts.³¹ In a speech one of the socialist leading figures, Värner Rydén, gave in Malmö in 1904 one finds further examples of this kind of rhetoric. Rydén began his speech by saying that capital had no home country but lived where it could make the most profits. Sweden had now started experiencing this theoretical fact practically with Russian money buying Swedish ore-fields in

²⁸ *Arbetet* 12 April 1904.

²⁹ Tomas Hammar. *Sverige åt svenskarna. Invandringspolitik, utlänningskontroll och asylrätt 1900-1932* (Stockholm, Stockholms Universitets Förlag, 1964) p.44.

³⁰ Tomas Hammar. *Sverige åt svenskarna. Invandringspolitik, utlänningskontroll och asylrätt 1900-1932* (Stockholm, Stockholms Universitets Förlag, 1964) p.44.

³¹ Samuel Edquist. ”En historia om främlingar. Om effekterna av nationalistiskt historieskrivning” in Anders Florén & Åsa Karlsson (eds.). *Främlingar – ett historiskt perspektiv* (Uppsala, Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia 19, 1998). pp.93-94.

Norrland, and Swedish companies threatening to move abroad. Rydén then pointed out that nowhere were workers paid as poorly as in Sweden which had an almost ‘barbarian half-Asiatic’ industry that forced its workers to emigrate. As if this was not enough, the capital now turned its gaze to yet even cheaper labour and started importing slaves from Galicia, “a small country in Poland where the people live in half-barbarian circumstances”. These slaves worked under conditions that were impossible for Swedish workers to put up with because when you compared the Swedish workers to the Galician the latter “stood on a substantial lower moral standing”. Rydén finished off by saying that the Swedish workers should remember Marx’s words of “workers unite!” and unite in the task “to drive the Galicians out of the country and claim Sweden for the Swedes!”³²

What becomes obvious from this example of the Galician work import is not only that the national is used by Swedish agents in response to the migration, but also that the national is constructed around racial qualities. Swedish workers were better than the “Galician” not only because they were Swedish, but because they were ethnically pure Swedish with superior racial qualities. Importing foreign blood of lower racial quality would substantially lower the quality of the Swedish national stock and should thus be avoided. In the Swedish historiography, these connections between ethnicity, race and nationalism have primarily been interpreted as a *radicalisation* of nationalism and has been located in the radical right, among groups such as *Karolinska Förbundet* and *Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet*. But as the above example demonstrates, stressing the national and justifying it with racial arguments was not just confined to right wing conservative groups. Swedish historian Håkan Blomqvist has indeed argued that a fundamental aspect of the social democratic nationalism was the belief in a superior, pure, healthy and trustworthy Swedish race.³³

This kind of rhetoric where the superior ethnically pure Swedish was emphasised, and was to be protected from migration, was thus found among agents of various political orientations. Consequently, the two above cases, the reactions against the Polish work import and the survey into the causes and effects of the emigration, are two examples of how migration gave rise to a general debate where the national concern was put in relation to the loss of good

³² *Fram* no.6 (June 1904). p.7

³³ Håkan Blomqvist. *Nation, ras och civilisation i svensk arbetarrörelse före nazismen* (Stockholm, Carlssons, 2006) pp.545-546.

Swedish blood and the inflow of inferior foreign blood. The end result of this development was that the national was increasingly interpreted in ethnic and racial terms.

Concluding remarks

As the painting by Zorn is an example of, the nationalisation of Sweden has to be considered both efficient and successful in that it did unite the large majority of the Swedish population around a number of symbols and (invented) traditions that soon came to be regarded as *typically Swedish*. By the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century the idea of a homogenous Swedish nation and culture had thus been introduced and had won substantial ground. Gradually, Sweden and the Swedish community were imagined by an increasingly larger part of the population. That the painting is as popular today as it was when it was painted more than a hundred years ago also says something about the durability of these ideas and symbols.

Zorn's idyllic painting of various Swedish symbols includes the image of the white-skinned, healthy, Swedish subject. To understand why Zorn chose to depict the Swede like that, one has to place his painting, as well as Swedish nation formation as such, in a more global context. Swedish agents increasingly based the national on ethnicity and blood lineage in a perceived practical and political need to keep the Swedish blood (and nation) pure in the face of global migration. Only examining local conditions that supposedly gave rise to an increased emphasis on the national is thus a serious mistake as nation formation was not only the effect of domestic factors, but also of the movement of people across national borders. The construction of the Swedish national at the turn of the century should therefore not only be located within the Swedish domestic framework, but should also be set in relation to global entanglements and processes.