Colonizing Women’s Bodies

Population Policies and Nationhood in Eighteenth-Century Sweden

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This article explores the establishment of a population policy in Sweden in the eighteenth century. Swedish population policy, making use of systematic church registers, became the basis for a new system of knowledge built on gender and sexual differences. In order to increase the population rate, the Swedish state promoted motherhood, thus qualitatively binding the state and its nation’s inhabitants. Parliament’s foundation of a Department of Public Economics was the cornerstone of a national discourse on population, laden with references to “the common good.” In the mercantile era, when people were viewed as resources and more people meant an increased capacity to compete in the international economy, new forms of knowledge were created to manage and promote population growth. Children were regarded as the hope of future. This discourse colonized women’s bodies by giving women a national task to become child bearers, child carers, and, accordingly, guardians of the nation. Carl Linnaeus, one of the most well-known scientists of the time, championed the importance of the biological mother’s milk for children and the strengthening of “natural” motherhood in general. Nevertheless, population growth and workforce reproduction were of such a high priority to the state that even unwed mothers had a role in growing the nation. Poor relief regulations offered economic compensation to mothers, including those who were sole providers. Motherhood as a national resource and as a symbol in nationalistic projects incorporated women into the state as mothers, not as individuals.

Population statistics developed in the eighteenth century were an effective weapon in states’ efforts to increase their strength. The concept of “population,” as Michel Foucault has argued, was a power technique that exploited sex. “Population” arose, he claimed, as an economic and social problem whereby power was established. In a time when a large population was considered necessary for wealth and success, the future of the state was dependent on how each inhabitant “made used of his sex.”¹ As philosopher Ian Hacking has shown, German and English philosophers were debating population issues as early as the seventeenth century; German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz suggested that, as Hacking has written, “a Prussian state should be brought into existence, that the true measure of power of a state is its population, and that the state should have a central

In the late eighteenth century, it was Sweden, however, that was seen to have most impressively mobilized "population" in the service of a state nation-building project, to the point where Germany in the 1770s inquired about the possibility of borrowing models for systematizing population statistics. Like some other early modern European states, eighteenth-century Sweden connected population with national strength and worried about having enough inhabitants. In order to increase the population rate, the Swedish state promoted motherhood in distinctive ways and attempted to benefit from gender-specific forms of extant national labor legislation.

Whereas the linking of motherhood and the nation was often, as in the case of the French Revolution, political, in the Swedish case it was primarily economic. The methods used in eighteenth-century Sweden to increase the population rate were distinctive: the most particular feature was the state’s technical capability to calculate changes in the population volume, which required the use of variables of sex and age. This article explores, on the one hand, the establishment of a population policy and, on the other, parliament’s foundation of a Department of Public Economics as two cornerstones for nation building in eighteenth-century Sweden. The main sources for this article are, on one hand, labor regulations and, on the other, reports and political essays, written between 1739 and the late eighteenth century, related to the population politics emanating from the government and from the Swedish Academy of Sciences, established in 1739. I also examine the importance of Poor Laws and the Church Act of 1686, which were still valid in the eighteenth century. Examining these sources together reveals both the economic and gendered dimensions of nation building, and allows for a focus on how population and economy together operated to colonize women’s bodies in service to the nation-state. In order to place Sweden in a context I will start with a more general discussion of influential studies that have explored the construction of national identities and motherhood in eighteenth-century France, North America, and England.

**Revolutionary Motherhood and the Politics of Nationhood in France and North America**

In rethinking bourgeois revolutions, feminists have posed questions about whether women could be patriots and, if so, under what circumstances? In what ways was a woman’s national belonging constructed? Notions of femininity and masculinity were imbued with the language of revolution and structured by new social and political relationships; masculinity was connected with certain societal positions and femininity with
others, particularly motherhood. Constructing gender and nation in both the language and practice of revolution was important. Historians of the American and French revolutions, Linda Kerber, Joan Landes, and Lynn Hunt, have illustrated that women ascribed to and even voluntarily adopted a reproductive role in the service of revolutions. They call this position “republican motherhood.” Landes has shown that “republican motherhood” encouraged even unwed mothers, who received financial help as well as instructions on breast-feeding, while their children received the full right of inheritance. It had previously been inconceivable to provide unwed mothers with financial assistance. The purpose of republican motherhood was to implant patriotic duty in children. Accordingly, the domestic sphere was considered a nursery of the state. Landes claimed that women contributed to this ideological construction. Although feminists spoke warmly about universal rights, they simultaneously contributed to defining republican motherhood by inscribing women in the domestic sphere. Virtue and morals were set up against the public sphere, freedom, and political participation. But at the same time, even unwed mothers could share in virtue and morals. Lynn Hunt has also revealed gender differences in the political language of the French revolution, quoting Prudhomme, who in 1791 wrote to his female readers, “the liberty of a people is based on good morals and education, and you are their guardians and first dispensers.” Consequently the future of the revolution depended on women.6

Yet while historians of gender and revolution have called attention to the connections between motherhood and patriotism, they are not specifically concerned with population policy as a basis for nation building. The following works on England in the eighteenth century, however, do deal with this phenomenon.

