

# The Peculiarities of Nations<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:* In the evolving relationship between the European Union and its member states, the evolution of a democratic deficit at the European level has become increasingly manifest and problematic. EU remains a polity in which the nation-state remains the repository of democratic legitimacy, while EU-wide rule-making and decision-making are vested with institutions lacking democratic accountability. At the core of the problem are the persistent peculiarities of European nation-states, in this case, the reluctance of successful nation-states like Sweden and Denmark to concede democratic power and legitimacy to a common European polity. Remembering a conversation with Peter Kemp.

*Keywords:* Peter Kemp, European Union, Sweden, Denmark, nation state, democracy, democratic legitimacy, democratic sovereignty, federalism, populism

I crossed paths with Peter Kemp twice in my life. The first time was during the campaign for Swedish membership in the European Union in 1994. The second was at a conference in Lund in 2010 on “Memory and Manipulation.”<sup>2</sup> Revisiting what we both wrote and published at the time, I now see how much these themes had in common. The European Union that we both had such grand hopes for is gasping for political life and legitimacy, and the nationalist fabrications and manipulations of collective memories are making short shrift of that “never again” which was once at the heart of the European project. A collective memory binding the peoples of Europe together is increasingly being challenged by unearthed narratives of national grandeur and self-sufficiency, effectively driving the peoples of Europe apart.

In this context, the UK exit from the EU might be seen as the end of a European road never seriously taken, since taking it seriously would have meant taking the

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1. This article is based on an introductory talk given at the Eco-Ethica conference at Sigtuna, Sweden, November 2019. © Göran Rosenberg.
  2. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Ingrid Rasch, eds., *Minne och manipulation: Om det kollektiva minnets praktiker*.

democratic deficit in the European Union seriously. Instead, EU remains a polity in which the nation-state is the sole repository of democratic legitimacy (the EU parliament is a democratically elected body lacking in democratic accountability), while EU-wide rule-making and decision-making is still vested with institutions lacking democratic accountability. One could also describe it as a system in which the nation-state had conceded actual political power to a non-democratic transnational level, without conceding formal democratic power. As long as the actual and the formal seemed to coincide, that is, as long as it was politically expedient for national governments to assume democratic responsibility for rules and decisions that were no longer theirs to make, the democratic deficit was rarely mentioned as a problem. EU was an efficient machine for economic growth, and economic growth would eventually even out national differences and grievances without impinging on the formal democratic sovereignty of the nation-state. In case of conflict, national democracy would assume a confirmatory role, legitimizing by democratic vote what had in practice been decided elsewhere.

The problem posed by the democratic deficit would only become apparent if and when the economic machine began to sputter, and diverging national needs and interests then would be harder to reconcile, and there would be no legitimate democratic political structure in place to deal with the conflicts. The current form of resolving conflicts between member states, de facto diplomatic negotiations behind closed doors between heads of member states (with each member state having the right of veto), has often been shown to be a recipe for the delegitimization of European-level rules and decisions. The failure to implement a common European asylum system, prompted by the existence of a common external border, is a case in point—with the effect that the common external border, central to the principle of freedom of movement, is in fact giving way to new internal borders, effectively undermining and delegitimizing one of the basic tenets of the existing EU treaty.

### Pronouncing the F-Word

The looming democratic deficit was very much on the mind of Peter Kemp and myself, as Sweden in a referendum in November 1994 voted yes to membership in the European Union. I was at the time the editor-in-chief of a monthly magazine, *Moderna Tider*, which had not only taken an editorial stand for Swedish membership, but had also initiated a wide-ranging debate about the nature and future of the European Union, and by implication, about the nature and future of the European nation-state.

