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Between Securitization and Counter-Securitization: Church of Sweden Opposing the Turn of Swedish Government Migration Policy

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ABSTRACT

Taking our point of departure in securitization theory the aim is to analyze how the Lutheran Church of Sweden responded when the Swedish Government in late autumn 2015 made a sudden halt to a previously generous posture towards refugees. Applying the concept of counter-securitization we demonstrate how the Archbishop, and other Church leaders, strongly contested this official policy shift, legitimating their standpoint by referring to a radical, cosmopolitan reading of the gospel. Employees and lay members were mobilized to support immigrants through protest, everyday service, consultation and lobbying. Articulating a view that securitization should not be reserved for cases of a perceived existential military threat is highly relevant for the debate about the role of religion and secularism. Securitization and counter-securitization appear as two complementary approaches, where the Church may stand up as a bulwark defending immigration rights in contradistinction to retrotopian and xenophobic interpretations of the gospel. We contribute to this field by illustrating how research should not be caught in a one-dimensional reading of 'security' and 'securitization', but has to be interpreted within a non-linear, non-binary framework, with a sensitive ear to different political, cultural, social and religious contexts, not forgetting the time dimension.

KEYWORDS

Church of Sweden; Swedish government; migration policy; securitization; counter-securitization

Introduction

Migration is a pressing and perennial concern for the church as *church*, and not simply as a social organization dedicated to the promotion of the welfare of all, especially the most vulnerable members of society.¹

It is by labeling² something a security issue that it becomes one.²

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¹P. C. Phan, 'Deus Migrator – God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration', *Theological Studies*, 77:4 (2016), pp. 845–868. Cit. p. 847 [emphasis in original text].

²C. Laustsen, B. Bagge and O. Wæver, 'In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 29:3 (2016), pp. 705–739. Cit., p. 708.

In this article we focus upon the post-November 2015 radically different securitization discourses represented by the Swedish Government and the former state Church of Sweden,³ respectively; labeling the latter a case of ‘counter-securitization’ as this discourse perceives ‘human rights’, and not the strength of ‘the nation’ or the vigor of ‘the welfare state’ as the primary referent, which has remained the focus for the (de)securitization discourse. We thus explore the arguments and motives underpinning the securitizing/counter-securitizing positions and practices of the Government and the Church of Sweden. This approach is in line with a recent trend in the study of securitization that has ‘significantly developed beyond its initial focus on the speech act’, increasingly expanding in the direction of an ‘analytics of government’, also emphasizing practices and processes.⁴ Securitization is here ‘conceived of as a tactic by policy makers to loosen the political constraints on them and allow them to formulate policies, gain funding, or shape policy implementation in ways that might not otherwise have been possible’. This broader approach to securitization may also include counter-securitization measures taken by opponents, thus introducing an arena for studying two contesting ‘regimes of practices’.⁵ The study thereby also explores the porous borderline between religion and politics.

The article departs from an ideological shift regarding migration policy,⁶ which took place in Sweden since November 2015, from a comparatively generous policy to a restrictive one. In August 2014, the PM of the Swedish Liberal-Conservative four-party Government urged all Swedes to prepare for a ‘huge immigration wave’, and formulated its official, and liberal stance at the time:⁷

I ask the Swedish people to be patient and open their hearts to the vulnerable we see around the world. When many are fleeing within a short time span, tensions emerge in the Swedish society. But we have learned that people who come here, later join us to build Sweden.

One year later, in September 2015, PM of the new two-party Swedish Social Democratic-Green Party Government, Stefan Löfvén, stated in the same spirit that ‘my Europe does

³The Lutheran State Church of Sweden was integrated into the Swedish welfare system all through the 20th century. However, on January 1, 2000, Church of Sweden separated with the state and received the status as one of many free-church and non-Christian faith-communities. ‘It nevertheless still enjoys an incomparable position as an FBO in the Swedish society, not least by a notable physical presence with the 3,500 churches throughout the country’. C. Fridolfsson and I. Elander Faith-based Organizations and Welfare State Retrenchment in Sweden: Substitute or Complement? *Politics and Religion*, 5:3 (2012), p. 640.

⁴T. Balzacq, S. Léonard and J. Ruzicka, ‘Securitization Revisited: Theory and Cases’, *International Relations*, 30:4 (2016), pp. 494–531.

⁵N. Lebow and T.J. Potenz, ‘Turning the Page: Conclusions, Questions and Agenda’. *Polity*, 51:2 (2019), pp. 417–425. See also H. Stritzel & S. C. Chang, ‘Securitization and Counter-Securitization in Afghanistan’, *Security Dialogue*, 46:6 (2015), pp. 548–567.

⁶In theory, and strictly speaking, the concepts of migrant/migration, immigrant/immigration, refugee and asylum-seeker have distinct separate meanings, such as defined by Eurostat (Eurostat). *Statistics Explained*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ordlista:Migrant>. 2020. [Accessed 2020-10-30] and UNHCR (UNHCR. *Operational Portal: Mediterranean Situation*). <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>. 2019. [Accessed 2020-10-30]. In practice the concepts are nevertheless often confused or conflated, both in academic texts as well as in governmental actions and documentation. We follow the Eurostat classification when possible in this text, although keeping the original concepts pronounced in quotations or official nomenclature, thus, even when they are not following the conventional terminology.

⁷F. Reinfeldt: Öppna era hjärtan för de utsatta [Reinfeldt: Open your hearts for the excluded] Cited in Dagens Nyheter, 14 August 2014. Church of Sweden’s Sunday service liturgic text reading starts with: ‘Open your hearts to God and listen to today’s holy Gospel’ (Svenska Kyrkan 2018, 67; our translation).

not build walls’, at a huge manifestation in Stockholm.⁸ Notably, the former PM represented the liberal-conservative party, the Moderates [Moderaterna] while Löfvén is a Social Democrat. Nevertheless, already on November 24 the same year the latter and his Green Party [Miljöpartiet] vice PM declared a shift from the most generous national migration policy in the EU to a more restrictive one. The main argument in favor of this reversal was that since EU had proved unwilling, and incapable, of orchestrating a common deal among their member states to receive the large number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean, the burden was becoming too heavy on the country’s welfare system. Although this was the central reason posed for the U-turn, the minority government was also under political pressure by perceived fear of ISIS- and Nazi-inspired terrorism, as well as anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiments in Sweden, as reflected and exploited especially by the retrotopian Sweden Democrats [Sverigedemokraterna].⁹ However, when the Swedish Government decided to turn the migration policy from desecuritization to an allegedly ‘temporary’ securitized stance, Church of Sweden and other FBOs¹⁰ answered by firmly holding on to an open, counter-securitizing posture, strongly criticizing the Government and the Swedish Migration Agency for inhumane treatment of immigrants: particularly their application of harsh and ambivalent asylum guidelines, severely hitting young people, many of whom had already begun getting new friends and learning Swedish language.¹¹

This drastic shift from an open to a restrictive migration stance implied a clear move in the direction of *securitization*, i.e. what has become an ‘intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects’.¹² Church of Sweden, reacted strongly against this, and insisted upon keeping a welcoming attitude, i.e. the Church was still in favor of *desecuritization*, ‘the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere’,¹³ or in the words of Huysmans, desecuritization of migration implies an ‘ethical-political judgment that allows discussing security questions in relation to immigrants and refugees without reifying them as existential dangers’.¹⁴

⁸Dagens Nyheter [Swedish daily], Löfvén: Mitt Europa bygger inte murar. [Löfvén: My Europe does not build walls]. 6 September, 2015.

⁹We apply Zygmunt Bauman’s term ‘retrotopia’ to characterize the Sweden Democrats [Sverigedemokraterna] as a ‘retrotopian’ party (like similar political parties in other European countries). Retrotopia is a ‘vision focused not on the future but on the past, not on a future-to-be-created but on an abandoned and undead past’ (Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017) (citation from back flap). According to the party’s official self-image it is a pragmatic, ‘social conservative’ party, rejecting liberalism and socialism as ‘utopian’ and outdated. Although concepts such as ‘family’, ‘nation’, ‘a common national and cultural identity’, and ‘people’ [Swedish folk; German Volk] indicate the party’s core values, it also acclaims Christian traditions as markers of ‘Swedishness’. Islam and Muslims on the other hand are considered ‘our biggest foreign threat’. J. Åkesson, ‘Muslimerna är vårt största utländska hot’ [The Muslims are our Foremost Foreign Threat] Aftonbladet, October 19, 2009.

¹⁰A faith-based organization (FBO) is ‘any non-governmental organization (NGO) that refers directly or indirectly to religion or religious values, when combating social exclusion in society, for example by helping migrants in need for social support’. D. Dierckx, J. Vranken and W. Kerstens (eds) *Faith-based Organisations and Social Exclusion in European Cities. National Context Reports* (Leuven/Den Haag: Acco, 2009), cit. p. 11.

¹¹Läkare utan gränser [Médecins Sans Frontières]. *Life in Limbo*. https://lakareutanranser.se/sites/default/files/media/msf_report_life_in_limbo_web_eng.pdf [Accessed 2020-10-27].

¹²B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienne, 1998), p. 4.