Population and Mercantile Thinking in Eighteenth-Century England

In his study of mercantile thinking in eighteenth-century England, historian Daniel Statt has explored the connection between population politics and constructions of the nation. In Foreigners and Englishmen, Statt focused on language and the contours of the social and economic discourse to make the case that mercantile thought, and the obsession with the reproduction of the labor force, resulted in a population policy in England. Writing “against a Whig interpretation of economic history that sees early economic thought struggling toward the doctrines of classical economists,” Statt argued that the mercantilist era was not, as some historians have maintained, a slump or a spasm, but an economic idea of considerable significance in its own
right, and that it was an era absorbed by the population question. He as-asserted that it was necessary to understand how “the discourse on population influenced public policy and in turn altered the lives of foreigners coming to England.” Only in the middle of the eighteenth century did the concept of “populousness,” a measure of the number of current inhabitants, give way in England to the concept of “population,” a measure of the number of future inhabitants. While the Whig party, in its cosmopolitan ambition, wanted to encourage immigration as the way to increase England’s population in order to strengthen the empire, the Tories promoted nativism. The debate concerning population and immigration revealed deep xenophobia, Statt argued, that excluded Jews, Scots, and others who could not invoke birth rights in the country. Population policy specified who was an Englishman. Statt’s study does not, however, focus on nativism and motherhood as aspects of population policy and he does not distinguish gender-specific tasks in nation building.

In the eighteenth century, revolutionary situations evoked gender differences and enforced separate spheres, with motherhood as a distinct discourse. As literary scholar Ruth Perry has shown, simultaneously in England, “national motherhood” arose in service of empire. While the duties of the “mothers of revolution” were highly ideological, in England they were also dependent on the concrete politics of motherhood. Women were encouraged to have children in the name of empire and the industrial spirit. The population needed to grow in order to maintain the army and to create new resources for colonial projects. As women became a national resource, Perry argued, motherhood became a new social and sexual identity for women in eighteenth-century England. Historian Kathleen Wilson—employing a postcolonial perspective critical of Benedict Anderson’s “unitary notion” of the “nation and its unproblematic transpositioning to … colonial and postcolonial worlds”—has claimed that though women’s subordinate position in eighteenth-century England paralleled other marginalized groups in the empire, their position was not exactly homologous. National belonging was not extended to non-English Others: Jews, Gypsies, and colonial Irish, Scottish, and African immigrants were objects of forced exile. And non-English women throughout the empire were subject to a number of class and race disadvantages in the Atlantic world. English women in the empire, by contrast, as national subjects, were privileged and more or less forced to take on conventional roles as mothers and wives.

Statt’s perspectives on mercantilist and population politics and Perry’s and Wilson’s perspectives on population politics and national motherhood will be further explored in this article. The period discussed covers about four decades of the eighteenth century. Mercantile thinking and its obsession
with population and reproduction of the labor force, as in England, was current during the whole period in Sweden. Immigration and nativity, the two means by which to increase the population rate, were both discussed, though nativity was favored in Sweden. I argue that population policy together with the foundation of a public economics were cornerstones of a political imperative to increase the labor force. It required statistical methods in order to calculate how much the population could increase through nativity. As a consequence of the concern with nativity, a maternal thinking developed. These different threads will be developed, and their connections explored, in this article.

**Statistical Methods and Concerns about Population**

Concerns about the population rate led to the development of statistical categories that were not neutral. Joan W. Scott has claimed that statistical reports provide a “way of establishing the authority of certain visions of social order, of organizing perceptions of experiences.” Statistical categories have attracted the attention of researchers inspired by poststructuralist thinking, not only through their efforts to uncover ideological contents concerning gender and class relations, but also within the fields of nationalism and national identity. Social anthropologist Benedict Anderson regarded the population census, as well as maps and museums, as important instruments of power in shaping the geography of a territory and legitimating claims to power. The late-eighteenth-century census interested him as it legitimized colonial supremacy. During the eighteenth century, racial thinking marked the census categories more and more clearly. However, the novelty was not the racial basis of division, but systematic quantification. Anderson argued that there was a passion for completeness and clarity. The census functioned primarily to ensure that everybody was present and had only one place in it. Anderson made a distinction between precolonial societies where people were counted because the sovereign needed knowledge about the basis for taxation and conscription in the middle of the nineteenth century, and when this less sophisticated census was replaced by a census with refined categories, on which new knowledge could be built, the new demographic topography. Anderson argued, “the census, the map and the museum constituted warp and weft which together made up the grammar that made the inhabitants in a territory into one with that territory.” Anderson noticed that the new census counted women but he did not comment on this fact.

Statistical categories are, as Foucault argued, rooted in eighteenth-century visions of greater glory for the state. Of the Nordic countries, Sweden is unique with regard to the population question. There was a
notion in Sweden that the country, as a consequence of war, was poorly populated. A demographic problem was similarly identified in France and in England connected to the mercantile doctrine. The connection between the inhabitants of a country and changes in their numbers is a relatively modern phenomenon. The Swedish concepts “befolkning” and “folkstock” (population) describing this connection originated in the 1760s, according to the dictionary of the Swedish Academy. These concepts were new and related to the number of people in the country. These concepts also demonstrate that inhabitants should be viewed as a collective and that this collective has both a base and a future. It links generations by birth and death rates. While the obsession with the population rate in the early eighteenth century was about increasing the number of the people by sophisticated methods, it was later a question also of conceptualizing “the people” as a collective by using the words “befolkning” and “folkstock,” as demonstrated in the debates. Many of these debates occurred in the Swedish Academy of Sciences, instituted with the purpose of promoting industry and science. The Academy announced a competition in 1763 about the questions: Why do so many people move out of the country each year? and Through what regulations can this be prevented? The approximately thirty entries submitted demonstrates the serious interest that men related to the Academy of Science and the government took in the question.

