



This is an author produced version of a paper published in Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the published paper:

Hellström, Anders. (2017). Carly Elizabeth SchallThe Rise and Fall of the Miraculous Welfare Machine : Immigration and Social Democracy in Twentieth-Century Sweden. Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism, vol. 17, issue 2, p. null

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12244>

Publisher: Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism

This document has been downloaded from MUEP (<http://muep.mah.se>).

Carly Elizabeth Schall, *The Rise and Fall of the Miraculous Welfare Machine: Immigration and Social Democracy in Twentieth-Century Sweden*. (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2016, 258 pp, 55\$). <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12244>

Many European countries appear increasingly unsure of how to handle the situation with refugees escaping from war-torn Syria. Across the continent, governments scramble to obstruct migrants, deferring moral and technical responsibility to the collective negotiations of the E.U. member states. Yet even before the current humanitarian crises, European countries were becoming increasingly hampered by crises of national identity. Some scholars have referred to this as a socio-cultural shift, hinting at a polarization of the electorates of many European countries, between those embracing a cultural pluralist agenda and those promoting cultural conformism (Hellström 2016: 49–50).

The Nordic countries are no exception to this general trend. *The Rise and Fall of the Miraculous Welfare Machine* by Carly Elizabeth Schall is a piece of excellent scholarly work, and offers essential historical, context-specific knowledge in this regard, pinpointing the normative contours behind the rise and fall of the welfare machinery in Sweden. By discussing how ethnic homogeneity matters for the development of the universal welfare state, she highlights the national political-cultural elements in the formation of the welfare state in Sweden, and asks the pertinent question of whether emergent ethnic heterogeneity therefore poses a threat to such systems, or if it is instead a pre-condition for its emergence and survival.

Analytically, her study embarks from the Weberian concept of “social closure”. The idea is that there exist “open” social relations for (most) of its members, but occasionally society imposes elements of closure, limiting the society’s goods to a subset of its members, which could be based on class, race, or sex (p. 7). Schall convincingly argues that it is the political elites that manage the division between openness and closure, and indeed, in Sweden, the Social Democratic Party (SAP) held a tight grip on the hammer in the formation and expansion of the welfare state. Its success was based on its ability to cooperate with other political parties and to balancing conflicting societal interests. But the welfare state has not always been for everyone. Amongst other measures, forced sterilization laws in 1934 and 1941 which were implemented and put into practice by the authorities, led to distinguishing between who was accounted for in the development of the Swedish national community, and thus, which categories of people were included in the formation of the welfare state.

The author focuses on five periods of potential closure in Swedish politics from 1928 to 2014. The first period (1928–1932) starts with Social Democratic Prime Minister Per Albin Hanson’s “People’s Home Speech” in the national parliament in 1928). The second period lasts between 1945 and 1950 and represents the institutional realization of the “Swedish People’s Home”, at the same time as Sweden accepted significant numbers of refugees from WWII. The third period (1968-1975) takes into account the increased levels of labour migration, which pushes immigration and integration into the public debate. The fourth period (1991–1995) deals with the economic crisis, change of government and thus a crisis within Social Democracy. The fifth, and the final period (2006–2014)

deals with both a crisis of entry, and a crisis of access to goods. This section also elaborates on the consequences of rise of the xenophobic party Sweden Democrats (SD) in the Swedish parliament).

In the book's first empirical section, Schall demonstrates that the political hegemony of the Social Democratic Party created the conditions for the birth of the welfare state and its eventual closure. Schall does not presume that the closure of the welfare state was necessarily inevitable. However, the same conditions which allowed both the Social Democratic Party and its welfare state project to flourish—namely, a strong and narrow sense of national community—also established the eventual “terms of closure” (p. 188). I therefore agree with the author that “the welfare state and the nation, then, are closely connected” (p.7).

Despite the obvious merits, Schall's book is not without shortcomings. First, while the book undoubtedly relies on an appropriate amount of empirical data, it remains less clear with which methodological tools the study was conducted. Schall uses ‘theory-driven purposive sampling’ and has a database of 2,321 articles from *Arbetet* (replaced in 2000 with *Norrländska Social-Demokraten*), *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. The author also pays attention to parliamentary debates. The meticulous reader would perhaps like to know what the coding procedure looked like, for example. The author also collects a number of documents from the Labour Movement Archives, including personal correspondence. This is indeed interesting, but what were the selection criteria? In sum, “a qualitative analysis on all documents” (p. 27) does not provide a satisfactory answer.

Second, how could and should the findings be applied to contemporary events? For example, while the book dwells on a discussion around the New Democracy in the early 1990s (a right wing populist party), which came into the parliament in 1991 and disappeared from the assembly again in 1994. An additional chapter could have elaborated further on the current debate around the parliamentary party the Sweden Democrats (SD) (in the Swedish parliament from 2010), and the shifting climate of debate in general. To give but one example, the “Swedish People's Home” metaphor was employed by the Social Democratic Party to sustain socially progressive politics, as elegantly shown in this book. On the other hand, the SD, in its' political rhetoric, embarks from the same concept to breed a welfare chauvinist political agenda, in singling out the cultural conformism connotations of the metaphor (see further Norocel 2016).

So does ethnic heterogeneity matter for the emergence and survival of the welfare state? Not necessarily. The growth of the welfare state in Sweden was based on homogeneity. But this does not mean that heterogeneity automatically leads to its decline. The rise and fall of the welfare machinery in Sweden is neither conditioned on homogeneity nor on heterogeneity, but on what the dominant political actors make out of these circumstances. It is a conclusion that foretells that politics matter: how political leaders articulate their messages and what policies they pursue (implementing collective solutions in a highly individualistic time) foretells the future relationship between welfare and ethnicity in Sweden and elsewhere.

References

Anders Hellström 2016. *Trust Us: Reproducing the nation and the Scandinavian Nationalist Populist Parties*, New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Ov Cristian Norocel 2016. Populist Radical Right Protectors of the Folkhem–Welfare Chauvinism in Sweden. *Critical Social Policy* 36(3): 371-390.

Anders Hellström (Associate Professor in Political Science)

Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM)

Malmö University