¹³Buzan et al., op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁴J. Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity. Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 127. We also agree with Aradau, that if securitization ‘orders social relations according to the logic of political realism and institutionalizes an exceptionalism of speed, extraordinary measures and friend/enemy, desecuritization is a normative project which reclaims a notion of democratic politics where the struggle for emancipation is possible’. C. Aradau,

Taking our conceptual point of departure in the context of securitization theory, the aim of this article is to analyze how the Lutheran Church of Sweden contests what in the hegemonic discourse has come to be articulated as ‘challenges of global migration’—referring to an increasing number of immigrants searching for new life chances and safe havens. As demonstrated by Bourbeau, in his major comparative study of securitization of migration in Canada and France 1989-2005, securitization is not merely a function of reactions to material factors or exogenous shocks like refugee pressure, but also has to be related to contextual, socio-historical and political factors.¹⁵ Securitization then manifests itself, not only as a ‘speech act’, but as a governmental regime. As stated by Christopher S. Browning in a conceptual overview, research on securitization has often been focused on ‘state security’, neglecting that ‘in practice states have often been a primary source of insecurity, anxiety and even terror for their citizens’.¹⁶ In our case we zoom in on how the Church of Sweden responded to the Swedish Government’s radical halt to a previously generous posture towards immigrants, which until autumn 2015 stood out as exceptional in comparison with other European countries.¹⁷

Arguably, the case offers ample opportunity to illuminate and reflect upon the role of the church in relation to current migration as ‘a global phenomenon of unimaginable magnitude and complexity’.¹⁸ Aside from the empirical contribution in its own right we mobilize *counter-securitization* as a concept articulating a view that (de)securitization, to be applicable, should not be reserved for cases of a perceived existential military threat or a perceived threat to a culturally homogenous welfare state and nation, but could as well concern a threat to a secular humanitarian or theologically motivated ethico-political human rights stance.¹⁹ Arguably, the study is thereby highly relevant also for the debate on the role of religion and secularism in contemporary society, not least regarding the topic whether religion could still be ‘the spear of revolutionary changes, and not always for the better’.²⁰ In other words, we use the Church of Sweden as a case to exemplify the potentials and limits of a faith-based organization to make a counter-force to a political regime that mobilizes arguments and measures to ‘securitize’ state and society from too much, or ‘the wrong kind’ of immigration. Arguably, our study thereby also ‘explores the often-missed dynamic between religion and politics that not only broadens the category of the political, but additionally sheds light on what can be considered religious’.

‘Security and the democratic scene: desecuritization and emancipation’. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7:4 (2014), pp. 388–413, cit. p. 406.

¹⁵P. Bourbeau, *Securitization of Migration. A Study of Movement and Order* (New York: Routledge, 2010/2011), p. 106, 121. There is also a potential link here to the extensive literature on ‘path dependencies’ and ‘critical junctures’, although here we prefer not to engage with institutional theory per se, as we are keen to focus on the politics-religion topic (see G. Capocchia, ‘Critical junctures’, in O. Fioretos, T. G. Falletti and A. Sheingate (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism* (2016). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199662814.013.5

¹⁶C. S. Browning, ‘Security and Migration: A Conceptual Exploration’ in P. Bourbeau (eds) *Handbook on Migration and Security* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2017), pp. 39–57.

¹⁷C-U. Schierup and S. Scarpa, ‘How the Swedish Model was (almost) Lost. Migration, Welfare and the Politics of Solidarity’ in A. Ålund, C-U. Schierup and A. Neergaard (eds) *Reimagining the Nation: Essays on Twenty-First-Century Sweden* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH – Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2017), pp. 41–83.

¹⁸Phan, op. cit, p. 847.

¹⁹Between year 2000 and 2017 the proportion of foreign-born people in Sweden increased from 11 to 19 per cent, i.e. near one fifth of the current population were born outside Sweden. K. Örstadius, Fakta i frågan: Invandring och integration i Sverige – sammanfattat. (Dagens Nyheter, 2018, 22 August). <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/fakta-i-fragan-invandring-och-integration-i-sverige-sammanfattat/>

²⁰B. Latour, ‘Beyond Belief. Religion as the “Dynamite of the People”’ in J. Beaumont (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Post-secularity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), pp. 27–37.

Next the article proceeds with a description of the conceptual framework, research method and material. In a third section we address the Swedish Government's migration policy turn-around as officially stated in November 2015. A fourth section gives a snapshot of how attitudes to immigration has developed among the population 2014-2020. A fifth section of this paper highlights the Church of Sweden as a counter-securitizing force, its organization, cosmopolitan tradition and outspoken willingness to help people in need. In a sixth section we analyze the posture of the Church in relation to the Government policy, focusing on official statements and examples of actions showing how the Church in words and deeds support immigrants in need. In conclusion we summarize our findings in the context of the securitization discourse, highlighting *counter-securitization* as an expression of a 'theology of migration' according to which 'the migrant possesses all the human rights which must be respected by all'.²¹ This means using religion as a potential counterforce to retrotopian politics, and as a 'societal resource [...] to foster national integration'.²² Our final reflection then returns to the broader issue of secularization versus post-secularization, underlining how, arguably, our study contributes to interrogate 'the multiple ways in which the boundaries between the religious and the political blur in contemporary politics'.²³

Conceptual framework, method and material

Migration policy is a moving target per definition in more than one way, and thus difficult to study due to its inherent character as a political field under constant modification. Adding the religious dimension to the topic makes it even more demanding as research undertaking. Here we address this challenge by combining elements of two strands of analysis; securitization theory and Bacchi's policy research approach labeled *What's the problem represented to be* (WPR).²⁴ Thus, *what are the problems represented to be in the case of the securitized Swedish Government migration policy and the Church of Sweden's counter-securitizing response?*

Our main road of analysis follows the manifestations of how migration policy is practiced in Sweden by the state and the Church during 2015-2020, taking politics 'beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics'. As an issue becomes securitized it is 'presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actors outside the normal bounds of political procedure'.²⁵ The 'referent object' could be for example 'the nation', or 'the welfare state'. Once defined as a 'threat' by a government, it may or may not be accepted by its audience as legitimating 'emergency measures' entailing securitization.²⁶ However, there is a

*creeping ambiguity as to where exactly, if at all, should we fix the 'existential' threshold [...] Few securitization case studies exhibit discourses that explicitly present an issue as an existential threat to the referent object's survival (be that object a state or society).*²⁷

²¹Phan, op. cit., p. 861.

²²C. F. Hallencreutz and D. Westerlund, Introduction: Anti-Secularist Policies of Religion, in D. Westerlund (ed) *Questioning the Secular State. The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (London: Hurst and Company, 2002), cit. p. 2.

²³May et al., op cit, p. 332.

²⁴C. L. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (Melbourne: Pearson Education, 2009). C.L. Bacchi, & S. Goodwin. *Poststructural Policy Analysis. A Guide to Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²⁵Buzan et al, op. cit., pp. 23–24.

²⁶Ibid., p. 25

²⁷U. Abulof, 'Deep securitization and Israel's "Demographic Demon"', *International Political Sociology*, 8 (2014), pp. 396–415, cit. p. 398 (italics in citation).

By stating the *volume* of immigration as a crucial matter of security, it suddenly becomes ‘removed from the realm of normal politics and imbued with a sense of urgency and threat’.²⁸ And, as argued by Huysmans: ‘Framing political unity and freedom in this way is a powerful method for sustaining an image of a completed, harmonious unit that only seems to be experiencing conflict, disintegration, or violence if external factors, such as migration, start disrupting it’.²⁹

The WPR approach is based on the idea that policy proposals depend on specific views on what constitutes the problem to be solved—i.e. ‘problems’ are not pre-given ‘natural facts’—and considers the ‘making’ of these problems as crucial for policy formulation and implementation.³⁰ Our first research question thus investigates the securitization problem represented to be when the Government in November 2015 introduced a stricter policy regarding the treatment of immigrants to Sweden, identifying the assumptions behind this switch. The second research question focuses on the policies introduced and to some extent also its visible effects in terms of immigrants’ situation and political reactions. Our third research question deals with how the government’s representation of securitization was questioned and counter-argued by the Church of Sweden in words as well as deeds.

The empirical basis of the analysis largely consists of key official statements by the Government and the Church of Sweden during November 2015–March 2020. We also draw upon recently published academic publications as well as statements and facts reported by actors such as the Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish National Audit Office. Most of these publications are easily found on respective website. To catch the counter-securitization stance taken by the Church of Sweden we have scanned its website to find key documents expressing their arguments and motives, complemented by principal statements by archbishop Antje Jackelén, including some statements of principle published. To exemplify the counter-securitization practices of the Church, we have mainly drawn upon a wide-ranging and self-reflecting internal report written by two investigators linked to the Church, and based on (i) an extensive survey addressed to parish members, and (ii) seven case studies of parish activities related to integration of immigrant involvements.³¹

The securitization move: refugees as a perceived threat

A common view in the scholarly literature is that international migration is approved by developed countries when it meets the needs of their labor markets, and when it takes place ‘in a controlled and predictable manner. But when it involves the irregular and ‘spontaneous’ arrival of people from other parts of the world, and when those migrants

²⁸A, Coen, Alise, ‘Securitization, normalization, and representations of Islam in Senate discourse’, *Politics and Religion*, 10:1 (2017), pp. 111–136, cit. p.13.

²⁹J. Huysmans 2006, op.cit., 127. See also E. M. Goździak and I. Main, ‘European norms and values and the refugee crisis: Issues and challenges’, in E. M. Goździak, I. Main and B. Suter, *Europe and the Refugee. Response. A Crisis of Values?* (London: Routledge, 2000), Ch. 1. [e-book] <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429279317>

³⁰Bacchi 2009 op. cit.; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016 op. cit.