Sweden has counted individuals for a long time. As early as the seventeenth century, a first-rate church registration system kept birth records of baptisms, marriages, burials, and controlled reading ability as well as knowledge of the catechism. Enforced enrolment in the Lutheran church was a prerequisite for registration. Other countries, like England and France, procured refined census methods during the eighteenth century. However, the Statistical Office (Tabellverket), initiated by the Swedish Academy and based on church registration, was unique. While other countries counted individuals, Sweden kept track of the population growth rate, which was more intricate and difficult. It insisted upon introducing the variables of sex, age, and civil status. With the help of these categories it was possible to calculate changes in the population volume. The Statistical Office was founded in 1749. Parish priests were supposed to collect annual data on births distributed by sex and descent, and deaths distributed by sex, age, and civil status. While the concept “populousness” was used in England to denote the number of the inhabitants at a certain moment, the concept of population (befolkning) was used in Sweden to denote the rate and the changes in accordance with such variables as sex, age, and civil status.

The first report from The Statistical Office showed considerable infant mortality. It made cogent diagnoses and proposed a remedy consisting of
public medical service, child care, and information.\textsuperscript{18} Research results from Finland (Finland was part of the Swedish realm) showed that mothers were accused of being responsible for the deaths of their infants. Enlightenment publications particularly emphasized the unwillingness of women to breastfeed their infants.\textsuperscript{19} This advanced counting, which Benedict Anderson assigned to the middle of the nineteenth century, belongs to the eighteenth century in a Swedish context. Through the new categories—sex and age— notions of the state boundaries were effectively connected to the life course of its inhabitants.

A booklet published in 1756 by the Academy of Sciences about how to increase the strength of the state, “Respectful Report on the Statistical Office” (\textit{Ödmjukt betänkande om tabellverket}), points out that “population should correspond to the size of the country.” It was said that the population was far from filling Sweden to the maximum.\textsuperscript{20} The meaning of this unit could not be emphasized enough. Jacob Faggot, the head of land surveillance, expressed this concept in the following sentence: “the concern was to be trained in a certain way of thinking.” Since the “increase and income of the working masses was the principal foundation of the country’s well-being,” the Statistical Office must be known to everyone. Public officials, as well as the estates, should be “used to and trained in a certain way of thinking, that both for now and the future would lay a good foundation for the general economy with its associated help and regulations,” he argued.\textsuperscript{21} Though population, constituted in this mercantile context as the strongest means to compete with other countries, was considered a state secret, in Faggot’s opinion, however, it should be made public. In this argument there is a good example of the importance attached to repetition and training as a way of establishing a discourse.

A country’s most important asset was its population. This ultimately decided how much the assets could increase. It was of such great importance that some suggested that those who moved out of the country should forfeit their right of inheritance. In Sweden, Pehr Wargentin, the secretary of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, suggested that those who left the country without a passport should be viewed as having forfeited their inheritance if they did not move back.\textsuperscript{22} But good infant care was the primary method for increasing the population. Researchers who investigated infant mortality in the nineteenth century revealed that the object of many brochures printed in the eighteenth century, after the Statistical Office first considered infancy care in 1755, was to create a strong feeling of guilt in mothers—often said to be loveless—so that they would be forced to take better care of their children.\textsuperscript{23} Good infant care, it was believed, would lead to an increase in the labor force.
Labor Legislation in Sweden

The Swedish parliament in the eighteenth century consisted of representatives of four estates: the clergy, the nobility, the burghers, and the peasantry. Using the doctrines of mercantilism, in eighteenth-century utilitarian thinking, some were decided losers and some winners. The words of utilitarianism were lashes to the poor, those who were supposed to be useful so that others could be free to keep their privileges. The numbers of impoverished people increased with proletarianization after 1750.

Those without means of independent support had to work as servants on yearly contracts. This included men and unwed women who had no resources to provide for themselves. Marriage was the principle means of support for women, and the patriarchal household was influenced by male superiority and female subordination. Men who did not commit themselves to yearly service were punished by conscription into the army and women who were not provided for were threatened by forced labor. In the eighteenth-century, labor regulations became more coercive. National legislation was promulgated, heavily constraining the labor force. This is well known in the research field and is part of the general understanding of the period. When reading the sources from a different perspective, I found an additional discourse, as discussed below.

Mercantile thinking focused on, among other subjects, how to increase the labor force, and this is the only aspect of mercantile thinking I am dealing with in this article. A large population was regarded as a source of wealth and the poor were portrayed as a potential resource that could not be squandered. Accordingly, the problem of poverty became increasingly important and was treated with care and deliberation. Children, regarded as the hope of the future, had to be safeguarded. Eighteenth-century Sweden, like England, was obsessed with this question for several decades.

Labor Legislation and Mothering

National labor legislation, produced and supported by both of the governing political parties of the time, was very repressive. Hattarna (the Hats), more so than Mössorna (the Caps) was the party connected to mercantile thinking as a complete system (including different protectionist methods). Agrarian workforce legislation, known as tjänstehjonslagstiftningen, mobilized hitherto untapped resources of female labor in the service of national production. It was accepted that “maids and other women” who were employed or had other means to support themselves “without being to the detriment of others,” were exempt from labor compulsion. But the new regulations even exempted those without means of support who wanted
to convert their labor obligations into “caring”—gender-specific fields of activity, such as taking care of parents. According to the new regulation of 1739, these fields of activity were expanded to include liberation for soldiers’ and boatswains’ widows who were taking care of children. This might be a consequence of the acknowledgement of pending demographic disaster.

According to church law and poor relief legislation, people who were defined as heathens, Gypsies, drifters, and Jews were, as Wilson also has shown for England, targets for compulsory treatment and enforced exile. In Sweden, these groups—defined by religion and settlement—were not considered useful inhabitants; only when, and if, they chose to settle, take on proper jobs, and convert to the Lutheran state church were they accepted as inhabitants. Otherwise they were objects of forced labor and males were also targets for forced conscription. Enforced exile was not used in the first place, as had been customary according to the seventeenth-century poor laws. Only if these people opposed the prescribed standards were they to be driven out of the country according to certain regulations that were repeated and tightened again and again.

