

The Evolution of Swedish Fascism: Self-identity and Ideology in Interwar Sweden

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Abstract

Historians and social scientists generally understand nationalism to be the defining feature of fascism. This study challenges that assumption with the examination of Swedish fascist movements through the concept of self-identity. Based on interwar fascist periodicals, the development of Swedish fascists' self-identity in relation to race, nation, and the signifiers of 'fascism' and 'National Socialism', is traced from the early 1920s when an overt attachment to Mussolini's model was displayed, through a National Socialist phase showing a cautious commitment to Nazi Germany, ending with a final phase of 'anonymisation'. In the face of criticism that their ideology was alien to Sweden, fascists adapted their self-representation to accommodate nationalist commitments, developing a transnational racialist ideology believed to be more in tune with Swedish political culture. When public opinion turned decisively against 'international fascism' in the mid-1930s, they were forced to discard the name and image of 'fascism' altogether, in a final phase of anonymisation, which however did not entail any significant ideological metamorphosis.

Keywords

Sweden, fascism, racialism, national socialism, Nazism, discourse, identity, ideology

Below I will consider fascist self-identity in Sweden, what I argue is its awkward relationship to nationalism, and how that relationship drove ideological change. Fascism is commonly understood by most scholars to be an essentially nationalist phenomenon, but upon examining fascist movements in interwar Sweden, it becomes apparent that the matter is more complex and sometimes requires a more nuanced approach to the nationalist aspect of their ideology. As I will show, while Swedish fascists in the 1920s generally did identify their ideology as essentially nationalist, it did not take long before that identification was significantly altered.

Criticism, from supporters and opponents, that fascism was an 'alien ideology' to Sweden, sparked internal discussions about the nature of fascism and particularly its relationship to nationalism among self-identified fascists. This discourse of fascists about fascism was an important factor in the transformation of Swedish fascist ideology, and drove its evolution through the interwar years. This was by no means only the case in Sweden. Fascists everywhere on the continent were

constantly subject to pressure to adapt tactically, whenever their ideology was compared to or compromised by great, but foreign, role models like Italy and Germany.¹

Self-identity is here a central concept employed to map the ideological development of Swedish fascism, which sets the scope and limits of this chapter. The aim is to show how identification with fascism in and of itself presented ideological conundrums, and impacted ideological development, through external criticism and internal debate. Firstly, this should not be taken to mean that there were no other factors in Swedish fascist ideological development; personal rivalries, tactical disagreements, and especially the divide between radical and conservative wings, are all elements that played a significant role in Swedish fascist ideology, but fall outside the scope of this analysis. Secondly, this examination only concerns those political organisations which overtly identified themselves with fascism or National Socialism, meaning that while the relationship between identity and ideology is foregrounded, inclusion of groups in the analysis is based on identifying as fascist, not ideological content.

Notably, this approach considers National Socialist identity as a form of fascist identity. This is crucial, since in the case of Sweden it would be frequently unhelpful to distinguish between the two. The rapid nominal change, from fascist to National Socialist, in the late 1920s and early 1930s of Swedish organisations did not constitute an ideological upheaval, but was an important stage in developing their tactics of identity and representation. Such a development was not unique to Sweden either – something similar happened with the British Union of Fascists for instance, which added ‘and National Socialists’ to its name in the mid-1930s. Therefore, for the present purpose, National Socialism will be regarded as a type of fascist identity, even if some contemporaries took a different view.

The main source material used for the study of fascist self-identification is party periodicals. Newspapers published by various fascist parties are examined as a means of tracing the internal discourses about fascists’ understanding of their ideology. Since the interwar period saw no single fascist group establish definitive predominance over the others, at least until 1936, there will be no specific focal point. The picture presented instead is an overview of certain discursive trends amongst a smörgåsbord of fascist groups. That being said, special attention will be paid to the first fascist movement of any size worth mentioning, *Sveriges Fascistiska Folkparti och Kamporganisation* [SFKO, Sweden’s Fascist People’s Party and Combat Organisation], outwardly led by Konrad Otto Hallgren, together with Sven Hedengren and Sven Olov Lindholm, and its

¹ Cf. the case of the NSB in the Netherlands in relation to Nazi Germany, in Dietrich Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe: German Nazis, Dutch and French Fascists, 1933-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 57–59; See also Robin te Slaa and Edwin Klijn, *De NSB: Ontstaan en Opkomst van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, 1931-1935* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), pp. 257–64.

successor permutations, particularly Lindholm's *Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet* [NSAP, National Socialist Workers' Party], which by the late 1930s had managed to become the largest, and certainly most conspicuous, of Sweden's fascist parties.

Swedish fascism is characterised by factionalism and internal disputes, and an intense rivalry between groups at their own expense, dedicating a significant portion of their propaganda to fighting each other.² In the words of Swedish historian Hans Dahlberg: '[e]veryone hated each other. A study of Swedish Nazism is a study of egotistical spite ...and verbal crudeness of the lowest sort.'³ Space does not permit a comprehensive account of the divisiveness of Swedish fascist politics here;⁴ but suffice to say, this was partly because of, and doubtless exacerbated by, the lack of effective and competent leadership, as well as the far-flung geographical spread of fascists across the country. The many divisions in Swedish fascism prevented a single interpretation of fascism being imposed or accepted, and thus greatly encouraged ideological discussion and acrimonious debate between the parties. Nevertheless, all movements in Sweden can be understood to participate in essentially the same discourses of political self-identity. Swedish historian Lena Berggren has written what serves as a good introduction to the Swedish fascist scene. Her 2002 article 'Swedish Fascism: Why Bother?' rejects the conventional copycat label for Swedish fascism,⁵ and analyses the Swedish variant in its own right without losing sight of the international context. However, Berggren does not explore the discursive identity politics of this scene, or the peculiar relationship between fascism and nationalism, and ideology and identity.⁶

² Klas Åmark, *Att Bo Granne med Ondskan: Sveriges Förhållande till Nazismen, Nazityskland och Förintelsen* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 2011), p. 304.

³ 'Alla hatade varandra. Ett studium av den svenska nazismen är ett studium av inkrökt hatiskhet ... och verbal råhet på lägsta nivå.' All translations are my own. Hans Dahlberg, *I Sverige under 2:a världskriget*, 3d edn (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1984), p. 201. Sven Olov Lindholm himself took offence at this description, and actually wrote a letter to Dahlberg to chastise him for what he considered an unfair characterisation. Stockholm, Swedish National Archives: Marieberg, Letter Lindholm to Ingemar Carlsson, 24.5.1985, Rönninge, SO Lindholm's collection, vol. 5.

⁴ A convenient table of Swedish fascist movements has been provided in Bernt Hagtvét, 'On the Fringe: Swedish Fascism 1920-1945', in *Who Were the Fascists?*, ed. by Stein U. Larsen (Oslo: Universitetsförlaget, 1980), pp. 724-25. The multiple splits and fusions in Swedish fascism were sufficiently confusing that the NSAP published a short propagandistic history with a diagram of fascist organisations in Sweden in 1934: *Kort Historik över Läget inom den Svenska Nationalsocialismen* (Gothenburg: 1934).