It was in this context that *Moderna Tider* in April 1994 published an article by Peter Kemp entitled “From the Peoples of Europe to the Europe of Peoples.”<sup>3</sup> Kemp’s Denmark by then had long since (1973) been a member of the European Union, or the European Economic Community, EEC, as it was called at the beginning, but the frictions between a deep-rooted Danish sense of national sovereignty and the impo-

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3. Peter Kemp, “Från Europas folk till folkens Europa,” 20–21.

sition of European rules and decisions had been apparent from the start. When Denmark in a referendum in 1992 narrowly rejected the Maastricht Treaty, it was granted several opt-outs from the treaty, the Edinburgh Agreement, which was passed in a second referendum in 1993. In yet a third referendum, in 2000, Denmark voted to opt out of the common currency, the euro, (as Sweden would do in 2003).

With reference to the reluctance of Denmark to abide by common EU-treaties, Peter Kemp argued that the democratic deficit in the EU could no longer be downplayed and papered over. Instead, there was an increasingly pressing need to rethink the political structure of the union, with the aim of creating a European level that was both democratic and accountable, while allowing for nation-states, and even regions, to assume and retain their democratic sovereignty wherever it had not by constitution been delegated to a federal European level.

Yes, indeed, a federal European level. We both then belonged to an all-too small choir of Scandinavian public voices daring to pronounce the F-word, suggesting that EU should become a federation. In a federation, we argued, EU legitimacy and unity could be derived from nation-state democracy and diversity, inspired by the motto of the American federation, *e pluribus unum* (emphasizing that a European federation must be of a very different kind). Or as I wrote: “Federations are perhaps the most sophisticated form of human societies, since they are based on the assumption of diversity and conflict and not on the assumption of homogeneity. This must not necessarily be a super state. . . . [O]n the contrary, a European federation, if anything, can only be constituted by its nation states . . . defined as much by their diverging memories of war and conflict as by their common memories of peace and co-operation.”<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, federalism was a hard sell in both Denmark and Sweden, two prosperous and self-assured nations, tacitly founded on a collective memory of national continuity and cultural homogeneity, both convinced that Europe needed them more than they needed Europe, and that the delegation of sovereignty to a European polity would be a threat to national democracy and to national institutions and traditions. The long-term political implications of the democratic deficit were thus largely neglected, as were the realities of a de facto shrinking national sovereignty in a world of transnational interdependency. Economic expediency was to be substituted for democratic legitimacy.

### From Reluctance to Radicalism

Already in 1994, as we were confronting a rise in nationalist and populist opinions in both countries, you could see where this might lead. Sweden had by then had its first populist experience with Ny Demokrati (“New Democracy”), a neo-liberal anti-immigration party, which gained 7 percent of the vote in 1991. In 1995, Denmark saw the establishment of Dansk Folkeparti (“Danish People’s Party”), a fiercely anti-

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4. Göran Rosenberg, “The Future of a European Gemeinschaft,” 187–98.

European, nationalist, and increasingly xenophobic party that would soon become the third largest party and significantly change the political and cultural landscape.

And as we speak, a nationalist party with neo-Nazi roots, the Sweden Democrats, has become the third largest party in Riksdagen, the Swedish parliament, with unanimous polls projecting it to become the second largest, or even the largest party, in the elections of 2022. Only a year ago (2018) it was considered beyond the pale for even center-right parties to touch it. Today the Sweden Democrats are at the center of an emerging right-wing political coalition, with clear prospects of winning the next elections, while its anti-immigration agenda is rapidly becoming mainstream.

Some years ago, I was asked to write an essay about what it would take for Sweden, or the Swedish electorate, to become radicalized, or rather to succumb to a populist nationalist temptation.<sup>5</sup> At the time the essay was written and published, in 2012, Sweden was still seen as a haven of liberal democratic stability, the exceptional nation of Europe, receiving and accommodating far more asylum seekers per capita than any other European nation, and with an expressed commitment to honor the moral and legal obligations of international conventions.