These standards differed among males and females, but the consequences for females in the context of population policy were that only for those who could be described as true and settled Lutherans was it legitimate to head one’s own household, to sit for oneself, as long as these women took care of their parents. Complaints about these regulations expressed that women had withdrawn from labor compulsion, and “sat for themselves.” This was a kind of entitlement to which women could refer if local employers demanded annual labor. There are a few examples that also provide evidence of women using this entitlement. A county policeman in Sollefteå, northern Sweden, described a woman who was denounced for registering for taxation. Her child was well brought up, he argued, and did not need as much care as would prevent the mother from being employed. There were many farmers, he argued, who would gladly take both the mother and child into their households. However, the woman “wanted to stay in her old and good habit,” the county policeman complained. According to another complaint from the sheriff in Hälsingland, northern Sweden, in 1764, several maids were sitting for themselves and giving care to old parents so that farmers could not use their labor. The state seems to have protected women from the demands of local farmers.

On the one hand, this policy assigned responsibility to women for the increase in the number of poor people who could not be placed within the old support system. On the other hand, it held women responsible for taking care of the population resources. Even though women were caregivers in the past, the new labor regulations showed that this responsibility was...
justified in a new way. Women were compensated for caring for the worn-out or unused labor force. Social-political means of control were used to solve workforce and caring issues. Offering women benefits in exchange for caring was a novelty. The benefit consisted of exemption from compulsory labor. Concern about the population rate became more urgent in the coming decades, and good infant care brought the question of maternity to the political agenda.

Carl Linnaeus, Wet-nurses, and “Natural” Motherhood

The system of foster mothers and wet-nurses was widespread, particularly in France, but also in England. In these countries infants were often breast-fed in wet-nurses’ homes. In Sweden wet-nurses could be employed in childrens’ homes. Church registers, as well as tax registers, in Sweden mentioned wet-nurses who were employed through the mediation of wet-nursing agencies. According to some debaters, wet-nurses should exist only in cases of need. In a booklet called “The Wet-nurse as a Stepmother” (Amman såsom styfmoder) published in 1752, Carl Linnaeus, one of the most well-known scientists of the time, took offence at the concept of wet-nurses. He spoke of the value of mother’s milk to children. About ten years later Rousseau made the same argument in his famous Émile. The campaign against wet-nursing started in France about 1760, according to historian George Sussman.

Wet-nurses were among the worst off in Sweden, badly positioned to take care of children, Linnaeus argued. He claimed that they transferred their bad characters to the children. Above all, Linnaeus’s message was that “natural” motherhood should be strengthened. Medically, he felt that breastmother’s milk was adapted according to the nature of the blood, it invigorated the already good biological foundations. However, nursing was also important with regard to motherly love, which, according to Linnaeus, was founded in nature. In contrast to the love of wet-nurses, “natural mother’s” love was “founded in natural instinct.” His statements were not without contradictions, however. The daily suckle increased the level of love in the children, he argued, but he did not draw the conclusion that love is a practice. Instead, he concluded that the love of mothers grew when they embraced their children. To support the opinion that nature guided good motherhood he declared wet-nurse milk as “false” (oäkta).

Another scientist expressed himself in a similar manner. Anders Berch, the first professor of Political Arithmetic (public economics), stressed in 1747 that wet-nurses were needed, but should be carefully examined. Nevertheless “physics” pointed out that nothing served as more suitable
nourishment for infants than a “mother’s own milk.” No one was more suited than “natural” mothers; they cared with more attention than others.33 Like Linnaeus, he drew the conclusion that “natural” mothers were most fit to care. When the same message was repeated time after another by different people in different contexts, a certain way of thinking was established. Another actor in the public dialogue, Johan Kraftman, published some thoughts about the scarcity of people in 1756, and repeated the same words about mothers and children by saying that “the love the child naturally develops for the mother by having her own milk cannot but fail when delivered by a wet-nurse.”34

This discourse carried biological signs even though the links between love and biology were somewhat blurred. Mothers who did not fulfill these demands were by definition “unnatural.” Women who did not undertake good motherhood were held responsible for the misfortunes of the state according to the booklet “The Tending and Care of Infants,” which explicitly stated that child care was for “the whole country the most useful duty fulfilled by mothers themselves” (hela rikets högst nyttiga plichtes fullgörande af sielfwa mödrarna) and fathers were expected to take care of mothers.35 Child care was obviously considered a service to the state.

The naturalization of motherhood, championed mostly by Linnaeus, was a novelty, and these thoughts had to be expressed repeatedly since not everyone engaged in the question of population stressed this point. One member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences and the most famous medical doctor in Sweden, Nils von Rosenstein, wrote instructions for wet-nurses in 1764 that showed no intention of building a myth around “natural” motherhood. His only view on this matter was that wet-nurses should be chosen carefully because children became similar to the women who nursed them. Thus, it was essential that wet-nurses were irreproachable.36

Criticism of the wet-nurse system continued. Twenty-five years after Linnaeus’s booklet on wet-nurses there were still complaints about them. The priest J. Aurinder wrote a letter to the chair of Collegium Medicum, Abraham Bäck, in 1781 regarding his opinions on infant mortality that was based on his knowledge of parish members in the Maria Parish in Stockholm. The problem, he concluded, was that the poor lived under terrible circumstances and foster mothers were among the worst off. Yet, he claimed, many of them cared for their children with deep tenderness.37