⁵ E.g. Holger Carlsson, *Nazismen i Sverige: Ett Varningsord* (Stockholm, 1942); or Armas Sastamoinen, *Hitlers Svenska Förtrupper* (Stockholm: Federativs, 1947); Eric Wärenstam, *Fascismen och Nazismen i Sverige 1920-1940: Studier i den Svenska Nationalsocialismens, Fascismens och Antisemitismens Organisationer, Ideologier och Propaganda under Mellankrigsåren* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1970), p. 39.

⁶ Lena Berggren, 'Swedish Fascism: Why Bother?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37.3 (2002), 395-417 (pp. 395-417); She also made the same argument in Swedish, in Lena Berggren, 'Den Svenska Mellankrigsfascismen - ett Ointressant Marginalfenomen eller ett Viktigt Forskningsobjekt?', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 2002, 427-44.

‘Fascism is not for export’, Mussolini famously declared March, 1928.⁷ Yet this never did much to prevent organisations all over Europe from taking up the fascist name, often in a highly fertile and creative fashion, as António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis have recently suggested.⁸ Sweden was no exception. Regardless of Mussolini’s intentions, fascism did not remain an Italian idea, but became a European phenomenon.⁹ In Sweden, fascism’s Italian origins and character were explicitly acknowledged.¹⁰ The weekly political newspaper *Nationen* [The Nation], owned by one of the ‘ancestral fathers of fascism in Sweden’, Elof Eriksson, was lavish with praise for the *Duce* and the extraordinary changes he brought about in Italy.¹¹ In 1925, when his paper functioned as a mouthpiece for SFKO, fascism was acknowledged to be ‘in its origins, its development, its theses, and its results, a specifically Italian phenomenon’.¹²

Nationen proclaimed the necessity of freeing Sweden from the yoke of ‘Jewish cosmopolitanism’. It advocated fascism as the means of doing so, as it was Mussolini who showed the only possible path, in spite of his lack of concern for a ‘Jewish question’.¹³ Eventually Mussolini saw the value for the reputation of fascism to cultivate admirers abroad, though they did not need Mussolini’s approval to embrace the creed and name of fascism, or acknowledge Mussolini’s influence.¹⁴ In *Spöknippet* [The Fases], weekly newspaper of SFKO once abandoned by Eriksson, an article by the Austrian Franz Haiser was published in response to Mussolini’s 1928 disavowal of international fascism: ‘This by no means changes the fact that he is a genius, inimitable giant, who possesses the rare gift of taking the personal will of millions, and giving them a higher, more ideal will in its stead.’ Mussolini was the first to put these ideas into practice, and to give them a name, Haiser argued, but fascists elsewhere could retain the name, as fascism supposedly pre-dated Mussolini in its essence – a political force beyond history.¹⁵

⁷ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 463.

⁸ Introduction to *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, ed. by António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–5.

⁹ Henrik Arnstad, ‘Fascismens Föränderlighet 1919-2014: De Svartbruna Rörelserna i ett Kontextuellt Perspektiv’, *Historisk Tidskrift*, 134.2 (2014), 259–66 (pp. 260–61).

¹⁰ See for instance Lena Berggren, ‘Intellectual Fascism: Per Engdahl and the Formation of “New-Swedish Socialism”’, *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascism Studies*, 2014, 69–92 (p. 72).

¹¹ Wärenstam, pp. 27–30.

¹² ‘Fascismen är i sitt ursprung, sin utveckling, sina teser och sina resultat ett specifikt italienskt fenomen.’ ‘Mussolinis stora författningsreform: Ett förödöme för andra länder’, *Nationen*, no 10 (1925), p. 4.

¹³ ‘Fram för den nationella fascismen’, *Nationen*, no 23, June (1926), p. 2.

¹⁴ The difficulty of organising fascism internationally became evident at the Fascist International Congress organised by CAUR. One Swedish group attended, the Swedish National Union of Youth. Michael Arthur Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928-1936*. (New York,: Howard Fertig, 1972), pp. 115–21.

¹⁵ ‘Detta förändrar dock ingalunda det faktum, att han är en genialisk, oförliknelig jätte, som äger den sällsynta gåvan att beröva millioner deras egen personliga vilja och inge dem en högre, ideellare.’ Franz Haiser, ‘Vad är fascism?’ *Spöknippet*, no 4 (1928), p. 4.

Italian Fascism was the great role model of the mid-twenties, but already in 1929 SFKO established contacts with the NSDAP, as key members were invited to the Nuremberg *Parteitage*.¹⁶ Sigurd and Gunnar Furugård had met the NSDAP leadership as early as 1923, and founded the short-lived *Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Frihetsförbundet* [SNF, Swedish National Socialist Freedom League] in 1924.¹⁷ Elof Eriksson had several close connections in Germany, in particular Erich Ludendorff.¹⁸ In 1930, the newspaper *Nationalsocialisten* encouraged others to ‘look to the example of Germany’s struggle for freedom and to unite in Sweden’s struggle for freedom in National Socialism’.¹⁹ *Riksposten*, mouthpiece of Martin Ekström’s *Nationalsocialistiska Blocket* [NSB, National Socialist Block], referred to fascism as a European return to reason: ‘It awoke first in Italy—the classical country of the Renaissance. Germany followed. Will it awaken in the rest of Europe also?’²⁰ Open acknowledgment of fascists’ ideological debt to Italy and Germany was common in Sweden during the twenties, and would remain so until about 1933.

However, the relationship between Swedish fascists and their foreign relatives was never entirely unequivocal. During this same period, corresponding roughly to the first decade of Swedish fascism, they displayed a concern with the nationalist implications of their relationship to Italy and Germany. The newspaper articles of this decade were troubled that the foreign appearance of fascism repelled other nationalists, and indeed critics were keen to portray fascism as an ‘alien ideology’.²¹ Accusations that the fascist parties were financed by Mussolini or Hitler were typical. SFKO was accused of taking orders from Rome, and felt the need to formally deny in June 1927, on its front page, any verbal or written contact with any Italian organisation.²² Similarly, Lindholm’s NSAP was regularly accused of taking financial aid from Nazi Germany, though no conclusive proof was brought forward.²³ Until the end of his life Lindholm maintained they received no money from Germany, and regretted what little contact they had with the NSDAP.²⁴

¹⁶ Heléne Lööw, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven: En Studie av Nationalsocialismen i Sverige 1924-1950* (Magnus Mölner & Jörgen Weibull, 1990), pp. 81–83.

¹⁷ Stein U. Larsen, ‘Conservatives and Fascists in the Nordic Countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, 1918–45’, in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. by Martin Blinkhorn (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 240–63 (p. 243).

¹⁸ Wärenstam, pp. 49–51.