However, as I wrote some years later, there was little reason to believe that the exception would last. “Not when anti-refugee parties are having their day all over Europe. Not when such a party has become the third largest in Sweden. Not when even a modest redistribution of some 40,000 refugees among the member-states of EU cannot be agreed upon.”<sup>6</sup>

When in the summer of 2015, millions of people were fleeing the war in Syria, and some 160, 000 of them arrived in Sweden, the exception abruptly ended, and Sweden rapidly went from being a welcoming nation to become a “repelling” nation, erecting tacit border controls and introducing stricter asylum laws to stem the flow.

In my essay, I set out to explain, and perhaps even predict, the shape and form of a coming populist turn in Swedish politics. I thus had to venture into some peculiarities of the Swedish nation; the elusive notion of the Swedish model, and the equally elusive notion of *folkhemmet*, “The People’s Home,” and the particular form of political nostalgia that these notions have given rise to; the promise of a return to a nation-defining Swedish success story. I concluded my essay: “If at the end of the day, the Swedish model would be widely perceived as either failing or obsolete . . . the politics of nostalgia might transform into an outright nationalist defence of the Swedish model, making radicals out of reluctant.”<sup>7</sup>

Since this was written, this is what has happened. The politics of nostalgia have become harnessed to a nationalist narrative attributing the failings of the Swedish model to the large-scale influx of culturally alien people, overwhelming the welfare system, undermining the social and cultural cohesion of the nation.

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5. Rosenberg, *Sweden: The Reluctant Nation*.

6. Rosenberg, *Refugees and Europe: The Swedish Exception*.

7. Rosenberg, *Sweden: The Reluctant Nation*, 61.

It could be argued that the Swedish model had been predicated on a nationalist narrative all the way from its inception in the 1930s, stressing Sweden's national homogeneity and cohesion. In the postwar years, however, it would appear as being predicated on something more universal, a narrative of reason and progress, emphasizing the building of a People's Home for the inclusion and equality of all. This was the narrative that would form the Swedish self-perception and inform its policies, not least with regards to immigration and asylum seekers, for the remainder of the twentieth century. As late as in the summer of 2014, facing a growing stream of Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Europe, the leader of the conservative party at the time, Fredrik Reinfeldt, gave a speech in which he appealed to the Swedish people "to open your hearts to people in deep distress."<sup>8</sup>

In the following elections of 2016, Reinfeldt's party lost heavily, while the Sweden Democrats almost doubled their representation to become the third largest party in the Swedish parliament, and the political climate changed. Reinfeldt immediately resigned and was chastised by his own party for causing the defeat by neglecting the threat of large-scale immigration. From there on, the national foundation of the People's Home became visible again, and the politics of nostalgia could easily exploit the easily re-awakened collective memory of a remarkable Swedish success story, for the promise of a return to its culturally more homogeneous origins and conditions.

The term itself, *folkhemmet*, with apparent connotations to the ominously ringing German *Volksgemeinschaft*, was originally coined by the Swedish nationalist and conservative politician Rudolf Kjellén in the early twentieth century. He also coined the even more ominous term National Socialism (well before it was appropriated by a certain German Party), by which he denoted the idea of a cohesive community based on common national and ethnic roots. Kjellén viewed society as an organism in which the People constituted an indivisible whole and in which distinctions of class, status, and ancestry were superseded by the common bonds of nation and home. Kjellén was certainly not a democrat; *folkhemmet*, as he imagined it, was a hierarchical and corporatist construction, populated by people defined by their distinct and fixed functions, professions and positions, justly managed by a benevolent patron, in the case of Kjellén, a constitutional monarch.

In 1928 the term was nevertheless appropriated by the Swedish Social Democrats and would henceforth denote a tight-knit national community, striving for a class-transcending social order based on peace, justice, progress, and democracy.

The Social Democrats became nationalists, and the nation became Social Democratic.