Population growth and workforce reproduction in Sweden was granted such a high priority that even unwed mothers were to become mothers in the service of the state. In addition, women who were foster mothers could fulfill this role for a long time. A royal proclamation to set up a wet-nurse office in Stockholm in 1757 made no distinction concerning civil status.
Wives and “other pregnant women” were to report there to be examined as potential wet-nurses.38

In eighteenth-century France, with the growth in the number of abandoned children due to economic conditions, wet-nursing was a very common practice.39 Michel Foucault stressed that the population discourse implied that sexuality should be kept within marriage.40 His assumption that the political technique of power with regard to the population served the purpose of ordaining heterosexuality can be modified by a later political population regulation in Sweden, the Infanticide Bill of 1779. In a royal proclamation to executives in 1779, alternatives to infanticide were provided for unwed mothers. If they wished, these women were allowed to obtain a secret absolution from the parish priest, and could give birth in anonymity. Furthermore, midwives’ oaths were changed so that midwives were prevented from releasing information about childbearing mothers, no distinctions were made between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” children, and no pejorative names were permitted. Unwed mothers could be compensated in accordance with the orphanage regulation of 1763.41

Mothering and the Profit of Children

Anxieties about population (folkstocken) were expressed in terms of children being considered as capital. Anders Berch spoke in “Science of Public Economics” about children this way. He maintained that the upper classes could expect that having children would help them meet expenditures for their children. The fetus was a gift for which the upper classes should be delighted. Parents donated “capital which will yield profits in time.” Berch claimed that the establishment of orphanages and nurseries was a good idea.42

Both labor legislation and poor relief regulations were affected by a population discourse. The Hospital and Orphanage Regulation of 1763 was particularly focused on children. Along with the elderly, the insane, and the incurable, children were positioned as “the poor and needy.” However, they were worthy of more tender-hearted care than others because it was hoped that they would “become useful members of the community.”43 This regulation switched to a milder tone when speaking of women and children. With regard to the maintenance of children, the regulation stated that it is “far more advantageous in caring and upbringing to let them stay with their own mother, or foster mothers, than to gather them in orphanages” because “the mothers themselves or foster mothers who have few children to nurse care with more tenderness” than one can expect from even “the most faithful and diligent nurses in an orphanage.”44
The regulation assumed that mothers and foster mothers showed more tender feelings than nurses in an orphanage because they have only a few children to sustain. According to this regulation, children should be sustained in accordance with three levels of compensation. Economic compensation should be given if “mothers live off their own work and are prevented from this by small children needing to be taken care of”; “one of the parents is ill over a long time or dead”; or “both parents are dead and the children must be maintained by strangers.”45 The last level received the highest level of compensation. With regard to the first level it was said that compensation should be paid to mothers, not parents. This could apply to both unwed mothers and mothers who were sole providers. The “lifestyle” of these women should not be encouraged even if looking after their children was important.

This regulation was heavily criticized because of a form of financing that was based on mandatory contributions by peasants to support the poor. Three years later the regulation was repealed and replaced by a new one that omitted some of the ideological statements. It stipulated that children should be cared for by their mothers and foster mothers but said nothing about why mothers provide better care than nurses in an orphanage. Compensation levels were also the same. The coercive measure used to provide for children failed and instead the new regulation detailed the peasantry’s duties to provide. In addition to this, voluntary contributions were expected. Every village had to elect a committee that would take full responsibility for poor children. The supervision was to be conducted by the royal directorate, along with county governors, bishops, and borough administrations.46 The regulation provided a task for those women who could occupy subject positions as settled and true Lutherans, mothers and foster mothers, that would be fulfilled by a state-ruled supervisory committee. Those women were supposed to embody a certain order in the service of the state.

Economy, Population Policies, and Motherhood

In “Introduction to Public Housekeeping,” published in 1747, Anders Berch, discussed how the wealth of people could be promoted. Marriage was the best way to ensure population growth, but other alternatives had to be considered since people did not always live in such an orderly fashion. Berch suggested that mothers be allowed to give birth in anonymity and that poor parents be permitted to leave their children in orphanages. It was not until much later, in 1779, that these suggestions were inscribed in the Infanticide Act.47

In different regulations and royal proclamations, marriage was partly disregarded in order to promote population growth. Motherhood was
depicted as a central duty of the state. Sex, as Foucault has argued, was absolutely essential to the population policy. In Sweden, however, motherhood was regarded primarily as a state service. Heteronormativity was a discourse that followed thereafter. The political instruments show how pragmatic the Swedish state was; no means to fulfill the state’s economic goals went unconsidered. Pragmatism crossed the repressive discourse to the working masses, the laboring poor. By connecting domesticity and good motherhood, a vision of home as the right place for caring was created. “Caring” in this context included caring for the reproduction of the workforce. Married women, unwed women, and wet-nurses were expected to care for the population as a resource. Their bodies were colonized by the population discourse.

To a certain extent, the nativity rate became a concern between women and the state. Fathers were excluded from the child and from caring, which helps illustrate historian John Gillis’s perspective on changes in fatherhood identity construction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The denaturalization of fatherhood occurred at a time when obstetrics was becoming a profession. But while Gillis put this change in the framework of ideological differentiation between the public and private spheres, I choose to use the framework of economic competition and an alliance between mothers and the state. This framework also fits better with Statt’s and Wilson’s findings and with those of Ruth Perry, who hints at the exploitation of women’s bodies in order to increase the population. From the booklet “Advice to Mothers,” published in 1769, she quotes the apprehension felt by women who did not give birth and thus had no right to become wives. In England, the beginning of the colonizing of women’s bodies began with the repudiation of wet-nurses. While breasts had previously had a class dimension, since wet-nurses were among the poorest people, they were later given a clear-cut sexual dimension since women were supposed to nurse their infants. This interpretation fits well into the discourse developed in Sweden. Linnaeus, for example, portrayed wet-nurses as low status and a bad influence on children. “Noble people degenerate and sharp-witted grow apathetic” by wet-nurses, he argued.