¹⁹ ‘...tag exempel av Tysklands frihetskamp och förena Er i Sveriges frihetskamp i Nationalsocialismen.’ ‘Nationalsocialistisk front i Tyskland’, *Nationalsocialisten*, no 4, May (1930), p. 3.

²⁰ ‘Mot all förmodan, säger Spengler i inledningen till detta verk, har den europeiska självbesinningen börjat vakna. Den vaknade i Italien först – renässansens klassiska hemland. Tyskland följde efter. Skall den också vakna i det övriga Europa?’, ‘Tyskland och den europeiska tanken’, *Riksposten*, no 11, August (1934), p. 1.

²¹ E.g. Carlsson, pp. 13, 35, 39–40, 71.

²² ‘Med oss—till seger!’, *Spöknippet*, no 22, June (1927), p. 1.

²³ As late as 1948 the Swedish police raided the headquarters of one of the largest fascist parties, the SSS, to investigate whether financial support had been received from Nazi Germany. Heléne Lööw, *Nazismen i Sverige, 1924-1979: Pionjärerna, Partierna, Propagandan* (Stockholm: Ordfront Förlag, 2004), p. 41.

²⁴ Marieberg, Letter Lindholm to Heléne Lööw, 12.9.1987, Rönninge, SO Lindholm’s Collection, vol 5.

‘One can hear on a daily basis that most of the newspapers’ readers consider Swedish fascism to work along the same lines as Italian fascism’, *Spöknippet* complained in 1926.²⁵ ‘You fascists, manly and strong, struggle for Swedishness [*svenskhhet*], [but] publically you display a sign with a foreign-sounding name, which many good Swedish men and women can hardly even pronounce’, one otherwise sympathetic reader wrote to SFKO.²⁶ Interest for the still new and exciting ideology clearly moved nationalists to consider indigenous fascist groups. However, it would also seem that upon cursory examination sympathisers could be repulsed by the unfamiliar appearance of the fascist name and image.

In a 1933 article, ‘Is national socialism an “un-Swedish” movement?’, *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* argued they could at most be accused of using a German organisational form and tactic, but nothing else.²⁷ The issue was raised time and time again, suggesting that it presented a significant problem for the fascists, to the point where it became a political stick to beat rival fascists. For instance, NSB’s *Riksposten* used the accusation to slander other fascist parties, claiming that unlike others, the NSB was wholly adapted to indigenous Swedish conditions and not influenced by the Germans, ‘such as sadly still occurs sometimes, here and there’.²⁸ In another article commenting on the collapse of the Danish National Socialist Workers’ Party, it was noted: ‘It was hardly more than one expected, for under the current conditions in Denmark, and the insane fashion in which Lembeke copied the German movement, the consequences could hardly have been any different.’²⁹ The obvious foreign connections with fascism, be they Italian or German, were perceived to be in conflict with nationalist interests that fascists promoted. Nationalism, and the way it was expressed by fascists in terms of xenophobia, racism, reverent respect for national traditions and history, and the veneration of the sacred nation, was in constant tension with the persistent notion that fascism was inherently foreign.

This conflict between nationalism and fascist self-identity perturbed the fascist movements,³⁰ so it is not surprising that accusations of being an ‘alien ideology’ acted as a catalyst to stir ideological

²⁵ ‘De flesta av tidningarnas läsare anser den svenska fascismen arbeta efter samma riktlinjer, som den italienska, vilket man dagligen kan höra.’, ‘Fria ord’, *Spöknippet*, no 4, November (1926), p. 4.

²⁶ ‘Ni fascister, som så manligt och kraftigt kämpa för svenskhhet, ni visa utåt en skylt med ett utländskt klingande namn, som många goda svenska män och kvinnor knappast ens kunna uttala.’, Håkan Svensk, ‘Vårt Namn’, *Spöknippet*, no 14, April (1928), p. 1.

²⁷ Gisle, ‘Är nationalsocialismen en osvensk rörelse?’, *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten*, no 7, April (1933), p. 2.

²⁸ ‘Då så skett och rörelsen i sin helhet lämpat sina idéer efter rent svenska förhållanden utan någon som helst tysk efterapning, sådan förekommer sorgligt nog fortfarande på sina håll...’, ‘Svensk Nationalsocialism’, *Riksposten*, no 11, August (1934), p. 3.

²⁹ ‘Det var knappast mer än vad man väntade sig, ty med de förhållandena som råda i Danmark och med det vansinniga sätt varpå Lembeke kopierade den tyska rörelsen kunde följden icke bli någon annan.’, ‘D.N.A.P. upplöst’, *Riksposten*, no 15, September (1934), p. 3.

³⁰ Jan Melin, Alf W. Johansson and Susanna Hedenborg, *Sveriges Historia: Koncentrerad Uppslagsbok: Fakta, Årtal, Kartor, Tabeller* (Stockholm: Rabén Prisma (Tiden Athena), 1997), p. 230.

change in Swedish fascism. Although Swedish fascists had long been keen to acknowledge their influences, the first decade of their existence was also one of debate about the extent and nature of these influences. From the beginning, there was a discernable unease between nationalism and fascism.

Against the barrage of criticism of fascism's foreign nature – from political opponents and allies alike – fascists in Sweden used a range of different counter-arguments intended to show that fascism was ultimately in harmony with Swedish history. One common response was to explain fascism as a European or global movement; originating in Italy, but with national permutations. 'We cannot really answer the question as to what fascism is in general, because fascism is individual, or rather national, to such an extent that each country offers its own type of fascism, the type that can be seen as the most appropriate for the country in question', *Spöknippet* stated in its first issue.³¹ The theories of fascism given by fascists differed between parties, periodicals, and over time, but some general themes are clear. The notion of a genus of fascism with different species in each country, so familiar to scholars of fascism today, was often used by interwar fascists to justify themselves.³² As Pär Dahlberg in *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* put it, in an article entitled 'Swedish and German National Socialism: each country must create its own social form along nationally specific lines', 'It is true that national socialism had its origins on German soil, but it is precisely through its foundational idea that it can become a blessing for all Nordic people'. It concludes by asserting that, no matter how closely related, Germany is not Sweden, and the conditions for the national reawakening of the former were not necessarily present in the latter.³³ Thus fascists aimed both to dispel the worries of the voters they tried to attract, reassuring them they would try nothing too frightfully foreign or radical like in Italy or Germany, while simultaneously reaffirming their nationalist identity.³⁴ Fascist ideology was fully adapted to Sweden's national situation; or in the words of *Spöknippet*: 'Of course, the main feature of fascism is its strong national character, which it has retained in each country where it has gained a foothold'.³⁵

³¹ 'Att besvara frågan vad fascism i allmänhet är, är ej gott emedan fascismen är så individuell eller rättare sagt nationell, att varje land erbjuder sin särskilda typ av fascism, den typ som kan anses vara den lämpligaste för landet i fråga.', G.S., 'Sann och falsk fascism', *Spöknippet*, no 1, October (1926), p. 4.