### The Peculiarities of Swedishness

The idea of a People's Home had of course always begged the question of who belonged and who did not. In the 1930s, when it all began, the answer seemed obvious

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8. Fredrik Reinfeldt, "Öppna era hjärtan."

and was spelled out in terms of blood and soil. The notion of Swedishness, *svenskhet*, came to play an important role in the emerging narrative of *folkhemmet*. Originally part of a national-romantic myth about the origins and nature of the Swedish nation, it also entered the rhetoric of the Social Democrats. Notions of race, roots (*folks-tam*) and social fitness were frequently invoked. The Swedish Social Democrats of the inter-war years were intensely preoccupied with the specific and unique traits of the Swedish national character. Swedes were “democrats at heart,” Social Democratic Party leader and prime minister Per Albin Hansson stated in a speech in 1933. “They love freedom and hate repression . . . but they also want the state to keep the order, harness avarice and excess, help all to work and sustenance, make it safe and good to toil and live in old Sweden.”<sup>9</sup>

The most important feature of this at once nationalist and Social Democratic narrative was first and foremost its remarkable success. In contrast to Germany, where similar ideas had fomented extremism, polarization, and social unrest, the Swedish experiment in “national socialism” was a democratizing and socially pacifying venture.

Whence the difference? Let me suggest that it might partially be derived from one of the most outstanding peculiarities of the Swedish nation, its long-standing and deep-seated tradition of civil consensus, rooted in the creation of the nation itself in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> One of the means to unify the new nation was the establishment in the early seventeenth century (by the powerful Swedish *rikskansler*, Axel Oxenstierna), of strong central departments, *ämbetsverk*, with the purpose of consolidating central control of a geographically scattered, culturally divided, and strife-torn territory. A distinctive feature of these new departments was their collegiate leadership. Decisions were taken by a collegium, not by single individuals, creating over time a specific culture of bureaucratic independence and self-importance. While these *collegia* became efficient tools in the forging of a centralized Swedish state and undoubtedly strengthened the king’s control of the country, they also restricted his autocratic prerogatives. Most royal initiatives henceforth had to be examined through the cool prism of an independent state bureaucracy and to have their merits weighed against new standards of reason and rationality. A language of matter-of-factness began to cloak and disarm potential conflicts between king and administration.

This specific culture of administrative independence and impartiality, *ämbetsmannakulturen*, was further strengthened by the large influx of young, educated, and to-nobility-raised commoners, into the services of the rapidly expanding and incessantly warring Swedish state. Thus was created an extensive class of “lower” nobility, promoted on the basis of education and administrative skill rather than on traditional aristocratic virtues and prerogatives. This contributed to an exceptional social mo-

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9. Per Albin Hansson, quoted in Alf W. Johansson, *Vad är Sverige? Röster om svensk identitet*, 243.

10. Rosenberg, “The Crisis of Consensus in Postwar Sweden.”

bility in Swedish society at the time, making the step from yeoman to nobleman not only feasible but sometimes rapid. The mental universe of Swedes was thus formed in a class-transcending culture of “facts and representations,” creating a preference for common solutions in “a spirit of consensus.”<sup>11</sup>

In Sweden of the 1930s, this spirit most likely contributed to a historic compromise between Capital and Labour, or more precisely, between the employers (SAF) and the labor unions (LO), instituting in 1936 what came to be known as the Spirit of Saltsjöbaden (after the seaside resort outside Stockholm where the handshake took place). The agreement became the emblematic foundation of “the Swedish model,” laying the national foundations for social peace, economic growth, and extensive welfare.

The political terrain of both right-wing and left-wing radicalism was thus effectively occupied by a joint national and socialist narrative. In the political and economic turbulence of the 1930s, Sweden became a haven of national Social Democratic pragmatism, wary of nationalist extremism, unwilling to endanger its nascent social model through foreign alliances and military adventures, making neutrality a national posture and the construction of *folkhemmet* a national priority.

This element of pragmatic reticence, a reluctance to engage in the world, became even more apparent when Sweden, through a combination of luck, opportunism, and geopolitics, managed to stay out of yet another European war. The claimed rationality of Swedishness was thereby firmly integrated into the national self-image, as was the virtue of neutrality, i.e., staying aloof from the irrational passions of the world.