³¹K. Hellqvist, and A. Sandberg. *En tid av möten. Arbetet med asylsökande och nyanlända i Svenska kyrkans församlingar 2015–2016* [In a Time of Encounters. Working with Asylum Seekers and New Arrivals in the Church of Sweden congregations 2015–2016]. (Uppsala: Svenska Kyrkan, 2017).

appear to bring little financial or social capital with them, the countries react with alarm'.³² For example, since the Rome Treaty 1957 the EU 'has created a legal-political regime based on citizen stratification on the one hand, and differentiation between citizens and other categories of subjects, on the other [...] the EU citizen and its alterity (i.e. the migrant) constitute each other'.³³ As argued by Balibar, this cleavage between citizens and non-citizens 'keeps going provided the 'nomads' or 'strangers' are not too numerous within the territory and active in the economic and cultural life—that is, do not disturb the representation of the population for itself as unified 'people'.³⁴ The presence of an increasing number of immigrants has been accompanied by the development of political parties with nationalist, anti-immigrant programs in many European countries, including Sweden.³⁵ National governments and the EU have simultaneously set up various border controls to keep migrants away from what has come to be called 'Fortress Europe'.³⁶

Asylum as a human right has become questioned in the public debate. Countries like Austria, Germany and Sweden that were first willing to open their borders for refugees following the conflicts in the wake of the Arab spring, and not least the civil war in Syria, later turned towards a securitizing stance, more or less joining a race towards 'hardwiring' the European frontier.³⁷ As a consequence, migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe diminished from 1,032,408 in 2015–123,663 in 2019.³⁸ While international agreements and national regulations provide important frameworks for receiving, and increasingly rejecting, migrants, conversely engaged individuals, many FBOs and other voluntary organizations act and inspire initiatives to support the same people.³⁹ Immigrants in need could thus be generously welcomed and supported, dismissed or met by ambivalence. In other words, migration policy in Europe is 'informed by a mixture of pragmatism, populism, Realpolitik, the natural desire for governments to get themselves re-elected, and, above all, economic factors. Few, however, would argue that moral considerations should play no role at all'.⁴⁰

The tension between generosity and restriction in Swedish migration policy has worked out differently over time due to a combination of priorities concerning the state of national economy, employment, and welfare system in Sweden plus demands

³²G. J. Borjas and J. Crisp (Eds), *Poverty, International Migration and Asylum* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 1.

³³M. Chatty, *Migranternas medborgarskap. EU:s medborgarskapande från Romförhandlingarna till idag* [A Citizenship for the Migrants: EU Citizenship Making from the Rome Treaty to the Present] Örebro Studies in Political Science 40. (Örebro: Örebro University, 2015). Citation from abstract.

³⁴E. Balibar, Europe as borderland. *Environmental Planning D: Society and Space* 27, pp. 190–215; cit. p.193.

³⁵See for example C. Mudde and C. R. Kaltwasser 2017. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. M. Tyrberg and C. Dahlström, *De invandringskritiska partiernas politiska inflytande i Europa* [The Influence of the Anti-migration Political Parties in Europe] Rapport 2017:1. Stockholm: Delegationen för migrationsstudier. T. Bale, 2018. Turning round the telescope. Centre-right parties and immigration and integration policy in Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy* 15 (3): 315–330.

³⁶M. Carr, *Fortress Europe: Inside the War against Immigration*. (London: Hurst Publishers, 2015). Elizabeth Vallet found the number of border walls in the world has increased from 15 to 70 since the fall of the Berlin Wall. See E. Vallet, *Borders, Fences and Walls* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

³⁷R. Andersson, Hardwiring the frontier? The politics of security technology in 'Europe's fight against illegal migration'. *Security Dialogue* 47:1 (2015), pp. 22–39.

³⁸UNHCR. *Mediterranean Situation*. 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean> [Accessed 2020-10-30]

³⁹P. Cloke, J. Beaumont and A. Williams (Eds), *Working Faith. Faith-based Organizations and Urban Social Justice*. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013).

⁴⁰J. Seglow, Jonathan, Integration and citizenship acquisition in the European Union a normative approach, pp. 14–30 in A. G. Ayata (Ed.) *Challenges of Global Migration. EU and its Neighbourhood*. GLOMIG project policy papers. (Ankara: METU and KORA, 2008).

following international commitments (e.g. the Geneva Convention 1954), and migration waves caused by conflicts and war within and outside Europe.⁴¹ Until lately *multiculturalism* was the dominating official discourse in the country, including simplified rules to become a citizen, whereas in neighboring Denmark for example, an *assimilation* discourse was and still is hegemonic with extensive restrictions.⁴² However, even in Sweden despite an official ambition to:

erase all conceptions of ethnicity from the term ‘immigrant’ [...] in chronicles and interactions of everyday life, immigrants are effectively taken to mean people who are not Swedes. In fact, they might not even be able to become Swedes, even in the long run, regardless of formal belonging in terms of citizenship.⁴³

Late autumn 2015 the Swedish Government began to refer to a situation where the number of people seeking asylum in Sweden had become

unprecedented in the country’s post-war history [...] Many of the asylum seekers and transiting migrants were unaccompanied minors. The refugee situation escalated over several weeks and months and impacted many public services. Several of these services were under strain already in the early autumn of 2015, since the number of people seeking asylum in Sweden had increased gradually and substantially over several successive years. The Government, the Government Offices, responsible authorities, County Administrative Boards and municipalities were under a heavy workload and were forced to reprioritize extensively to manage the situation.⁴⁴

An official discourse speaking of a ‘refugee situation’ that is ‘escalating’ making the authorities ‘forced to reprioritize extensively’ rhetorically indicates an emergency, something which hence could be rationalized to be met by using security arrangements, i.e. in effect allowing more authoritarian measures, such as extensive border controls, inner border controls stricter asylum rules, and making it more difficult for families to reunify.⁴⁵

The threat perceived by the Swedish Government was not immigration as such, but allegedly too much at a time when EU and most of its other member states refused to take responsibility, thus causing a perceived ‘flooding’ of migrants to Sweden.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the Government did not only refer to massive pressure on the welfare system and heavy work load on the immigration authorities, but was also putting responsibility on the EU and its member states in order to legitimize its own drastic immigration policy turnaround:

⁴¹M. Byström and P. Frohnert. *Invandringens historia – från ‘folkhemmet’ till dagens Sverige* [The History of Immigration – from ‘the People’s Home’ to Today’s Sweden]. Report 2017: 5 (Stockholm: Delmi. 2017).

⁴²M. Spång. *Svenskt medborgarskap* [Swedish Citizenship] Delmi 2015: 5 (2015). See also A. Hagelund, After the refugee crisis: public discourse and policy change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. *Comparative Migration Studies* 8:13 (2020), pp. 1–17.

⁴³P. Strömblad and G. Myrberg. *Kategoriernas dilemman*, [The Dilemmas of Categories] Delmi 2015: 7. (2015). See also foot note 8.

⁴⁴Swedish National Audit Office. *Lessons from the refugee situation in 2015 – preparedness and management*. Report RIR 2017:4. 2017.

⁴⁵Polismyndigheten [The Swedish Police]. *Frågor och svar om inre utlänningskontroller* [Questions and Answers about Inner Border Controls] 2019. <https://polisen.se/om-polisen/polisens-arbete/granspolisen/fragor-och-svar-om-inre-utlanningskontroller/> [2019-03-20]

⁴⁶The frequent/normalized use of metaphors such as refugees resembling waves and flooding, also make way for interpretations where these uncontrolled forces of nature need to be stopped by use of violence. For a similar analysis see C. Fridolfsson, ‘Political Protest and Metaphor’, in T. Carver, J. Pikalo (eds) *Politics, Language and Metaphor: Interpreting and Changing the World* (London: Routledge, 2008) pp. 132–148.

The Government took a series of temporary measures to significantly reduce the number of people seeking asylum in Sweden when EU Member States in the second half of 2015 could not share the responsibility involved in managing the large number of asylum seekers.⁴⁷

The new stance produced media headlines like ‘Now Stefan Löfvén’s Sweden will build new walls’.⁴⁸ Little by little ‘ordning och reda’ [order and discipline] became a key expression in the post-September 2015 securitization discourse, often used by the PM as well as the political opposition.⁴⁹ Another popular term in line with this discourse was to implement ‘vuxen politik’ [adult policy].⁵⁰ This pejorative message signals that people still urging for a generous immigration policy are naïve and irresponsible. This stance can also be understood in relation to an add/a campaign circulated on the Social Democratic Party Facebook page showing border personnel at work onboard a public transportation, stating that ‘We guard Sweden’s security’ and ‘we ought to develop the Swedish model, not dismantle it’.⁵¹ The articulations and imagery signal a classic securitized discourse on immigration implying a need for police or military measures, indicates that it poses a security threat to the Swedish nation, state and society. An immigrant ‘threat’ has in this manner, indeed, become *the* security problem represented to be.