³² Cf. the Dutch NSB history, *Voor Volk en Vaderland: De Strijd der Nationaal Socialistische Beweging 1931 - 14 December - 1941*, ed. by Cornelis van Geelkerken, 2nd edn (Utrecht: Nenasu, 1943), pp. 13–15; See also José Streef, 'Fascism's Century', in *Fascism*, ed. by Roger Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 206–7.

³³ 'Det är sant att nationalsocialismen haft sitt ursprung på tysk botten, men just genom sin grundidé kan den bli till välsignelse för *alla nordiskt betingade folk*.' Pär Dahlberg, 'Svensk och tysk nationalsocialism', *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten*, no 5, March (1933), p. 6.

³⁴ Though many hostile critics remained utterly unconvinced, as the democratic press often remained hellbent on portraying Swedish fascists as fifth columnists for the Germans. See for instance Sastamoinen, p. 36.

³⁵ 'Visserligen är huvudegenskapen i fascismen den starka nationella prägel, som densamma erhållit i varje land, där den vunnit insteg...', Håkan Svensk, 'Vårt namn', *Spöknippet*, no 14, April (1928), p. 1.

Another trend in the discourse of fascist self-identity in Sweden during this period tried to de-emphasise the significance of Italy and Germany as role models, which turned out to be a crucial step in the evolution of Swedish fascism. In 1928, *Spöknippet* argued that Italy had started the struggle for a new epoch, but that the idea of fascism had existed long before then, reifying the idea of fascism as an ahistorical entity. ‘Swedish fascism is a living expression of this view [åskådning]... Its origin, its thought, and its form is purely Swedish, but the impulse for its creation came from a foreign country: it is a Nordic spring flower, summoned by a more southern sun.’³⁶ The NSFP said they had much to learn from the German movement in purely organisational terms, but ‘politically nothing, for the Sweden and Germany of today are political antipodes. Therefore, to cite a bunch of statements of national socialists, who are no doubt prominent in Germany, is more likely to work against, rather than promote, *the purely Swedish national socialism*’ [italics in original].³⁷

The visual image of fascism was no less important. ‘We deny that we introduced the colour black from Mussolini’s Italy, for in our country too the black shirts were once worn by men, who truly dared something for their Fatherland.’³⁸ ‘*Spöknippet* has deep roots in our Swedish history’, they claimed: it was supposedly derived from ‘stormvasen’, the coat of arms of the sixteenth century king Gustav Vasa.³⁹ This tactic of portraying historical figures as fascist was not unique to Sweden either; fascists everywhere naturally proclaimed respectable national heroes to be fascist.⁴⁰

Riksposten argued, rather improbably, that Gustav Vasa was a foundational figure for Swedish fascism: ‘This teaching about the people’s community [*folkgemenskap*] is not foreign import into our country. It had already inspired the two men who have had the strongest hold on the soul of the

³⁶ ‘Den svenske fascismen är ett levande uttryck för denna åskådning. Till sitt ursprung, sin tanke och sin form är den rent svensk, men impulsen till dess skapande har kommit från ett främmande land: den är en nordisk vårblomma, som framkallats från en sydligare sol.’ ‘Fascistisk idealism’, *Spöknippet*, no 6, February (1928), p. 1.

³⁷ ‘Visserligen ha vi kanske mångt och mycket att lära av den tyska rörelsen, rent organisatoriskt sett, men politiskt ha vi inget, ty Sverige och Tyskland av i dag äro två utpräglade politiska antipoder. Att därför citera en massa uttalande av, utan tvivel i Tyskland framstående nationalsocialister, är därför mera ägnat att motarbeta än främja den *rent svenska nationalsocialismen*.’ Konrad Hallgren, ‘Nationalsocialismen och ledartanken’, *Nationalsocialisten*, nos 16-17, November (1930), p. 7.

³⁸ ‘Att vi infört den svarta färgen från Mussolinis Italien bestrida vi, ty även i vårt land hava de svarta skjortorna även en gång förut burits av män, vilka i verkligheten *vågat* något för sitt Fosterland.’ ‘Den svarta färgen’, *Spöknippet*, no 2, October (1926), p. 1. See also: Heureka, ‘Den Svarta Skjortan’, *Spöknippet*, no 29, July (1928), p. 3. The author refers to the 18th century privateer Lars Gathenhielm, authorized by Charles XII to attack pirate and enemy ships.

³⁹ ‘Spöknippet har djupa rötter i vår svenska historia.’ ‘De svenska fascistemblemens innebörd’, *Spöknippet*, no 13, March (1927), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Probably symptomatic of the nationalist trend to romanticise historical figures as national symbols. See Olle Larsson and Andreas Marklund, *Svensk Historia* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2012), p. 315. Examples in other countries are the Dutch NSB, which declared Golden Age admiral Michiel de Ruyter to be a real fascist icon, while the BUF in Britain regularly proclaimed William Shakespeare a proto-fascist.

Swedish people: Engelbrekt and Gustav Vasa.’⁴¹ Between the foundation of Swedish fascism in 1924, and about 1933, the ‘alien ideology’ criticism pushed fascist discourse towards the naturalisation of the ideology, and to establish fascism as inherently Swedish. By qualifying their admiration for Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and emphasising fascism’s authentically nationalist character, a new path opened up in the evolution of Swedish fascism.

By 1933, most Swedish fascist groups had exchanged the name of ‘fascism’ for ‘National Socialism’. In 1929, following the first party congress in October that year,⁴² SFKO explained that fascism was ‘in our country purely national socialist’, and they proceeded to refer to themselves as mostly National Socialist and only occasionally as fascist.⁴³ The swastika was adopted as the party symbol in 1930, and was proclaimed to be an ancient Nordic symbol known to ‘us Nordics, long before we knew the cross of Christ’.⁴⁴ In 1930, Konrad Hallgren left the SFKO, which merged with *Nysvenska Folkförbundet* [New-Swedish People’s League] and the Furugårds’ SNF, and renamed itself *Sveriges Nationalsocialistiska Parti* [SNSP, National Socialist Party of Sweden], under the leadership of the veterinary surgeon Birger Furugård. In 1933-1936 Lindholm would be Furugårds principal rival, as the former led a left-wing breakaway movement, *Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet* [NSAP, National Socialist Workers’ Party], until Furugård gave up politics and SNSP members were urged to join the NSAP.⁴⁵

The trend towards adopting the signifier ‘National Socialism’ instead of ‘fascism’ in the early 1930s did not mean a simple turn to German Nazism, but *also* to Sweden’s own indigenous racialist currents. While some still sought to naturalise fascism as a Swedish nationalist ideology, this option was increasingly displaced by a focus on the superiority of the Swedish, Nordic, or Aryan race. An early sign of this coming trend appeared in 1928, in *Spöknippet*:

Of course [fascism] struggles in all countries for a national renaissance, a Christian overhaul and moral, psychological, and physical strength and health seen in the light of racial research and anti-Semitism, but firstly this struggle is entirely Aryan, secondly Christianity is on the whole the religion of the Aryans, and lastly the Aryan

⁴¹ ‘Denna lära om folkgemenskapen är inget [*sic*] främmande importvara i vårt land. Den besjälade redan de två män, som haft det starkaste greppet om svenska folkets själ: Engelbrekt och Gustav Vasa.’ ‘Vad är nationalsocialism?’, *Riksposten*, no 9, July (1934), p. 1.