Effectively then, the Swedish model came out of the war stronger and more self-confident. Projects and reforms that had been interrupted were resumed and even radicalized. A devastated world had to be rebuilt, and the unharmed Swedish industry was in a unique position to provide whatever was needed to do it—steel, trucks, timber—creating a Swedish post-war boom that made even the most costly welfare reforms seem within reach. Uncontaminated by the memories of war, cut loose from the chains of history, liberated from national aggressions and emotions, Sweden was to become a model society heralding a new era of peace and progress.

How peculiarly Swedish this was in comparison with neighboring Denmark was obvious to the journalist and writer Jytte Bonnier: “Rationalism was the highway of Swedish thinking, and materialism the fuel of the Swedish welfare project. . . . Science and technology showed the way, planning was the order of the day: This was something completely different from the pragmatic view of life characterizing my home country. . . . We had two separate traditions and mentalities.”<sup>12</sup>

This was then the society into which I was born as perhaps its greatest beneficiary, the son of two survivors of the Holocaust, to whom Sweden had opened its doors and offered a future, and where distinctions of class and origin no longer seemed to matter. Health care, housing, and child support were to be accorded to

11. Eva Österberg, *Folk förr: Historiska essäer*, 192, 194.

12. Jytte Bonnier: “Drömmen blev till sist lögn.”

each and every one, poor and rich, newcomers and oldtimers, on the basis of general and generous rules, not on the basis of discretionary means-testing. This gave the burgeoning Swedish middle class a stake in the welfare state, making it an expression of “the Swedish form of life,” reinforcing the class-transcending support for what had essentially become a Social Democratic project.

### A Peculiar Swedish Religion

The distinctive Swedish blend between the hard-to-penetrate cultural codes of Swedishness, and claims to a universal culture of reason and rationality, is perhaps most clearly manifested in the role of organized religion in Sweden. Before the war, Sweden could reasonably be described as a monolithic state church society with a distinct and visible Lutheran cultural identity (full religious freedom came very late, and the separation of state and church took place only in 2000). Linked to the ideal of a People’s Home was the Lutheran ideal of a “People’s Church,” *folkkyrka*. The Church of Sweden thus identified with the Swedish state and the Swedish state identified with the church and protected its privileges, or more succinctly, the church relinquished its moral and spiritual independence from the state while the state provided it with a *de jure* monopoly on religious affairs. This made for a culturally entrenched People’s Church, indivisibly intertwined with the political and social ambitions of the nation. The church became progressively secularized, less owing its power to its spiritual and moral authority than to its role as the custodian of quasi-religious national traditions and specific matters of state.

When this increasingly anachronistic position was publicly challenged in the late 1940s, it triggered a fierce debate that lasted several years, in which the church more or less conceded the high ground to its secular critics, or rather, claimed the critics’ ground for itself. The church had no argument with secularism, it was said. Reason was not alien to religion but part and parcel of it. The dogmas of the church were no longer seen as incompatible with secular principles.

In fact, the debate did not so much pit the tenets of Reason against the tenets of Faith, as it revealed the tacit cultural bonds between church and state. The role of religion in Sweden thus became the great invisible in the narrative construction of Swedishness, adding yet another component to its peculiar fusion of tradition and modernity.

Although the Christian roots of modern Sweden are rarely acknowledged, studies have shown how the self-professed secular nature of modern Swedishness is deeply steeped in a Lutheran tradition of national self-sufficiency and moral rectitude. The Swedish claims to universal tolerance and cultural openness were in fact founded on a historically short experience of cultural and religious pluralism, and thus on a subsequent lack of experience in confronting and handling cultural and religious difference. While Sweden proudly had subscribed to a policy of openness towards asylum seekers and immigrants, which dramatically had changed the de-



mographic make-up of Sweden (20 percent foreign-born in 2019), this was arguably not matched by a corresponding ability to integrate and absorb the “new Swedes.” Rapidly growing socio-economic divides have disproportionately formed along cultural and ethnic lines. Economic and social marginalization has hit the foreign-born part of the population significantly harder, and is increasingly being accompanied by cultural and religious stereotyping and stigmatization.