Policies and solutions provided by Government

In brief, Sweden’s migration policy officially comprises ‘refugee and immigration policy, return policy, support for repatriation and the link between migration and development. It also includes global cooperation on these issues. This area also covers issues related to Swedish citizenship’.⁵² The immigration problems perceived by the government triggered tougher asylum rules and inner border controls, especially hitting unaccompanied children and youth, making family rejoining almost impossible, and leaving thousands of young migrants in limbo without a possibility to plan for their long-term future. The Government also wanted the policy to become tougher on finding undocumented immigrants, for example by taking fingerprints even on six years old children.⁵³ All in all, after the securitization turn autumn 2015 more demanding rules to get asylum and citizenship as well as slimmed social benefits were introduced by the Government. This securitization policy targeted in particular what has been labeled ‘undeserving’ migrants, including

⁴⁷Ministry of Justice, *Sweden’s Migration and Asylum policy*. Fact sheet. <https://www.government.se/4adac4/contentassets/183ca2f36f1c49f3b7d1b5724a5753ce/swedens-migration-and-asylum-policy--fact-sheet-2019.pdf> [Accessed 2020-10-30].

⁴⁸Dagens Nyheter. Nu ska Stefan Löfvén’s Sverige bygga nya murar [Now Stefan Löfvén’s Sweden will build new walls] Editorial, May 4, 2018.

⁴⁹The PM Stefan Löfvén already in August 2015 stated: ‘Vi ska se till att det blir ordning och reda i flyktingmottagandet’ [We must Assure Order and Discipline Concerning Refugee Reception]. *Aftonbladet*, August 26, 2015.

⁵⁰The phrase originates from the inauguration speech of the Moderate Party leader Ulf Kristersson 12 October 2017, where he said he wanted to see ‘more adults in the room’. <https://moderaterna.se/ulf-kristerssons-oppningstal>. By coincidence (?) an article by James Mann in *New York Review of Books* published 26 October the same year had the same topic: ‘The timeworn metaphor has been used and reused ever since the earliest days of the Trump era, when Donald Trump was first putting together his cabinet’. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/10/26/trump-adult-supervision/>

⁵¹Letmark, P. (2017) Statsvetare om kritiserad annons: Socialdemokraterna närmar sig SD och M [Political Scientist on Criticized Advertisement: Social Democrats approach Sweden Democrats and Moderates] *Dagens Nyheter* 2019-10-19. <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/statsvetare-om-kritiserad-annons-socialdemokraterna-narmar-sig-sd-och-m/>

⁵²Ministry of Justice 2018. Op. cit.

⁵³Dagens Nyheter. Förslag om att hitta papperslösa kritiserar av JK [Proposal to find undocumented criticized by the Chancellor of Justice] 22 March 2018.

unaccompanied children who are unable to document their family status, but also expected potential terrorists and other criminals.⁵⁴ Through a logic of equivalence and logic of difference⁵⁵ these groups of migrants are tied together and constructed as the opposite from the deserving ‘true’ asylum seekers, while simultaneously nurturing the suspicion towards the entire collective of immigrants since there is no easy way of knowing who these unwanted migrants are.

Despite the hegemonic turn towards securitization, the Government has also ‘taken several initiatives to improve the introduction of newly arrived immigrants in Swedish society’, including ‘investments in schools, housing and measures to help newly arrived immigrants to more quickly enter the labor market’,⁵⁶ i.e. measures of integration, possibly also indicating desecuritization. Hence, 9000 unaccompanied migrant children who had arrived before November 24, 2015, and waited more than 15 months on a decision regarding their first application were later allowed to apply for a new, temporary right to stay. However, largely lacking legal status and housing, they often find themselves in a state of limbo, not knowing whether they will have a future in Sweden or not. Consequently, homelessness and lack of other basic needs are causing extended psychological stress such as sexual exploitation, drug dealing or other forms of criminality, sometimes even ending up in suicide.⁵⁷

In addition, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, and the media, are reporting on severe loss of financial resources for the local authorities responsible for the implementation of receiving and integrating immigrants.⁵⁸ In other words, the official immigration policy has increasingly been characterized by a dual focus, i.e. on securitization of the state and welfare society, and on integration of those immigrants who ‘deserve’ to stay, although stating more demanding criteria for staying in Sweden than before November 2015. The securitized stance regarding immigration is also obvious in the rhetoric used by the Government, here exemplified by a statement from the PM Stefan Löfvén in November 2019 commenting on organized crime:

This raw criminality has emerged from segregation, unemployment, school failure and the demand for drugs. Sweden has too many failures when it comes to integration. We have now changed migration policy to make fewer people coming to Sweden.⁵⁹

Even though Löfvén here blames failed integration, the securitization problem represented to be is rather immigration itself, and alleged consequences caused by it such

⁵⁴B. Anderson and V. Hughes (eds) *Citizenship and its Others*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

⁵⁵E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

⁵⁶Migrationsverket, Nearly 163,000 people sought asylum in Sweden in 2015. 2016. <http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/News-archive/News-archive-2016/2010112-Nearly-163000-people-sought-asylum-in-Sweden-in-2015.html> [Accessed 2017-08-16]

⁵⁷L. Beskow, *Den humanitära situationen för ensamkommande barn och unga i Sverige* [The Humanitarian Situation for Unaccompanied Children and Youth in Sweden]. Red Cross Sweden. 2020. See also *Läkare utan gränser* [Doctors without borders] Op. cit, and J. Johansson and M. Darvishpour, Neither here nor there? Unaccompanied immigrants between securitization and counter-securitization in Swedish migration policy. Paper presented at the Social Work Conference at Örebro University, Sweden, 9–10 October 2018. D. Hedlund and L. Salmonsson (2018). ‘Challenges in the Guardianship of Unaccompanied Minors Seeking Asylum’, *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, 26:3 (2018), pp. 489–509.

⁵⁸N. Karlsson, ‘Ge ekonomiskt stöd till kommuner som vill gå ihop’ [Give Financial Support to Municipalities that will Merge], *Dagens Nyheter*, 2020: 19 February, p. 5.

⁵⁹A. Larsson, ‘Löfvén: ‘Dålig integration bakom gängbrottsligheten’ [Löfvén: Bad integration behind gang criminality] Göteborgs-Posten, 2019, November 19. <https://www.gp.se/nyheter/g%C3%B6teborg/l%C3%B6fven-d%C3%A5lig-integration-bakom-g%C3%A4ngbrottsligheten-1.20528866> [Accessed 2020-10-30]

as unemployment, school failure and demand for drugs, thus stating less immigration as the solution.

Polarization of attitudes and policies

Another example of the current restrictive discourse on immigration in Sweden is how the Moderate Party the very same day a migrant entering from Turkey was shot and killed by the Greek border control,⁶⁰ published a Facebook post with the party leader posing in hunting gear saying: ‘Strengthen the border! The refugee crises from 2015 shall never be repeated. Sweden must help the Greek efforts with protecting the EU outer border’. Critique of this flagrantly securitized position however came from both the right and left and made the party withdraw their post later that same day. Nevertheless, the fact that it was published in the first place makes it clear that this kind of statements has become normalized in the hegemonic political discourse. Meanwhile, the leader of the retrotopian Sweden Democrats, visited the border between Turkey and Greece in order to discourage refugees to enter the EU that way, telling a journalist:

... the SD leader hands out leaflets with the message that ‘Sweden is full’. The message is signed with ‘The Swedish people, the Sweden Democrats’. ‘We try to make them not want to go to Sweden’ Jimmie Åkesson says.⁶¹

Here the party leader not only actively tries to stop refugees from traveling to Sweden. He is also telling his Swedish constituency that it would be irresponsible to allow more immigrants into Sweden. Allowing more immigrants would, according to this metaphor, pose a risk of Sweden/the Swedish society bursting, exploding or overflowing, since the country is already ‘full’ when applying this vocabulary. In an official party poster at the time, the leader poses with the flyers discouraging potential asylum-seekers at the Greek-Turkish border from traveling to Sweden. The text on the poster addresses the Swedish citizens and states: ‘We do what we can to prevent a new government institution crisis!’ alluding to the problem represented to be in this discourse, namely how the Swedish welfare system and its institutions are considered near collapse.

The security problem represented to be as stated by the two cited party leaders is not escalating armed conflicts nor prosecution threatening the rights of refugees, but a perceived ‘crisis’ caused by too much and the wrong kind of immigration threatening the Swedish nation, welfare state and its institutions. Related to this political discourse, pending EU talks on finding a common migration policy, as well as corresponding domestic policy talks among political parties in the Swedish parliament, reflect a normative duality concerning the meaning of ‘European values’. Catherine Woollard, the Secretary General of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), posits that what is often called ‘the refugee crisis’ in fact is ‘a deep European political crisis which unrolled

⁶⁰K. Hamadé, ‘Mohammad, 22, sköts till döds: ‘Försökte ta sig över’ [Mohammad, 22, Killed When Trying to cross the Border] Expressen [Swedish daily], March 2, 2020. <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/migrant-ihjalskjuten-av-polis-vid-grekiska-gransen1/>

⁶¹L. Åkesson, J. Karlsson and N. Svensson (2020) ‘Åkesson vid gränsen: Kom inte till Sverige’ in Expressen [Swedish daily] 2020-03-04 <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/jimmie-akesson-delar-ut-flygblad-kom-inte-till-oss/> [Accessed 2020-03-05]

in 2015/2016, paralyzing decision-making and creating deep, probably irreparable, divisions between EU Member States'.⁶²

Leaders like Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán have positioned themselves as defenders of a Christian Europe, enacting anti-migrant policies to protect Europe from being overrun by Muslims. On the other hand, other leaders often appeal to a vision of Europe in pursuit of peace and human dignity, tolerance, freedom, and democracy'.⁶³