⁴² Carlsson, p. 24.

⁴³ ‘... och därför är fascismen i vårt land *rent nationalsocialistisk!*’, ‘Nationalsocialism och fascism’, *Spöknippet*, no 45, November (1929), p. 2.

⁴⁴ ‘Symbolen för *ljusets allkraft* har hakkorset emellertid varit för oss nordbord, långt innan vi kände Kristi kors.’ ‘Under Hakkorset’, *Spöknippet*, no 7, June (1930), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Carlsson, pp. 29–35.

spirit is completely different from that of other races. [...] What we have pointed out here is how fascism is not international, but Aryan-universal.⁴⁶

The timing of this development suggests the influence of Nazi racism, still leaving the fascists open to ‘alien ideology’ criticism. But it is important to remember that biological racism and eugenics pre-dated fascism in Sweden, and Europe for that matter. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe was the intellectual breeding ground for Social Darwinism and eugenics. Combined with anxieties about degeneration and race, these ideas spawned many intellectuals devoted to some form of biological racism.⁴⁷ Swedish fascists themselves stated, truthfully enough, that they were building upon their own national racialist and anti-Semitic traditions, claiming internationally renowned figures like the Swedish anti-liberal political scientist, Rudolf Kjellén, who also influenced the Swedish leader of the Right, Arvid Lindman.⁴⁸ Racial biology and eugenics were subjects commonly discussed in both scientific and political forums since the turn of the century all over Europe, with Sweden one of the world’s first countries to implement measures for the promotion of ‘racial hygiene’.⁴⁹ During the 1930s, Social Democrats advocated eugenics as part of a social reform programme,⁵⁰ while the Agrarian League wanted to protect the Swedish racial stock from ‘inferior foreign racial elements’.⁵¹ Elof Eriksson himself had played a role in the creation of the Agrarian League. The first sterilisation law was enacted in 1934, forcibly sterilising some 300 people annually (predominantly women) until 1941, when the figure grew to roughly one thousand.⁵² This suggests that the racialism of Swedish fascists was neither exclusively copied from the Germans, nor was it necessarily perceived to be by the Swedish public. It was already too entrenched in Sweden’s mainstream politics.⁵³

⁴⁶ ‘Väl kämpar den i alla länder för nationell renässans, kristen uppräckning och moralisk, psykisk och fysisk styrka och sundhet sett i rasforskningens och antisemitismens ljus, men dels är denna kamp helt och hållet arisk, dels är kristendomen i stort sett ariernas religion och slutligen: den ariska andan är helt olik andra rasers. [...] Vad vi har påpekat är hurusom fascismen icke är internationell utan ariskt universell.’, ‘Fascismens rätta definition’, *Spöknippet*, no. 11, March (1928), p. 2.

⁴⁷ J.W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 92–108.

⁴⁸ Lööw, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven*, p. 217; Lena Berggren, *Nationell Upplysning: Drag i den Svenska Antisemitismens Idéhistoria* (Stockholm: Carlsson Förlag, 1999), p. 79; Larsson and Marklund, pp. 316–17; Wärenstam, pp. 14–15.

⁴⁹ Åmark, pp. 360–80.

⁵⁰ See also, Maria Björkman and Sven Widmalm, ‘Selling Eugenics: The Case of Sweden’, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 64.4 (2010), 379–400.

⁵¹ John Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish Experience in the Second World War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 16; Per T. Ohlsson, *Svensk Politik* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2014), p. 263; on biological racism and anti-Semitism in the Swedish Right, see Rolf Torstendahl, *Mellan Nykonservatism och Liberalism: Idébrytningar inom Högern och Bondepartierna, 1918-1934* (Stockholm: Universitetet Uppsala, 1969), pp. 144–46.

⁵² Lööw, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven*, pp. 217–36.

⁵³ Berggren, ‘Swedish Fascism’, pp. 413–16; It has also been argued this legislation was actually to some extent influenced by other fascist groups among the upper classes, see Karl N. Alvar Nilsson, *Svensk Överklassnazism, 1930-1945* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1996), p. 258.

Thus racialism in its various aspects – racism, anti-Semitism, Aryanism – presented an attractive alternative for Swedish fascists to defend the transnational nature of fascism. Nationalism, which for years had been central to fascist ideology, brought them into constant conflict with fascism's foreign origins, while the discursive defences discussed earlier were unconvincing in many respects.⁵⁴ But racialism could replace nationalism in fascist ideology, and conveniently assigned Swedes a place at the top of the Aryan racial hierarchy. In the words of a contemporary German student of Swedish fascism: '[t]he racial homogeneity of the Swedish people is almost without its equal in the world'.⁵⁵ The idea of Sweden as the pinnacle of a Nordic-Aryan race was not just appealing, but also supported by contemporary science.

Nationalism forced Swedish fascists to confront their foreign ideological origins. International fascism was a menace to the mind of the Swedish public, and of increasing concern as democracy seemed to crumble in Europe.⁵⁶ Fascist self-identity and nationalism constantly tended towards an irresolvable ideological dilemma. Racialism, on the other hand, could accommodate a multi-national fascism: it admitted to kinship with the German Nazis, and other 'Aryan' fascists, while explaining and justifying that kinship. The substitution of 'fascism' with 'National Socialism' was an essential part of assuming a racialist over a nationalist identity.

In the early 1930s, articles more critical of Italy and Mussolini appeared:

Mussolini came with his Fascism and no matter how beneficial and brilliant its accomplishment was, led by a hyper-intelligent statesman's will, we cannot turn away from the fact that Italy's fascism has *not* managed to raze the Western capitalist system [...] It has no racial-biological foundation. Chaos in racial respects does not represent risk or shame to [Italian] Fascism.⁵⁷

Swedish fascists adopted an increasingly hostile attitude over the years. 'Fascism' came to be associated with a foreign, southern 'race', whose Latin culture was alien to the Aryans, ironically incorporating 'alien ideology' criticism into their own ideology. 'Fascism' was even declared to be

⁵⁴ 'Samling under fascismens fälttecken!' *Nationen*, no 36, September (1926), p. 1.

⁵⁵ 'Die rassische Homogenität des schwedischen Volkes ist fast ohne Gegenstück in der Welt.' Kurt Mall, *Der Nationalsozialismus in Schweden im Spiegel seiner Kampfpresse*, PhD Thesis (Heidelberg, 1936), p. 14.