**Motherhood and Social Citizenship**

The question of whether motherhood is a resource that can be connected to rights has been recently discussed in the field of citizenship. This discussion is also a struggle over how to prioritize interpretations concerning future politics. Research on social citizenship by political scientists has concentrated on rights. However, there are other dimensions of interests
concerning discursive ties between the state and its inhabitants on which historians sometimes focus. Another dimension that might contribute to a new understanding is the concept of “personal service”—a concept that political scientist Wendy Sarvasy has explored. In attempting to expand the concept of service, she argued that social citizenship is not just about social rights but also about labor regulations, right to care, and such obligations as work and military service. Constructions of women’s service vis-à-vis the state show that woman as mother can be seen as a counterpart to men’s service as soldiers. If the incentives and pressures are strong enough, women, by giving birth and taking care of the population as a resource, are thought to do service for the state and thereby “forced” into a national motherhood. The economic-political narrative in the eighteenth century carried notions of ties between the population and the state. According to these notions, women’s bodies were colonized.

“The Improvement of a Country’s Public Economy”

Population politics should be viewed in the context of economic competition, and the most competitive means, within mercantile economic thought, was the size of the population. Parliament’s foundation of a Department of Public Economics was another cornerstone in establishing a national discourse on population. The census and the map together shaped the grammar that united people and state territories, Benedict Anderson has argued. The map as a space for the consciousness of national identity is about obtaining the means to imagine the state territory. The map, however, is not the focus of this article. Topography, as illustrated in the eighteenth-century map, was part of public economics. In Political Arithmetic calculations of the economic conditions of the state included both censuses and computations of the country’s assets. It was the energy or motion between the two that decided the wealth of the state. As Anders Berch stated, calculations were necessary to obtain knowledge about “whether the population corresponds to the size of the country.” Such knowledge was the first step toward “the improvement of a country’s public economy” (allmänna hushållningen). It started with the knowledge of the age of the inhabitants and continued with the “condition of the country itself, which is the other cornerstone on which the public economy is administered.” The purpose of this rhetoric was to legitimize a new economic and political order that would make the inhabitants feel like a People.

Research often points out that advocates of mercantilist doctrines viewed poverty as an incentive to work. This was however not true of all political actors of the time. Berch stated that by the “conditions of the economy”
he meant “all those occasions through which the inhabitants could sustain and support themselves and even increase their wealth.”54 One of the key ideas of public economy was that both the state and the inhabitants would profit. There was a great deal of discussion about how to create emotional bonds between the people and the state, and how to ensure that the people would love their country so that they would not abandon it. Certainly, a large population formed the real basis for “the right strength of a state,” but it also took encouragement to get the population to grow, said Anders Chydenius, a member of the parliament and a particularly active debater on population policy.55 This was articulated fifteen years after Berch’s declaration. Two rival political discourses regarding economy and population are revealed. A report from the Statistical Office in 1761 stated that love of the fatherland could be maintained by love from the state, which would, in turn, counteract emigration.56 The Statistical Office even turned against compulsory recruitment to the armed forces.57 Another debater, Anders von Höpken, commented on the problem of compulsory recruitment in a booklet on emigration in the middle of the eighteenth century. He emphasized that it counteracted positive feelings for the fatherland (fäderneslandet), saying that it should be considered an honor to defend one’s country, not a punishment.58 This explicit national rhetoric was intended to mobilize the inhabitants for the future strength of the country.

The relationship between the inhabitants and the country became a problematic area and had important gender implications. The people were defined as the most important resource of the state, and social tasks allotted to women as mothers were articulated. This articulation also drew on an emotional motherhood discourse. In the booklet “Casual Thoughts on love of the Fatherland,” a doctor of natural history and professor of economics at the University of Turku, Pehr Adrian Gadd, urged women to take responsibility, saying: “mothers of the people of the country and ancestors, whom nature has equipped with tender and charming manners, you who take part in the upbringing of the children during their infant years, fulfill with dignity your calling, do not choke through carelessness . . . those sparks of love of the Fatherland that nature has laid in the hearts of your children.”59

Gadd’s writings are filled with strong emotion and an attempt to construct historical myths of the past, which is somewhat rare in this context. Gadd was engaged in the emigration question and participated in an attempt to prevent emigration in 1763.60 He wanted to show that love of the country was a latent feeling in all inhabitants, while simultaneously claiming that such a feeling could be acquired: the “society where a human lives most of the time and possesses citizenship can already to some extent be called Fa-
therland; more so, if one owes both birth and upbringing to the same.  

The interesting part of this passage is the idea that those who live in a country and feel like citizens are also part of the country’s future. The fatherland in this context must be considered something more than the place of birth. It is a concept, something you have to imagine. Some twenty years later the same words were expressed by the Swedish philosopher Daniel Boethius in a textbook for young people. When people live together and feel united with other people, he claimed, they begin to create an imagination about a fatherland, and the more they feel the benefits, the stronger the unity with the Fatherland becomes. I would argue that these expressions are metaphysical. People had to be trained in a way of thinking in order to develop a feeling of unity. This discourse was woven around rights and obligations for some people but not all those living in the country. 