Until lately Sweden had a reputation as 'a country of solidarity and liberal universalism' including a generous approach to immigrants. 'Prime ministers from left to right have heralded this Swedish model of immigration as a success story. It serves both the 'cosmopolitan' ends of hospitality and refuge, and the national ends of domestic development and prosperity'.⁶⁴ However, following the immigration peak in 2015 polarization between, and to some extent even within political parties in the parliament, has grown stronger, with a corresponding development among the population at large. For example, a panel survey conducted between 2014 and 2016 shows that respondents in general held positive attitudes toward different forms of immigration, although attitudes varied depending on reason for migration and country of origin. Respondents were most positive toward immigration for study and work while attitudes due to escape from war and oppression and to unite with family members were slightly less positive. Immigration from the Nordic countries, Europe beyond the Nordic countries, and North America received largely positive attitudes whereas immigration from the Middle East and Africa was more debatable. Most respondents perceived immigrants to have positive, rather than negative, effects on Sweden, despite queries concerning customs and traditions that do not fit into Swedish society. Changes in attitude that took place between 2014 and 2016 were quite small, although 'groups that initially were more positive toward immigration tended to become more positive while groups that initially were more negative tended to become more negative over time [...] the results thus show that Swedes tend to hold positive attitudes toward immigration and that public opinion between 2014 and 2016 was characterized by stability rather than change'.⁶⁵

The last few years, population attitudes towards accepting refugees has become more negative, and in a recent survey 58 percent of the sample said it is 'a good proposal to accept fewer refugees' into Sweden.⁶⁶ However, despite a more inward-looking, nationalist trend in Swedish politics there is still a parallel, cosmopolitan, and welcoming discourse, including secularly as well as religiously motivated individuals and associations in civil society.⁶⁷ Among these, the Church of Sweden is a strong counter-securitizing voice

⁶²E. M. Goździak and I. Main, 'European norms and values and the refugee crisis. Issues and challenges' in E. M. Goździak, I. Main and B. Suter (eds), *Europe and the Refugee Response A Crisis of Values?* (London: Routledge, 2020), Ch. 1, p. 1.

⁶³*Ibid.*, Ch. 1, p. 4.

⁶⁴C. Fernandez, 'Cosmopolitanism at the crossroads; Swedish immigration policy after the 2015 refugee crisis', in M. Goździak et al., op. cit., Ch 14, p. 220.

⁶⁵J. Strömbäck and N. Theorin, *Attityder till invandring En analys av förändringar och medieeffekter i Sverige 2014–2016* [Attitudes Towards Immigration. An Analysis of Changes and Media Effects in Sweden 2014–2016]. (Delmi Rapport 2018:4), Summary.

⁶⁶J. Martinsson and U. Andersson (eds.) *Swedish Trends 1986–2019* (SOM Institute, University of Gothenburg), p. 46. file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/7.%20Swedish%20trends%20(1986-2019)_v2.pdf A similar picture is painted by a Swedish Television report. Swedish Television, SVT-Novus. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/svt-novus-undersokning-visarskarpt-ton-i-migrationsfragan> [Accessed 2020-10-15]

⁶⁷R. Scaramuzzino and B. Suter, 'Holding Course: Civil Society Organizations' Value Expressions in the Swedish Legislative Consultation System before and after 2015', in Goździak and Main, op. cit., Ch. 11.

advocating a welcoming attitude towards refugees and other immigrants in need, especially children, youth and their families.

A Lutheran church in a secular society

Sweden is commonly regarded a highly secular society, scoring high on secular-rational and self-expression values, although with a long-standing Lutheran heritage.⁶⁸ Church of Sweden was a State Church and well integrated within the Swedish state apparatus before the year 2000. For example, today's Ministry of Education was until 1967 named the Ministry of Ecclesiastics, censuses and the civil registry, now carried out by the Swedish Tax Agency, used to be handled by the Swedish State Church before July 1991. The head of state (monarch) still needs to be a Church of Sweden member according to the Constitution, and there are also special laws regulating the government of cemeteries and funerals that involves Church of Sweden. The Church is administratively divided in 13 dioceses [stift],⁶⁹ each led by a bishop, whose tasks include ordaining the candidates to the priesthood and diaconate, and regularly holding visitations in the 1337 parishes [församlingar].⁷⁰ The elected bodies are organized much like the national regional and local levels in Swedish ordinary political system. Elections are held every fourth year, for all the decision-making bodies within the Church, at parish, diocese and national levels.⁷¹

Church of Sweden still has 5.9 million members, i.e. nearly 60% of the total population, most of which became members before year 2000, when the Church was still a state institution and membership was acquired at birth.⁷² Far from all of these individuals are deeply committed Christians. Approximately one per cent of the members cancel their memberships each year, although there is also some recruitment of new members.⁷³ As argued by one scholar, it is 'impossible' to characterize the Church of Sweden in a few words, thus suggesting alternative labels such as 'a Folk Church, a national church, as catholic or liberal, or as, in some sense, Lutheran Church'. Up to the 1860s bishops and representatives of the priests formed one of the four estates. 'The opinion of the church was heard in the state laws and the influence of the king, or later the government, on structural and moral issues, was also formed in laws, binding church and society together [...] The church was always part of the political

⁶⁸World Values Survey, *Findings and Insights*. (2019) <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp> [Accessed 2019-04-15]. H. Höjer, Sverige är ett udda land [Sweden is an odd country]. *Forskning och Framsteg*, 3 (2015), <http://fof.se/tidning/2015/3/artikel/sverige-ar-ett-udda-land>.

M. Jänträ-Jareborg, Religion and Secular State in Sweden. Chapter 6 in: J. Martínéz-Torrón and W. Cole Durham Jr. *Religion and the Secular State: National Reports* (Utah: XVIIIth International Congress of Comparative Law, Interim Edition, 2010), pp. 669–68.

⁶⁹From the ancient Greek word meaning congregation or church.

⁷⁰The bishop is elected by the priests of the diocese together with an equal number of lay delegates. He/she is assisted by the chapter [domkapitlet] and by a diocesan synod [stiftsstyrelse]. The chapter, consisting of clergy and laity, oversees the parishes and clergy, ensuring that they keep to the doctrine and practice of the Church of Sweden. (Svenska Kyrkan, 2020). <https://www.svenskkyrkan.se/statistik> (Accessed 2020-03-12).

⁷¹In every parish there is a Parish Council [kyrkoråd] that together with the rector [kyrkoherde] is responsible for the liturgy, and for the educational, social and evangelistic work. Every member of the Church of Sweden over the age of 16 is entitled to vote. To be a candidate for office one needs to be a member, baptised and at least 18 years old.

⁷²Svenska Kyrkan, Svenska Kyrkan i siffror [Church of Sweden in figures] <https://www.svenskkyrkan.se/statistik> [Accessed 2020-05-20].

⁷³J. Bromander and P. Jonsson. *Medlemmar i rörelse. En studie av förändringar i Svenska kyrkans medlemskår* [Members on the Move. A Study of Changes in the Church of Sweden Member Cadre] (Uppsala: Svenska Kyrkan, 2018).

system and the representative democratic or political structure is not understandable if that is not taken into consideration.⁷⁴ Thus, the long-standing hegemony of the national Lutheran Church of Sweden combined with its cosmopolitan and ecumenical orientation signals its exceptional position in the country's religious landscape even after losing its status as a state church, i.e. it has a 'semi-official' position confirming the historical link between Sweden as a nation state and Christianity as a world religion.⁷⁵

Due to its historical heritage, country-wide extension, and a strong organizational structure combining centralized leadership and popular legitimation through democratic voting to decision-making bodies, the Church cannot be neglected in politics. The Church furthermore has a cosmopolitan heritage and a strongly emphasized social mission, carried out by employed staff as well as volunteers.⁷⁶ All this considered, Church of Sweden is strong enough to propose counter-securitization measures, with potential significance. Its social (diaconal) mission is defined as follows: 'Protecting the vulnerable and fostering good relationships, regardless of religious or ethnic background, is part of the Church's mandate. In other words: loving your neighbor and Christian faith are inextricably linked.'⁷⁷ Church of Sweden's historical cosmopolitan legacy continues with archbishop Antje Jackelén's political commitment⁷⁸:

The refugee crisis has placed Europe at the crossroads, raising questions about our way of looking at Christianity in the West. Either we choose the road taken by the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán saying that Muslim immigration is a threat against our Christian identity, or we choose the road taken by the Church of Sweden, meaning that our Christian faith urges us to reach out a hand and help our fellow beings. Baptism is the string that ties all Christian people together worldwide. But baptism also includes an obligation and a call to live in faith and love and care for people who suffer, despite their color of skin, citizenship, belief or gender. You cannot discriminate if you want to practice the love of God.

To understand this cosmopolitan, and ecumenical brand of Lutheranism one has to return to the Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom (period of office 1914-1931), whose invitation to a major interreligious summit in Stockholm in August 1925 saw 700 delegates from 37 nations gathering in the Church of St. Nicholas/Stockholm Cathedral.

There was in fact an organic connection between church and nation. The church itself was safeguarded towards nationalistic demands through its catholicity, tradition and universality. *The church was the soul of the nation, in fact of every nation.* The church corresponded in its spirituality to the needs of the people and the mentality of the nation [our emphasis].⁷⁹

Another source highlights Söderblom's

⁷⁴S-E. Brodd, 'Impressions of the Church of Sweden: Liberal and Catholic with Nuances of Lutheranism', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 17:3 (2017), pp. 133–155; cit. 133 and 146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2017.1413069>

⁷⁵P. Pettersson, 'State and religion in Sweden: Ambiguity between disestablishment and religious control', *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 24:2 (2011), pp. 119–135.