Before the wave of asylum seekers in 2015, the narrative of a pluralistic and tolerant society open to all, had nevertheless managed to prevail over a narrative depicting the Swedish model as threatened by culturally alien immigrants, refusing to adapt to Swedish norms and traditions, placing a burden on the welfare state, contributing to its demise.

Not so any longer. Since 2015, the nationalist narrative has rapidly come to dominate the politics of Sweden, most clearly manifested in the advance of the Sweden Democrats, from untouchable extremists to likely members of a future Swedish government, with a growing influence on opinions and attitudes.

But a more nationalist Swedish mood has also manifested itself in the appearance of a new “muscular liberalism” (to borrow a term from David Cameron), calling for the liberal state to impose the bona fide rational and enlightened Swedish mores and traditions on culturally and religiously recalcitrant foreigners. This Jacobin impulse, to pursue a policy of coerced secularism, claiming its universal and culturally neutral character, might be seen as yet another manifestation of a peculiarly Swedish trait. What to Swedes might be a matter of enforcing secular and universal principles against archaic and irrational religious and cultural practices, could as well be seen as the imposition of an invisible majority culture, largely formed by the peculiar fusion of a Lutheranism imbued with secularism, and a secularism imbued with Lutheranism.

This has served to make the Swedish model remarkably unaware of its own cultural premises and prejudices. The very notions of culture and religion have rather come to be associated with alien traditions, rituals, and lifestyles, whereas the cultural peculiarities of the distinctly Swedish claim to universal reason and rationality have been largely invisible in the emerging landscape of cultural and religious diversity.

It is thus important to recognize the extent to which a peculiar Swedish “religion” has continued to define a distinctly majoritarian view on issues concerning the relation between private and public, individualism and collectivism, rationality and irrationality. It is precisely this cultural amalgam that explains why a number of Lutheran ministers have been prepared to close ranks with professed atheist (“humanist”) critics of religion against what is conceived of as irrational foreign religious beliefs and practices.

A case in point was the decision recently (September 2019) by a manifest liberal party, the Centre Party, to demand the legal prohibition of male circumcision, i.e., a cultural and religious practice exclusively associated with two religious minorities, Jews and Muslims. Some years before that, a group of prominent Swedes, includ-

ing a profiled minister of the Church of Sweden and a former leader of the liberal party (Liberalerna), had publicly demanded the same, referring to the imperatives of universal human rights, protecting children from religious coercion. Parents circumcising their male infants were compared to child molesters: “To show empathy and respect for adults who wish to cut into the healthy bodies of their children is to turn the back on the children.”<sup>13</sup> The article further made a comparison between male infant circumcision and an imaginary religious custom to cut off children’s earlobes, concluding: “When approximately 3,000 male bodies per year are *religiously mutilated* in Sweden, we cannot rightfully call our engagement for Human Rights anything but half-hearted.”<sup>14</sup>

In yet another attack on irrational religious practices, a prominent public figure within the Left Party (the former Communist Party) suggested that each and every child should be protected against “all religious practices” up to the age of twelve.

By whom and how? one might ask.

The conspicuous blindness to the cultural roots of the anti-circumcision campaign in particular, and Swedish secularism in general, is perhaps indicative of the extent to which the Swedish national narrative is still colored by the conflation of Swedishness with universal morality and rationality. This amalgam of national enlightenment and cultural self-righteousness has made the Swedish narrative noticeably ambiguous; on one hand the inviting myth of *folkhemmet*, a generous welfare state open to all, and on the other hand the dissuading myth of Swedishness, i.e., a particular Swedish way of life based on a deep-rooted ethnic and cultural tradition, hard to emulate and penetrate.