After 1750, some debaters claimed that those who were well treated were more useful for the country. Several of them argued that the wealth of the inhabitants went hand in hand with the wealth of the country. The most radical discourse made reference to particular reasons for the miserable conditions of workers. There could be external reasons, so that workers had to be helped in order to feel useful. Jacob Faggot said that the working masses that were called vagrants were not only unhappy, they were innocent. This implied that the reason for their misery was not localized within the individual. Instead the problems were general and had to be tackled on a general level. The concept of unemployed people occurred in this context. One debater argued that men were unemployed involuntarily. He spoke of how important it was to support unemployed men so that they could be good providers and their children could be useful to the state. The workforce question was posed to get gender differentiation into a national narrative. Women were assigned certain tasks as mothers and men were assigned tasks as providers. 

The concept of belonging to the state was constructed for the working masses in two ways. People needed to be encouraged and no one was to be unemployed voluntarily. These two ways spoke of belonging and participation. The common good and the common interest were metaphors in the rhetoric of both economic and population policies, so that they were woven together in a national discourse. 

Sociologist and professor of gender, sexualities, and ethnicity studies Nira Yuval-Davis has claimed that changes in the relationship between the state and its inhabitants were primarily expressed as a growing identification with the state at the expense of other identities. These changes did not so much evolve from notions of a shared history as from predictions about a shared future. The nation was constructed with regard to the future, which
also explains why people who cannot imagine a shared history of territory can mobilize a sense of belonging, such as people in postcolonial states.65

The concept of the nation underwent a transformation in the political discourse on economy and population. Viewing the labor force as the most important means of competition provided insights into the connection between the state and its inhabitants. In this context the concept of nation was reshaped. It is striking how frequent the concept was used to designate a “we,” but equally interesting that different discourses about who this “we” represents are revealed. One issue originated from emigration matters and one from an increase in the national profit. These were also connected. When the issue of how to increase the number of people was discussed, matters of emigration arose. A great deal of attention was paid both to naming the outposts of the country and connecting this naming with the inhabitants of the country.

But immigration was also considered as a means of increasing the population. Some debaters, like Anders Berch, suggested that immigration be encouraged. Berch claimed that people became alike by living together. By “alike” he was probably referring to religious manners. He speculated that if whole regions were abandoned as a result of warfare or religious oppression, people must act quickly to persuade others to move into the country.66 Berch argued that religion had formed barriers between people and now they had to yield. Freedom of religion was a matter of discussion until the first legislation on religious freedom was passed in 1781. An undersecretary of state, Johan Liljencrantz, used same argument in 1760, saying that the public economy would improve through freedom of religion by allowing the immigration of foreigners. He said, “Swea’s country will improve and grow in power and respect.”67

Another population and emigration discourse that attempted to establish a national “we” was related to inhabitants already living in fixed residences in Sweden. A motion by a man of the peasant estate argued in favor of making life better for the nation’s own workers in the country. He used the term the nation’s own children.68 The concept of “own” stressed the connection between the Swedish territory and those who were native to Sweden. This was a distinct discourse regarding the population question.

In the rhetoric of economic politics, the concept of nation was used to turn the focus inward toward the common territory, the economy, in a concerted effort to compete with other political territories. Expressions like national usefulness, national profit, and the national interest were widespread. The concept of national thinking was frequently used to refer to the Right Thinking of all inhabitants about the fatherland. One debater, Anders Schönberg, said that “every citizen considered it more honorable and advanta-
ious to be a member in his own fatherland than in another country.” Pehr Adrian Gadd said that the “way of upbringing through which our ancestors’ honorable and serious manners were almost obliterated” had turned away from “the real national thinking.”

The “we” in this discourse of national thinking referred to both the public economy and the nation. Jacob Faggot said, “those nations . . . who continuously followed an economic plan . . . were better off than those who have had but steady and good orders.” Another debater argued that “the Nation is a mass of people who have united in protection of the highest power.”

Conclusion

According to Daniel Statt’s study of England, eighteenth-century mercantile thinking created an obsession with “population” and how to spur the growth rate. My study eighteenth-century Swedish population policy corroborates this. While in England the focus was on immigration, nativity was the focus in Sweden. As a result of systematic church registers, Swedish population policy was very efficient and became the basis of a new system of knowledge built on gender and sexual differences. Sweden kept check of the population rate. The methods used made it possible to calculate the population. This implied a strong connection between mothers and the state. Motherhood became a weapon in the struggle between states as well as between local labor purchasers and the women’s workforce. The state needed to define them as mothers, important for the reproduction of the labor force. Thus, women of the right kind possessed an exchange value. They received economic compensation in the form of exemption from compulsory labor regulations in exchange for their reproductive work.

Caring became a legitimate task for women, and allowed them to some extent to escape subordination by males. However, belonging to the state concerned women as women, not as individuals. Analytically these kinds of rights must be observed from a dual perspective, as is the case for most kinds of rights. An allotted responsibility could also be viewed as a burden for women.

The social-political configuration of womanhood primarily meant that the quantity of possible identities had expanded. To men this must have represented a threat to their patriarchal rights as masters of the household, since women were allowed to “sit for themselves,” meaning they were not forced into subordination to a male master of the household. Unwed mothers were also encompassed. These changes should be viewed in light of a new economic policy meaning that the duties toward the household
encountered competition from the state. With respect to labor regulations (and the state), women could thus make a claim on social rights. The political economy was mainly guided by repression, but another competitive discourse also guided the thinking, namely, love for the fatherland. In the Political Arithmetic, calculations of the economic conditions of the state included both censuses and computations of the country’s assets. It was the energy or motion between the two that decided the wealth of the state. As Anders Berch stated, calculations were necessary to obtain knowledge about “whether the population corresponds to the size of the country.” Such knowledge was the first step toward “a country’s rise in the public economy.” It started with the knowledge of the age of the inhabitants and continued with the “condition of the country itself, which is the other cornerstone, on which the public economy is administered.”