⁷⁶Fridolfsson and Elander, op. cit. pp. 634–654.

⁷⁷Svenska Kyrkan 2019. svenskakyrkan.se/Loving-your-neighbour-central-to-Christian-faith. Accessed 2020-05-12.

⁷⁸A. Jackelén, *Vägvalet är självklart – att sträcka ut handen till nödställda* [Our Destination is Self-evident – to Reach Out to People Who Suffer] Dagens Nyheter [Swedish daily] 12 September (2015) p. 10. [our translation]

⁷⁹K. Hansson, 'Nathan Söderblom's ecumenical cope', *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology*, 66:1 (2012), pp. 62–79; cit. p. 64. See also A. Lauha, Nathan Söderblom and the Nordic Countries and Churches from a Finnish point of view, in S. Dahlgren (Ed.) *Nathan Söderblom as a European* (Church of Sweden Research Department, Uppsala, 1993), pp. 43–60.

powerful, genuine advocacy of the ecumenical spirit – or ‘mindset’ as he preferred to call it – among the various representatives of the different sections of a rather disunited Christian Church landscape. *Overcoming these divisions among the people of Christ, wherever they might be found in the world, was his ultimate goal* [our emphasis].⁸⁰

Söderblom’s cosmopolitan ecumenical efforts rendered him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

The Church of Sweden still has the organizational and financial strength to act as an influential non-governmental organization, both by itself and as a strong voice in a choir of other religious voices, Christian as well as non-Christian. It is an active member of the Christian Council of Sweden, an ecumenical forum of churches in Sweden, including a broad set of Christian congregations, representing around 7 million Swedes.⁸¹ The Church is also a member of the national Interfaith Council comprising ten different faith families.⁸² Recently the Church rallied for an international meeting aiming at international and interreligious responsibility for refugees. In February 2021 a meeting is scheduled to be hosted by the archbishop: ‘It will highlight how religious communities and related organizations working for and with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced persons in Europe and the Middle East’.⁸³

Activities in welfare provision carried out by the Church and other FBOs in Sweden are typically performed in fields where the public sector has given up, failed or not acknowledged new needs or demands. It may include service delivery like providing homeless shelters and other kinds of diaconal support; capacity building through choir singing and courses in language, sports etc.; and political activism like hiding refugees, and providing health care and legal advice to undocumented.⁸⁴ An early example of how a securitizing stance towards immigration by a government could be successfully challenged by a broad religious opposition, is the Easter Call in 2005, when the Christian Council of Sweden launched a joint protest against tougher policies that at the time had made it more difficult for refugees to receive residence permit. As many as 157,000 people signed the petition addressed to the Government. As a consequence, 20,000 asylum seekers were granted residence permit in a second trial.⁸⁵ Although the Easter Call was organizationally initiated by the ecumenical Christian Council of Sweden, it did not only gain support from most of the Christian congregations, but also from the Islamic Council of Sweden [Sveriges Muslimska Råd], and more than 60 non-religious NGOs and political party organizations.⁸⁶ This action is a clear-cut example of how a securitizing stance towards migration by a Government could be successfully challenged by a broad religious opposition as a desecuritizing, or even counter-securitizing move in

⁸⁰J. Mathias, ‘Unity in Christ or Pan-Europeanism? Nathan Söderblom and the Ecumenical Peace Movement in the Inter-war Period’, *Religion, State and Society*, 42:1 (2014), pp. 5–22, cit. p. 19 (our emphasis).

⁸¹Sveriges Kristna Råd [Christian Council of Sweden]. Juluppropet fortsätter [Christmas Call continues] (2017). www.skr.org/nyheter/juluppropet-fortsatter/

⁸²Sveriges Interreligiösa Råd [<https://interreligiosaradet.se/in-english/>] Notably, despite anti-immigrant sentiments among parts of the population Christian socialists in Sweden have provided a forum for integrating Muslims and members of other religions. See R. M. Bosco, ‘Religious Socialism in Post-Secular Europe’, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 20:1 (2019), p. 131.

⁸³Svenska Kyrkan. *Questions and answers about the world of neighbors*. <https://www.svenskkyrkan.se/migration/envardavgrannar/fragor-och-svar> Accessed 2020-03-17

⁸⁴See Fridolfsson and Elander op. cit. for an overview of FBO activities in Sweden.

⁸⁵Hellqvist and Sandberg, op. cit.

⁸⁶Fridolfsson and Elander, op. cit.

favor of securing the safeguarding of human rights. As argued by Christopher S. Browning:

the referents of state security and human security are not as diametrically opposed as sometimes presumed. Indeed, the suggestion here is that in the long run prioritizing human security is also the best way of enhancing state security.⁸⁷

Thus, according to the Church of Sweden the security problem represented to be in the case of the Easter Call was the Swedish Government failure to protect human rights, rather than borders or a thriving welfare state. The same logic is in place when the Church opposes the post 2015 restrictive immigration policy, questioning the Government's argument that the situation implies 'a serious threat against public order and inner security'.⁸⁸

Between cosmopolitan and inward-looking 'Swedishness'

Although not our primary focus in this article, we want to draw some attention to internal opposition against the official, cosmopolitan posture of the Church of Sweden. Despite a shrinking membership base, more than half of the Swedish population were eligible to vote for the decision-making bodies within the church, at parish, diocese and national level during the last election on September 17, 2017. Participation in the election increased from 12.76 per cent in 2013–19.08 per cent in 2017, which was the highest voter turnout since 1934.⁸⁹ This was largely due to politicization through strong mobilization of voters triggered by the nationalist, retrotopian and Islamophobic Sweden Democrats' explicit use of the church election as platform for their anti-immigration political agenda.⁹⁰ Among the 15 nomination groups to the Church Assembly election in 2017, the Social Democratic group received 30% of the votes, the party-independent group (POSK) 17%, the Centre Party group 14%, and the Sweden Democrats group 9%.

According to the Sweden Democrats' national spokesperson the Church of Sweden has become 'a left-liberal opinion leader where respect for classic Christian belief has capitulated in favor of socialist and liberal positions'. For him Christianity is

a worldwide community believing in Jesus as everything in earth and the light of the world and part of trinity. The tracks put by Christianity in legislation, moral and ethics, in music, philosophy and literature cannot be minimized. It is impossible to take Christianity away from me as a Swede, or out of Sweden as a Nation.⁹¹

In practice, however, the Sweden Democrats do not seem to have put any strong marks in terms of influence upon the official Church policy.⁹²

⁸⁷C. S. Browning, 'Security and migration: a conceptual exploration. Chapter 2' in P. Bourbeau (ed) *Handbook on Migration and Security* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2017), p. 57.

⁸⁸Svenska Kyrkan, Yttrande över promemorian Begränsningar av möjligheten att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige [Statement on the Memorandum *Limits on the right to receive residence permit in Sweden*]. Dnr: Ks 2016: 213.

⁸⁹Svenska Kyrkan, Slutgiltigt resultat för val till kyrkomöte 2017 [Final Result of Election to Church Meeting 2017] <https://kyrkoval.svenskakyrkan.se/Valresultat2017/slutg/Visning/Resultat/Kyrkomote.aspx>

⁹⁰See above, footnote 9.

⁹¹A. Emilsson, 'Så vill vi förändra svensk kulturpolitik i grunden' [This is How we Basically Want to Change Swedish Cultural Policy], Interview in Dagens ETC [ETC Today] 20 October 2020. <https://www.etc.se/kultur-noje/aron-emilsson-sa-vill-vi-forandra-svensk-kulturpolitik-i-grunden> See also footnote 9.

⁹²For example, the three Sweden Democrat proposals [motioner] to the 2017 Church Meeting were all targeted at supporting people in need in war-struck areas in the Middle East. This is very much in line with a Swedish Church to

A counter-securitizing church

Less than a week after the Government's turnaround announcement on September 15, 2015, archbishops of Germany and Sweden co-authored an opinion piece, twin-published in the Swedish daily *Sydsvenskan* and in German press:

Sometimes guarding a 'Christian Europe' is spoken of. While at the same time the call to love thy neighbor is rare. 'The Christian Europe' is used as a reason to call for delimitation and foreclosure of Europe. We cannot let that stand unchallenged. To open its door to people in need is the foundation of the Christian values. We must not compromise with human love and mercifulness in this humanitarian disaster on our continent.⁹³

Here the archbishops use 'Christian values' as they critique a securitized use of the concept of 'Christian Europe', ending their statement with the Bible quote: 'I was a stranger and you invited me in'.⁹⁴ In November 2015, the archbishop again criticized not only the Swedish Government but also the EU for not taking responsibility:

*The Government's proposal to drastically change the conditions for people to come to Sweden affects those who are particularly vulnerable. [...] A heavy responsibility falls on the European Union. It has failed to realize the solidarity that has been a fundamental idea throughout the European project. It is indecent that children and others in need of protection have to pay the price for this failure. I am delighted with everything that church members have contributed over the past few months. The Church of Sweden will continue to be a force to count on in the future. The answers we give today are tested by tomorrow's questions. We must be aware of what we owe to our children and grandchildren. We still have an opportunity to think long term. We can cultivate the values that give hope, and which allow us to keep our humanity at maximum level.*⁹⁵ [our translation and emphasis]

In a special statement on the Government's securitizing turn, Church of Sweden summarized its general critical position in March 2016, by raising eleven bullet points to the Ministry of Justice.⁹⁶ One of these points goes head on the securitizing argument, questioning the Government's claim that 'the present situation constitutes a serious threat against public order and inner security'. The church here even refers to a Government Bill on securitization in general which states: 'For this to be valid it needs to be a case concerning a danger that in a broader perspective is important and threatens life and health of the population and the functionality of society',⁹⁷ declaring that this is *not* the case here. Notably, the Church here opposes the Government's implication that immigration has become a threat to 'life and death of the population'. In line with some Critical Security Studies, this case thus illustrates the notion that the

support people in need in various parts of the world. J. Kronlid, Proposals 134-136. Svenska Kyrkan, Kyrkomötet [Annual Church Meeting], 2017.