This then has made for a peculiar form of political nostalgia, predicated on the collective memory of a particular social order, the Swedish model, as well as on the preservation and defense of a particular set of Swedish values and traditions.

### A Nostalgia of a Peculiar Kind

In the best-selling crime novels by the Swedish writer Henning Mankell, the pioneer of Nordic Noir, the hero is a seasoned, disillusioned, and somewhat depressive police superintendent, Kurt Wallander. The crimes that Wallander is set to investigate are all heinous and macabre in character: heads are cut off and scalped; victims have sharpened wooden poles driven through their bodies; others are crucified or dismembered; women and children are molested, burnt, and tortured.

These horrible events all take place against the backdrop of an idyllic Swedish landscape, inhabited by trusting and innocent people, unable to imagine such crimes, and even less to plan and execute them. In contrast, the perpetrators are all aligned with sinister and alien forces that invade the Swedish paradise and undermine it. The

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13. Annika Borg, Christer Sturmark, et al., “Därför måste regeringen stoppa omskärelse av pojkar.”

14. Borg, Sturmark, et al., “Måste regeringen stoppa omskärelse.” Italics added.

increasingly depressed Kurt Wallander is given many reasons and ample opportunities to mourn the good society which he once knew and which is now falling apart before his eyes.

When the last skull has been splintered, and the last child has been molested or burnt, and the last foreign plot has been exposed, and Wallander warily has unmasked the last lie, what has been conveyed is the image of Sweden losing its bearings and mores and becoming a society like all others. The personal depression of Kurt Wallander thus becomes inseparable from his mourning of a lost Swedish utopia. There is no doubt in my mind that Henning Mankell, a self-confessed supporter of the radical left, was having his protagonist, Kurt Wallander, represent his own disillusionment with the retreat from the ideals of *folkhemmet* and his own yearnings for its political restoration.

This disillusionment is most visible in the party that still claims political ownership to the Swedish model, the Social Democrats. Although the party, while in government, has been instrumental to reforms signifying retreats from the model, and while in opposition has acquiesced to liberal-conservative proposals to the same effect, it has skillfully managed to retain most of its traditional rhetoric, depicting itself as the true custodian of *folkhemmet*.

This unofficial and unresolved ideological conflict within the Social Democratic Party has, among other things, manifested itself in a persistent ambiguity towards the European project; yes to the benefits of economic integration, no to political integration and the impingements on national sovereignty. Anti-Europeanism is a persistent and widespread undercurrent in small-town and rural Sweden, where the benefits of EU membership and globalization have not been too obvious, and where the weakening of the welfare state might be perceived as an existential threat (and perhaps rightly so).

This is a political landscape in which Europe and EU all too easily will be perceived as a threat rather than a promise, and in which the new rhetoric of welfare nationalism might manifest itself on both the far right and the far left of the political spectrum.

Until the election of 2018, the conflict between the old narrative, openness and welfare for all, and the new narrative, closeness and welfare for our own, had largely been contained within the Social Democratic Party, with the rhetoric of nostalgia serving as a veil over the deepening rift within the party.

Now the veil has lifted. The “reluctants” are increasingly turning into “radicals.” In the 2018 election, 25 percent of the members of LO, the Swedish central trade union organization, closely tied to the Social Democrats, voted for the Sweden Democrats.

Not that Sweden in this regard differs from other Western countries, where similar nationalist transformations are taking place, but in this, I would argue, Sweden is a society that must deal with a potential threat not only to its social fabric, but to its national narrative as well, to its peculiar Religion of reason and rationality.

So, this is what Peter Kemp and I, from our very different national and cultural vantage points, had to confront in our common endeavor to argue for a transition from the Europe of peoples to the peoples of Europe, the peculiarity of nations. Let's just say that the task is still unfinished.

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