⁵⁶ Louise Drangel, *Den Kämpande Demokratin: En Studie i Antinazistisk Opinionsrörelse 1935-1945* (Stockholm: LiberFörlag, 1976), pp. 20–22.

⁵⁷ 'Mussolini kom med sin Fascism och hur välgörande och storslagen dess gärning än varit, ledd av en hyperintelligent statsmannavilja, så kunna vi ej blunda inför det faktum, att Italiens fascism *icke* förmått störta det väst-kapitalistiska systemet. [...] Den har ingen rasbiologisk grundval. Kaos i rashänseende är för Fascismen ingen fara eller skam...', 'Lappo', *Spöknippet*, no 8, July (1930), p. 6. For clarification, the author implies Italian Fascism *should* be ashamed and wary of such racial confusion.

an ideology of oppression antithetical to National Socialism.⁵⁸ In 1935, *Riksposten* proclaimed: 'We have no fascism in Sweden. Thank God!'⁵⁹ From the late 1920s through to the end of the 1930s, Swedish fascist nationalism gave way to racialism, which harmonised with their fascist identity. This harmony of identity and ideology allowed Swedish fascists to answer criticism more convincingly: 'National socialism is not German, not Swedish, not Danish etc. It is *Nordic!*'⁶⁰ Racism is frequently understood as a sort of heightened form of nationalism or an aspect of ultra-nationalism, but racism could also exist independently of nationalism – even if it had usually been allied with nationalism since the nineteenth century.⁶¹

In interwar Sweden, racialism helped native fascists outgrow a narrow nationalism, transcending national boundaries. As racialism replaced nationalism, contradictions were resolved, and a lasting self-identity emerged. Although fascism is commonly described as nationalist, and this was initially recognised as its defining feature by fascists themselves, racialism became the defining element in the 1930s. Nationalism had prompted fascists to foreground their own indigenous traditions and political ideas, *against* Italy and Germany, which is precisely what opened up the possibility of a racialist fascism.

However, changes in Swedish fascist ideology were not exclusively governed discursively, as the organic development of fascist self-identity ended up shipwrecked on account of the international political situation of the late 1930s. While fascists tried to work out their precise relationship to race and nation, public opinion forced another transformation as Hitler's expansionist project in Europe tainted the Swedish fascists' image.

The name of Mussolini's Fascism stuck to those in Sweden who now preferred to call themselves National Socialists, and their disavowal helped little when they still recognised the kinship of movements abroad that had retained the name of 'fascism', (such as the BUF in Britain).⁶² The Spanish Civil War reinforced the impression of a 'Fascist International'; and despite the National Socialists' best efforts, the press continued, perhaps unsurprisingly, to use the terms National Socialism and fascism interchangeably. But in Sweden it was above all Germany's actions, especially in domestic politics – the Night of the Long Knives, the Nuremberg Laws,

⁵⁸ 'Fascism betyder förtryck och kapitalism', *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten*, no 3:10, February 6 (1935), pp. 1, 4.

⁵⁹ 'Vi ha ingen fascism i Sverige. Gud ske lov!', 'Är Greve Eric von Rosen fascist?', *Riksposten*, no 26 (1935), p. 4. Cf. a similar attitude in the original Furugård party, Wärenstam, p. 34.

⁶⁰ 'Nationalsocialismen är icke tysk, icke svensk, icke dansk o.s.v. den är nordisk!', Folkwang, 'Nationalsocialism är ej import!', *Riksposten*, nos 35-36, October (1937), p. 4. Cf. Mall, p. 39.

⁶¹ George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), p. 67.

⁶² For instance 'Pauli brev om fascismen', *Riksposten*, no 6, July (1934), p. 1.

Reichskristallnacht – which were controversial and aroused suspicions that fascists were planning to do something similar in Sweden.⁶³

In October 1938 Lindholm's NSAP had become the largest Swedish fascist party, but the NSAP's electoral failure (it remained firmly below the 4% parliamentary threshold), combined with Germany's behaviour, drove Lindholm to despair.⁶⁴ In a highly revealing letter to Sven Hedengren in September that year, Lindholm expressed his frustration with their unrelenting marginalisation:

We're not getting anywhere! I do not doubt that, with great sacrifices and effort we could gather ca 20 000 votes even in 1940, and in 1942-44 and so on. But Germany is in our way so bloody much, so it isn't possible. People are mad, and what is happening these days one will never forget. Hitler – Nazism – War, murder, misery! Because of this I now consider it impossible to stop this madness. The only conceivable [way forward], if the ideas are to be saved, would be to get rid of both name and symbol, not to mention boots, cross strap, and 'Hitler salute'. I know it is a dangerous step, for most of our members would perhaps lose interest. But surely we aren't fighting to always remain a union for merely expressing our opinions, limited to a few thousand people, but to get somewhere.⁶⁵

Lindholm acted accordingly, and the NSAP became *Svensk-Socialistisk Samling* [SSS, *Swedish-Socialist Union*]. The fascist salute was abolished, as was the *kamp hell* [hail struggle] greeting. A new battle cry was introduced: 'We want – Sweden for the Swedes'. The swastika was replaced with the Vasa sheaf.⁶⁶ The newspaper changed its name from *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* to *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* [The Swedish People's Socialist].⁶⁷ Local party formations were informed that the contents of the party programme and the ideology remained the same, even though the name had changed: 'You still fight in our ranks for national socialism, though it happens under the name of Swedish-Socialism or Swedish People's Socialism.'⁶⁸ During the war,

⁶³ Dahlberg, p. 202; Wärenstam, p. 100.

⁶⁴ Hagtvet, p. 715.

⁶⁵ 'Vi kommer ingenstans! Jag betvivlar inte, att vi med stora offer och ansträngningar skulle kunna trumma ihop ca 20.000 röster även 1940, like så 1942-44 osv. Men Tyskland ligger oss i fatet så förbannat, så det går inte. Folk är galna, och vad som sker i dessa dagar kommer man aldrig att glömma. Hitler – Nazismen – Krig, mord, elände! Att bryta detta vansinne betecknar jag nu som omöjligt. Det enda tänkbara om idéerna skall räddas blir att slopa både namn och symbol, för att ej tala om stövlar, koppel och "Hitlerhälsning". Jag vet att det är ett farligt steg, ty de flesta av våra medlemmar skulle kanske tappa sugen. Men vi kämpa ju inte för att i evighet förbli ett åskitsförbund [sic] på några tusen personer, utan för att komma någonstans.', Sven Olov Lindholm, cited in Löw, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven*, p. 57.

⁶⁶ Wärenstam, p. 100.

⁶⁷ 'Den Svenske Folksocialisten är vår tidnings nya namn', *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, no 7:2, 11 January (1939).

⁶⁸ 'Du kämpar i våra led alltjämt för nationalsocialismen, fastän det sker under namnet svensk-socialism eller den svenska folksocialismen.', cited in Wärenstam, p. 101.