⁹³H. Bedford-Strohm and A. Jackelén. Vi får inte och kan inte blunda för människor i nöd [We Must not and Cannot be Blind to People in Need] *Sydsvenskan* [Swedish daily] (2015), 21 September. <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=1315292>

⁹⁴Matthew 25:35. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3A35&version=NIV>

⁹⁵A. Jackelén, Ärkebiskopens reaktion på regeringens förslag om flyktingmottagande [The Arch-Bishop Reaction to the Government Proposition on Refugee Reception] (Svenska Kyrkan, 2015), 27 November. <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=1341863> [Accessed 2020-30-10]

⁹⁶Svenska Kyrkan. Yttrande över promemorian Begränsningar av möjligheter att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige [Statement on the PM Restrictions of Opportunities to Receive Permit to Stay in Sweden]. Kyrkostyrelsen Ks 2016:213.

⁹⁷Government Bill 2015/16, No. 67. Särskilda åtgärder vid allvarlig fara för den allmänna ordningen eller den inre säkerheten i landet [Extraordinary Measures in Case of Serious Danger for the Common Order or Inner security of the Country], p. 13

officially perceived securitization of state and society may well imply the '(in)securitization', '(un)freedomization' and '(in)equalization' of denizens on the move.⁹⁸ In other words, there is no theoretically grounded pre-given referent of security, but only security and securitization as represented to be, in a given context. Other points on the list raise strong concerns regarding introduction of temporary residence permits, limitation of the rights to family reunion, and the abolition of the criterion 'particularly deserving circumstances [...] hitting hard at unaccompanied children'.

According to the Christian faith all human beings are endowed with equal value, rights and responsibility. A human being has a right to health, development and protection. When that right is violated, God calls upon us to see and act. A fellow human being in need provokes our desire to get involved and help out. The Church of Sweden's work with refugees naturally flows forth from people's engagement and the diaconal mission of the parish.⁹⁹

The quote signals a duty-based ethics, where Christians are called upon to take action. It also illustrates how the Church interpretation of 'Swedishness' includes an obligation to secure refugee rights.

A Christmas Call petition in 2016 was signed by 80 000 people and handed over to the Minister of Migration on February 7, 2017.¹⁰⁰ The Call particularly urged the Government to change its immigration policy to facilitate family reunification. Although the name collection was finished, the campaign was said to continue as long as the three demands of the call were not met by the Government: all individuals given asylum in Sweden have a right to be reunified with their families; all practical barriers to family reunification shall be removed; children and youth have a right to safety and confidence in the future. When critics accused the Church of being 'naïve goodness apostles', not accepting any restrictions on immigration, the Church leaders stated that this criticism was a case of 'disinformation' as the Church call was rather specifically aimed at giving children, youth and their parents security and opportunity to live together as families.¹⁰¹ They argued that the official Church standpoint is not promoting unbound immigration, but taking responsibility for those immigrants already residing in Sweden, especially young asylum seekers. As such it remains a firm counter to the tougher securitization position adopted by the Government and the parliamentary majority post-September 2015. In other words, regardless of favoring migrant families' right to unification is an essentially religiously or secularly motivated argument, it becomes political as the Government's restrictive policy antagonizes the position. We now turn to some examples showing how the official Church posture is more than just words.

In the foreword of an extensive report on how the Church engages in service delivery and capacity building with regard to immigrants, the archbishop gives an overall summary:

⁹⁸D. Bigo and E. McCluskey, 'What is a PARIS approach to (in)securitization? Political anthropological research for international sociology' in A. Gheciu and W. C. Wohlforth (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of International Security* (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2018), pp. 1–16. www.oxfordhandbooks.com

⁹⁹Svenska Kyrkan. Yttrande över promemorian Begränsningar av möjligheter att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige [Statement on the PM Restrictions of Opportunities to Receive Permit to Stay in Sweden]. Kyrkostyrelsen [Church Council] Ks 2016: 213.

¹⁰⁰Sveriges Kristna Råd, op.cit.

¹⁰¹Wiborn, K. and L. Svensson. Det är inte ett upprop för obegränsad invandring [This is not a call for unbound immigration] *Svenska Dagbladet*, 29 December 2016.

The Church of Sweden's parishes have become meeting places in many ways: social activities and games, language cafés, church services, distribution of clothing, assistance in contact with the authorities and counselling, to name but a few. The fact that over 80 percent of the Church of Sweden's pastorships and parishes are working with refugees and that half of them started a new programme in 2015 speaks volumes.¹⁰²

In addition, the church has for many years run medical clinics helping undocumented not eligible for medical treatment of non-life-threatening conditions through the Swedish universal health care system. Although these clinics are illegal, they are left in peace by the authorities to carry out their work—something which indicates the informal power and strength of the organization. The church continuously allocates money for support to refugees and their integration within Swedish society, and to international aid, for example to emergency refugee support in the Middle East and South Sudan. Most of the work inside Sweden encompasses 'meeting people in various phases of the asylum process and people who have received permission to stay and are about to establish themselves in society, and also to contribute to social cohesion'.¹⁰³ It could be a matter of legal and practical support to new arrivals, language training, trainee jobs, children and youth activities, and more. Between autumn 2015 and autumn 2016 parish work to help asylum-seekers and new arrivals comprised about 37 000 visitors during an average month.¹⁰⁴ In an extensive report—largely based on a national survey among employees and voluntary workers plus five case studies—there are plenty of examples showing the work carried out by the Church, mainly at the parish level.¹⁰⁵ Official statements by the archbishop and other leading FBOs such as the Christian Council of Sweden are accompanied by service delivery on the ground, for example by offering health clinics, night shelter, and language cafés for documented as well as undocumented migrants. In addition, the Easter Call 2005 and the Christmas Call 2016/2017 were huge manifestations urging the Government to turn back to their previous more open stance versus migrants.

Political activism, including advocacy and representation of marginalized groups, consultation, lobbying, and protest performed by FBOs, is commonly officially sanctioned, or at least not considered illegal. However, FBOs at times also cross the line to illegal action, e.g. by helping and representing people that for one reason or another have experienced problems in their relations to the public authorities. Such action may include hiding of migrants listed for deportation. In an earlier study we met professionals and volunteers arguing that 'I simply had to' or 'It had to be done', in reference to them hiding refugees.¹⁰⁶ To do what is considered right according to a Christian ethics thus takes precedence over securitization referents such as 'Swedish values', or 'state security'.¹⁰⁷ In the framework of the securitization discourse, such cases illustrate how a mainstream, national interest interpretation of the concepts 'security' or 'Swedish

¹⁰²A Jackelén. 2017. Foreword in Hellqvist and Sandberg op. cit, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰³Svenska Kyrkan 2017b. 60 miljoner fördelat till arbetet med asylsökande och flyktingar [60 Million SEK allocated for work with asylum-seekers and refugees] www.svenskakyrkan.se/nyheter/60-miljoner-fordelat-till-arbetet-med-asylsokande-och-flyktingar- [Accessed 2017-12-15]

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Hellqvist and Sandberg, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶Fridolfsson & Elander, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷'people in need turn to us because we don't ask for citizenship or identity documents. In such case they must feel safe, even when we organize a family camp' (M. Egfors, Lås inte in kyrkan i kyrkorummet [Don't Lock up the Church in the Church room] *Alingsås Tidning* [Local daily] 2017, 7 September, Part 1, p. 15).

values' collides with a *counter-securitization* posture implying a humanistic, theological reading of what *really* needs securitization.

Immigrants should not be treated as a 'threat' according to Church of Sweden; on the contrary, asylum as a human right is under 'threat' by the new restrictive Government policy—and thus needs to be secured. Again, theological motives to counter the securitized stance taken by the Swedish state are presented by Church of Sweden's archbishop (together with her German counterpart):¹⁰⁸

Secure and legal ways to Europe must be created in order to prevent people from getting abused or lose their lives on their way here. For the same reason, generous refugee quotas need to be set up. Another instrument is humanitarian visas [...] Protection seekers entering Europe must be treated with dignity and humanism throughout the EU.

Here the concern is not an imagined threat to social cohesion or a threatened welfare provision, but instead to do what is considered right according to a Christian ethics. Thus, rather the legal ways for refugees to enter Europe need to be safeguarded and securitized in their view. Such focus represents a deontological standpoint, meaning that the human right to asylum is a duty-based ethics, which necessarily has implications on measures taken by the Church of Sweden, such as protecting families threatened by expulsion.