The purpose of this rhetoric was to legitimize a new economic and political order that would make the inhabitants feel like a people.

In this context, inhabitants and the state were molded together in a qualitatively new way to look at the future. The language was laden with references to the public and the common good. When a large population was the primary means of competition, a new base of knowledge arose to promote this. This discourse colonized women’s bodies by giving settled, true Lutheran women a national task to become child bearers, child rearers, carers, and guardians of the nation. These positions were not attainable for everyone living in the country. In Sweden, and even more so in England, groups defined as Gypsies, drifters, Jews, and heathens were marginalized and became targets for expulsion and denigration. These groups could not be accommodated in the nation unless they gave up traveling, became true Lutherans and made themselves objects of taxation. Motherhood has a very special meaning in population politics, and in a national context. Motherhood as a national resource and as a symbol in nationalistic projects implies incorporation of women into the state as mothers, not individuals. This runs counter to the principles of democracy since it is based on gender difference and hierarchy.

Notes


See Karin Johannisson, *Det mätbara samhället. Statistik och samhällsdröm i1700-


The sources have been translated from Swedish to English.


Ruth Perry, “Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-


Ibid., 8–27.


Erland Hofsten, “Pehr Wargentin och grundandet av svenska befolknings-

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22Jacob Faggot, *Systematiskt begrepp om almänna hushållningens brister och botemedel* (Stockholm, 1763), 9–10.


24Carl von Linné, “Amman såsom styfmoder,” in *Valda Handlingar av Carl von Linne (1752)* i översättning utgivna av svenska Linneföreningen (Åbo, 1947), 12, 15; see also Londa Schiebinger, “Why Mammals are Called Mammals: Gender, Politics in the Eighteenth Century Natural History,” *American Historical Review* 98, no. 2 (1993): 382–411. Schiebinger reads Linnaeus from a feminist perspective. In his classification of animals, Linnaeus put particular focus on the reproductive organs, she claims, and when doing that he could include humans, more precisely women. In one of his sex classes, that is Mammals, woman could easily be included. In other words, she could be inscribed in nature, which at the same time set man apart as the general norm. Schiebinger argues that the concept of “mammal” helped to legitimize the division of labor by gender through its emphasis on wet-nursing as a natural activity. Felicity A. Nussbaum argues that the “lactating breast entered scientific discourse
as a categorizing organ when Linnaeus somewhat arbitrarily chose it in 1758 as the defining term in the category *Mammalia,* " *Torrid Zones,* 25.


33 Anders Berch, *Inledning till almänna hushålningen, innefattande grunden til politie, oeconomie och cameral wetenskaperne: Til deras tänst, som biwista de almänne föreläsningar inrättad* (Stockholm, 1747), 78.


35 Späda barns ans och skötsel: Alla Christeliga föräldrar åliggande (Stockholm: Kongl. Tryckeriet, 1755), 16.


39 Sussman, *Selling Mothers’ Milk,* 19–32.


41 Friherre Johan Rosir, President uti Kongl. Maj:ts och riksens Swea Hof-Rätt samt commenduer. . . 17/10 1778, Årstrycket, University Library, Lund. The Infanticide Act has been read in different ways in historical research. On the one hand it is said to be unfair to women because men could legitimately withdraw from fatherhood. Marie Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam: Ögifta mödrar på svensk landsbygd 1680–1880* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997), 66–68. On the other hand it has been considered an effect of secularization, a new way of thinking about criminal law. See Börje Bergfeldt, *Den teokratiska statens död: Sekularisering och civilisering i 1700-talets Stockholm* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1997), 21–39.


44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.
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Berch, *Inledning til almänna hushålningen*, 34, 35. The Infanticide Act was part of King Gustav III’s penal law reform. On this penal reform, see Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam*.


Carl von Linné, quotation 17.


Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 159.

Ibid., 65–67.

Ibid., 67.


“Tabellkommissionens underdåniga relation 1761,” in Hjelt, *De första officiella relationerna*, 159.

Ibid., 63

Ibid., 67.


Ibid., 63

Daniel Boethius, *Utkast till föreläsningar i den naturliga sedoläran, innehålland
grunderna till människans moraliska begrep och läran om dess rättigheter och skyldigheter (Uppsala, 1782), 172.

63E.g. Jacob Faggot, *Swenska lantbrukets hinder och hjälp* (Stockholm, 1746); Jacob Faggot, *Systematiskt begrepp om almännas hushållningens brister och botemedel* (Stockholm, 1763); see also Jacob Faggot’s and Edvard Runberg’s proposal for new agrarian workforce legislation, *Oförgripeligt förslag til en almänns tjänste-hjons stadga* (Stockholm, 1765), in which labor relations were supposed to be “voluntary unions” (p. 2). Others who talked about paying more attention to the needs of the workers included Carl Gustaf Tessin and Anders von Höpken; see Gustaf Utterström, *T Jordbruks arbetare: lemnadsvillkor och arbetsliv på landsbygden från frihetstiden till mitten av 1800-talet* (Stockholm, Tiden 1957), 258–65.

64Samuel Ödman, “Tankar om sättet at förekomma tiggerier i städern, utan at åsidosätta den Christeliga kärlekens pligter,” *Kongl. Götheborgska Wetenskaps och Witterhetssamhälles Handlingar* (Göteborg, 1788), 42–45


69Pehr Adrian Gadd, *Upmuntran och underrättelse til nyttiga plantagers widttagande i Finland* (Åbo, 1763), 9.

70Jacob Faggot, *Systematiskt begrepp om Almänna Hushållningens drifter och botemedel* (Stockholm, 1763), 10, Årstrycket, University Library, Lund.


73Edgren, *Från rike till nation*. 