Lindholm pointed out in his book *Svensk Frihetskamp* [Swedish Freedom Struggle] that anything that was similar to the Germans in the Swedish struggle was nothing to be ashamed of, but ‘it was now more necessary than before to underline our national independence’.⁶⁹ The declaration marks a turning-point in the history of Swedish fascism. While the ideology would not undergo any more significant alterations after this point, the name and much of the image were sacrificed – and with it an explicit fascist identity. The largest fascist party had become the SSS, and though this strain of fascism in Sweden remained ideologically consistent, its presentation changed.

Correspondingly, in the late thirties far fewer far-right movements called themselves fascist. One interesting example is *Frihetsrörelsen* [FR, The Freedom Movement]. Founded in December 1937 with the support of Eriksson’s *Nationen* – the same paper which had supported the SFKO twelve years earlier – the new movement largely conformed to the ideology of earlier Swedish fascists, except perhaps in its radical Lutheranism. Headed by chairman and ‘warrior of the spirit’, pastor Ernst Ålander, it sought ‘a new Sweden, a Swedish spiritual and national renewal’.⁷⁰ ‘It is Nordic-Swedish in essence, has roots in the Swedish racial heritage and derives its impulse from the wellspring of the Swedish spirit.’ *Nationen* exclaimed: ‘The Truth was and remains the way to rebirth, to the people’s salvation from annihilation in Jewish Satanism [*sic*].’⁷¹

Viciously anti-Semitic (and anti-Catholic), the movement advocated a ‘Nordic Renaissance on a real, racial foundation’, alongside the renewal of Christianity in a tougher form; that is, without its Judaic legacy. FR commended Nazi Germany for its leadership in racial thought, but found it too supportive (!) of the Jews.⁷² Similarly to the *Deutsche Christen* in Nazi Germany who attempted to create a specifically anti-Jewish Church on the basis of race as a sacred principle,⁷³ there was a petition for ‘the removal of the Old Testament from the Christian message: ‘We want a Christian Bible, not a Bible that consists of ¾ Jewish tales and stories’.⁷⁴ In some ways, the FR represented the culmination of ideological developments of the thirties. Their programme of anti-Semitism and spiritual, national, and racial rebirth indicates the absorption of the racialist ideas that proliferated

⁶⁹ ‘Det var nu nödvändigare än tidigare, att understryka vår nationella självständighet.’ Sven Olov Lindholm, *Svensk Frihetskamp* (Stockholm, 1943), p. 34.

⁷⁰ ‘Kyrkoherden Ernst Ålander i Gnarp, Hälsingslan, ordförande i den startade Frihetsrörelsens Centralstyrelse, är en av förgrundsmännen i kampen för ett nytt Sverige, en svensk andlig och nationell förnyelse.’, ‘Andens stridsman’, *Nationen*, no 2, February (1938), p. 1.

⁷¹ ‘Den är nordiskt svensk till sitt väsen, härleder sig ur det svenska rasarvet och hämtar sina impulser ur den svenska andens källsprång [...] Sanningen var och förblir vägen till pånyttfödelse, till människornas frälsning undan förgörelse i judisk Satanism.’, ‘Ljus över landet! Frihetsrörelsen har startat’, *Nationen*, no 2, February (1938), p. 1.

⁷² ‘Nordisk Renässans på äkta, raslig grund’, *Nationen*, no 8, October (1938), p. 1.

⁷³ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 21–43.

⁷⁴ ‘...avlägsnande av Gamla testamentet från den kristna förkunnelsen’; ‘Vi vilja ha en kristen bibel, icke en bibel som till ¾ består av judiska sagor och berättelser.’, ‘En sann kristendom!’, *Nationen*, no 8, October (1938), p. 4.

among Swedish fascists in the late 1920s and 1930s. Moreover there was a recognition of kinship with Nazi Germany while the rhetoric clearly associates them with earlier Swedish fascists (not to mention Ålander's prior membership of the NSB).⁷⁵ But crucially, they rejected the signifier 'fascism'. At no point did they assert any affinity with fascism beyond expressing admiration for Germany's racialist ideas. FR is perhaps the first group to recognise how tainted the name of fascism had become in Sweden. Consequently, the movement proclaimed its ideology with a name and image entirely distinct from conventional fascism.

By 1937-38, Swedish fascists had reached a point where racialism – earlier little more than an ideological footnote – had become the core of their political programme. The international situation and Nazi Germany's behaviour in the latter half of the 1930s had turned their fascist image into a liability. At the margins of Swedish politics, with no hope of crossing the parliamentary threshold, FR spurned 'fascism'. Where racialism had earlier in that decade replaced nationalism as the defining feature of Swedish fascist self-identity, by the end of the 1930s it had effectively subsumed fascism. International politics had made the image of fascism untenable, leaving an anonymous transnational racialism in its wake. Per Engdahl, one of the most influential figures of Swedish fascism after 1945, is exemplary of this trend. First a member of SFKO, he promoted a racialist notion of *New Swedishness* throughout the 1930s and 1940s in organisations like *Sveriges Nationella Förbund* [National League of Sweden] and *Svensk Opposition*.⁷⁶ Members of former fascists groups would from this point on find shelter under such generic names; Engdahl himself felt compromised by the label of 'fascism' until the end of his life.⁷⁷

While Lindholm realised in 1938 that 'the swastika had turned into bad advertisement', as wartime critic Holger Carlsson put it, the label of Nazism indelibly stuck to him and his party.⁷⁸ The initial German military success prompted a temporary resurgence of National Socialist symbols and greetings in the SSS, while post-war journalism would not let the public forget Lindholm's old allegiances and politics.⁷⁹ In the 1970s and 1980s, when Lindholm had become mostly focused on international peace efforts and protesting nuclear proliferation, he still complained of the media's treatment of his past as fascist leader.⁸⁰ I will not examine the wartime period here, but a cursory glance shows that in many ways the attempt at anonymisation was a complete failure in Sweden, compromised by their past support for Nazi Germany, especially when Norway and Denmark were

⁷⁵ Nilsson, pp. 106–8; Wärenstam, pp. 47–48.

⁷⁶ Löow, *Nazismen i Sverige, 1924-1979*, pp. 46–52.

⁷⁷ Berggren, 'Swedish Fascism', p. 400.

⁷⁸ Carlsson, p. 92.

⁷⁹ Sastamoinen, pp. 38–39, 190.

⁸⁰ Gothenburg, Regional & City Archive, Letter Lindholm to Ingemar Svensson, 15.12.1983, Rönninge, Ingemar Svensson's Archive.

occupied by the Wehrmacht.⁸¹ Under these conditions Swedish fascists were always at risk of having another label applied to them: ‘quisling’.⁸² Armas Sastamoinen’s journalistic work on Swedish fascist groups, especially the SSS, presented a picture of them as carbon copies of German Nazism, dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Swedish state. The title of the 1947 book is revealing: *Hitler’s Swedish Vanguard*.

The new path taken, hesitantly and without success, by Lindholm and the SSS was not always followed by other fascist movements, some of who clung to their fascist self-identity. For instance, in November 1938 Nils-Erik Björkman founded *Solkorset* [The Sun Cross], a small but fanatical National Socialist group, with an unambiguous party symbol.⁸³ Yet in the long run, the SSS heralded the coming of a new era for fascism in Sweden. ‘Anonymous fascism’ – a fascism that previously identified itself as fascist hiding its ideological kinship and denying any connection to the fascist regimes – became a hallmark of fascist movements after 1945. In the first two post-war decades several new organisations with clear ideological and personal links to the movements of the 1930s were created, but without names to identify them as such. The neo-fascist group *Nordiska Nationalsocialistiska Kampförbundet* [Nordic National Socialist Combat League], founded 1955, quickly changed its name to the less offensive *Nordiska Rikspartiet* [Nordic National Party], (briefly led by Lindholm’s ex-wife, Vera Oredsson).⁸⁴ If *Sverigedemokraterna* [Sweden Democrats, founded 1988] are regarded as part of this history,⁸⁵ and many post-war fascists undeniably found their way into this party,⁸⁶ then it is clear that they learnt the lesson about anonymisation, and with rather greater success than Lindholm.

Anonymisation is the stage in political development which occurs when the political climate becomes acutely hostile to the ideological signifier. At this point, maintaining that self-identity, being representative of that ideology, guarantees political obscurity. For fascists to anonymise themselves in this sense meant to discard identifying features associated with their politics, without changing the ideology. The adoption of this tactic in the 1930s highlights that Swedish fascists understood that the public strongly identified fascism by its appearance, its outer trappings: ‘name and symbol, not to mention boots, cross strap and Hitler salute’. Arguably examining the historical

⁸¹ Dahlberg, p. 207.

⁸² Carlsson, p. 68.

⁸³ Lööv, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven*, p. 58.

⁸⁴ Lööv, *Nazismen i Sverige, 1924-1979*, pp. 161–66 See also Lindholm’s own account of the divorce and Vera’s political career. Marieberg, Sven Olov Lindholm, *Soldatliv och Politik*, vol. 2, pp. 72-78, SO Lindholm’s Collection, vol. 3A.

⁸⁵ Henrik Arnstad among others has no doubt SD is a neo-fascist party. Arnstad, ‘Fascismens Föränderlighet 1919-2014’, p. 265.

⁸⁶ See for instance Per Svensson, who argues there are crucial personal, ideological, and organisational connections between Swedish interwar fascism and SD. Per Svensson, *Vasakärven och Järnröret: Om den Långa Bruna Skuggan från Lund* (Stockholm: Weyler, 2014).

process of fascist anonymisation could also be important for understanding the identities and ideologies of far-right groups in post-war Europe, and the connections to their interwar predecessors.⁸⁷

Conclusion

With this analysis I hope to have demonstrated the value of understanding Swedish fascist movements in their own right, rather than as satellites of fascist regimes, as some scholars have dismissed them.⁸⁸ In scholarship it has always been common to concentrate the discussion on the regimes of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in approaches to generic fascism, which has risked a distortion of our understanding of what fascism meant as a European phenomenon. Sadly, research into smaller fascist movements remains scarce, and this is particularly true of Sweden. In spite of Lena Berggren's call in 2002 for engagement with this topic, there has hitherto still been little change in the field, with a few notable exceptions in recent years. These appear to have been brought about by the rise of the Sweden Democrats in recent years, encouraging a new perspective on the far-right's historical background.⁸⁹ However, most of what has recently been written on Swedish fascism is in Swedish, making it inaccessible to most scholars interested in fascism, who remain forced to rely on out of date information.⁹⁰ This chapter is a small contribution to remedy the situation.

Using the idea of self-identity, I have traced how an inherent tension between nationalism and fascist identity generated the impetus for the interplay of nominal and ideological change, from the early twenties, to the late thirties. The conventional understanding of the Italian Fascist regime as a model for other fascists holds true for most of the first decade. Political parties such as SFKO, and leaders like Birger Furugård, Per Engdahl, Elof Eriksson, and Sven Olov Lindholm, did not mind associating themselves with the foreigners who inspired their political project, and were keen to sing their praise. This picture had to be immediately qualified however, as Swedish fascists were soon forced to respond to criticism, sympathetic and inimical, which questioned their nationalism. The tactics used to answer their critics foreclosed a full acknowledgment of foreign influences, and instead opened a path for Swedish fascists to understand their ideology as something truly Swedish. No doubt encouraged by the second wave of fascism, heralded by the rise of Hitler's NSDAP in Germany, Swedish fascists naturalised their ideology by foregrounding indigenous traditions and

⁸⁷ Henrik Arnstad, *Älskade Fascism: De Svartbruna Rörelsernas Ideologi och Historia* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2013), pp. 347–87.

⁸⁸ Jan Peters, *Exilland Schweden: Deutsche und Schwedische Antifaschisten, 1933-1945* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984), p. 6.

⁸⁹ See for instance Victor Lundberg, *En Idé Större än Döden: En Fascistisk Arbetarrörelse i Sverige, 1933-1945* (Stockholm: Gidlunds Förlag, 2014), pp. 9–14, 146.

⁹⁰ E.g. Wolfgang Wippermann even gets basic facts about the Swedish parties wrong, such as who the party leaders actually were. Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismus: Eine Weltgeschichte vom 19. Jahrhundert bis Heute* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2009), p. 102.

political and intellectual currents such as racialism, xenophobia, and eugenics.⁹¹ While these tactics were intended to make fascism appear less exotic, they pushed Swedish fascists towards a racialist ideology, which actually displaced nationalism, strictly speaking.

This Swedish case study thus sheds a little light on the nominal shift of far-right movements from ‘fascism’ to ‘National Socialism’. Here I have suggested that while the transformation was ideologically superficial, it was a matter of some political importance, as the popularisation of the National Socialist signifier seemed to present fascists with precisely the sword they needed to cut their Gordian knot of nationalism. The haste with which Swedish fascists embraced the new name points to just how troubling ‘fascism’ was as a signifier for nationalists beyond Italy. While the nominal shift did not immediately entail ideological change, in the long run it opened and foreclosed other potential paths of fascist ideological development, and heavily encouraged anonymisation in the late thirties.

This case study has also attacked the idea of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as being simply ‘models’ for smaller fascist movements. While their influence was undeniable and strong, the relationship could completely undermine the credibility and respectability of indigenous fascist groups, which could not express support for the regimes without tainting their own image. Eriksson, Furugård, and Lindholm all had some sort of contact with Nazi Germany, yet it is doubtful these connections were ever of any help. The regimes were at least as much obstacles to, rather than models for, political success. Italian and German fascism undeniably had a considerable impact on the ideology and political culture of Swedish fascism, but this impact was never just one of simple adoption – in fact, it ultimately encouraged a rather unexpected introversion in Swedish fascism.

⁹¹ On interwar fascism as coming in two waves, see Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2003).