Conclusion

We now return to our three initially posed research questions. We started out by asking about the problems represented to be behind Sweden's official turnaround in September 2015, when following a general European trend with extensive restrictions on immigration. The Government's explicit turn from an 'open your hearts'-policy to a restrictive, securitizing stance was officially motivated by stating that immigration had now become a 'threat' to the Swedish welfare system, which was not prepared to handle such influx of immigrants. Little by little other alleged threats were also brought to the table by the political opposition, such as crumbling national cohesion, terrorism, drugs and criminal gang fights expressed through shootings and bombings. In such a constructed chain of equivalence, the metaphorical immigrant serves as an ideological explanation to a faltering welfare state and failed social integration in a broader sense. If Sweden as one of few EU countries were to stick to its 'open your hearts'-policy the Government would have run the risk of losing its majority support in the Parliament as it was under pressure by the populist retrotopian, Islamophobic and assimilationist Sweden Democrats,¹⁰⁹ the traditional Conservative Party and the Christian Democrats, all arguing that immigration, especially Muslim immigrants, threaten Swedish values and culture.

Secondly, we also asked about the specific solutions to this security problem represented to be, and the policy changes that the Government introduced after November 2015, including some of their consequences. The Swedish securitized immigration discourse did not just remain rhetoric, but also made Swedish immigration policy stricter

¹⁰⁸H. Bedford-Strohm and A. Jackelén, op. cit. [our translation]

¹⁰⁹See above, footnote 9. Notably the Conservative Party have reversed, and now strongly self-criticize their earlier 'open your hearts' policy; cf. footnote 7 above.

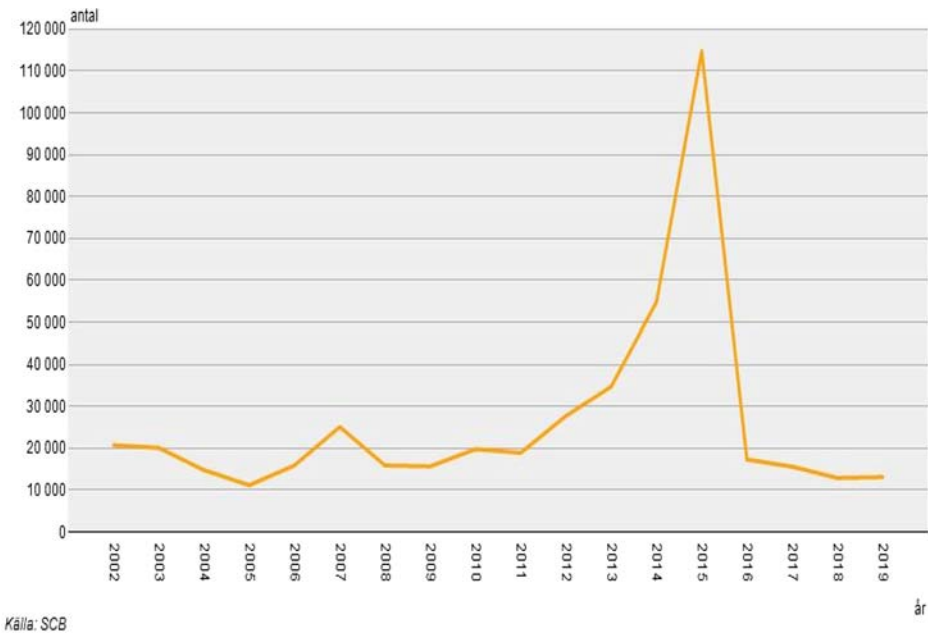


Figure 1. Asylum-seeking immigrants in Sweden 2002–2019. Source: Diagram made by authors, based on Statistics Sweden. http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START__BE__BE0101__BE0101P/Asylsokande/ [Accessed 2020-05-22].

and more similar to other European countries. The perceived problem—that too many migrants of the wrong kind put a pressure on the welfare state and even expected to become a threat to state security—led to stricter border controls, more expulsions and fewer family reunions admitted. These policies contributed to an overall decline of asylum-seeking migrants entering Sweden (see Figure 1). However, the substantial drop of immigrants to Sweden post-2015 cannot be understood without also taking into account the hardwiring of the European frontier conducted by the EU and its member states implying that ‘everyday border and migration management has become more security-focused—as well as more expensive for taxpayers’.¹¹⁰

Thirdly, the securitizing turn provoked political opposition, although among the political parties in the parliament only the Left Party reacted strongly against, whereas the Green Party—minority support to the Social Democrats in Government—reluctantly accepted the turn. However, outside parliament many individuals, action groups and NGOs marked resistance to the galloping securitization race. Among civil society actors the Church of Sweden maintained its counter-securitization position, backed by on creditable financial, organizational, and human resources, as well as profiting from a long-term cosmopolitan and ecumenical record of helping people in need. Thus, speaking with Laclau and Mouffe, Church of Sweden represents an antagonistic position to the hegemonic discourse,¹¹¹ and with the terminology used here, sustained a counter-

¹¹⁰R. Andersson, *Irreguljär migration och Europas gränskontroller. En etnografisk analys* [Irregular Migration and European Border Controls] (Delegationen för Migrationsstudier. Delmi Kunskapsöversikt 2016: 3), Summary, p. vii.

¹¹¹E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

securitization stance, arguing that the Government now went in the direction of state-isolationism, negating ‘Christian values’, while refusing to invite strangers—instead of welcoming them.

Even though radical in its defense of Christian ethics, and accused by the Sweden Democrats of being ‘leftist-liberal’, the Church of Sweden’s rhetoric could also be said to represent a classical conservative ideological stance, in terms of arguing an intrinsic responsibility to future generations such as in this exemplified here by the archbishop: ‘[w]e must be aware of what we owe to our children and grandchildren. We still have an opportunity to think long term’. This citation echoes Edmund Burke’s advocacy of a generation-crossing social contract: ‘As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.’¹¹²

Reflection

Securitization in the context of extensive migration is commonly legitimized by referring to ‘threats’ alleged to hit the survival of the nation state in terms of a perceived, historically anchored value basis, ethnic, cultural and religious cohesion and social welfare. However, as illustrated here, the reference point of securitization could instead be a reference to immigrants in need, i.e. a case of *counter-securitization*. As a potentially mediating link between these two positions ‘*desecuritization*’ has become the bridging/integrating government strategy including measures promoting legal support, language courses, housing, jobs and leisure activities, as well as supportive engagement by civil society in service delivery, capacity building, political activism and individual hospitality. However, denizens without formal citizen rights, like most refugees, asylum seekers, and otherwise ‘irregular migrants’—are commonly living in a limbo-like situation of insecurity, thus being haunted by ‘(in)securitization’, ‘(un)freedomization’ and ‘(in)equalization’.¹¹³

When the tide of political opinion turned from an open to a restrictive stance towards refugees as well as labor-seeking migrants, the official stand by the Church of Sweden still remained in a position of *counter-securitization*, withholding that migration should not be considered on par with an existential military threat. The Church thus raised counter-securitizing arguments implying a Christian duty-ethical position saying that mobility across national borders is a basic human right in contrast to securitized references like ‘the welfare state’, ‘national security’, ‘social cohesion’ or ‘ethnic homogeneity’. This position links to a basic normative problematic revolving around two separate axes: ‘(1) whether states may exclude prospective migrants and (2) whether there exists a human right to migrate’.¹¹⁴ Answers to these questions point in two radically different

¹¹²Jackelén 2015, op. cit.; E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, Vol. III) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15679/15679-h/15679-h.htm#REFLECTIONS>, (2005), p. 360.

¹¹³D. Bigo and E. McCluskey, op. cit., p. 4. ‘The number of irregular immigrants staying in Sweden without legal permit is estimated to be at least 50 000’. S.T. Björling, Därför blir tusentals som ska utvisas kvar i Sverige [That’s Why Thousands Who Should be Expelled Still Remain in Sweden] (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2019), News Section, p. 5.

¹¹⁴A. Reed-Sandoval, The New Open Borders Debate, in A. Sager (Ed.) *The Ethics and Politics of Immigration. Core Issues and Emerging Trends* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), p. 14.

directions, such as the Michael Walzer ‘prescriptive nationalist’ defense of closed borders, or Joseph Carens’ standpoint that ‘there exists a human right to unrestricted immigration’,¹¹⁵ the latter position having a religious-based correspondence in a ‘theology of migration’. In times when migration has become ‘a global phenomenon of unimaginable magnitude and complexity’,¹¹⁶ ‘defense of a closed border’ or a ‘human right to immigration’ are the two terminal positions between which any denizen, politician and scholar has to find their position. Facing this challenge, an analysis guided by concepts such as securitization, desecuritization (non-assimilationist integration), (in)securitization, and counter-securitization could be helpful, both for scholarly reflection and political action, not least when it comes to assessing the predicament and rights of undocumented children and youth.

Our study then illustrates how the religious becomes political and the political becomes religious.¹¹⁷ A theologically based ethics may stand up as a bulwark defending the right to immigration legitimized by a radical reading of the gospel. The driver of this engagement could even be regarded as an expression of a ‘theology of migration’, as proposed by Roman Catholic theologian scholar Peter C. Phan in a strongly programmatic text:

the migrant is the imago Dei, created in the image and likeness of God as any other human being equally is, and this the ontological ground of human rights. Therefore, the migrant possesses all the human rights which must be respected by all.¹¹⁸

However, adversely and not to forget, the Christian gospel may also be re-defined as something rather different, used by political powers as a legitimizing instrument in favor of retrotopian, inward-looking and xenophobic nationalism, as has been done in countries like Hungary, Poland, and Russia.¹¹⁹ In other words, the securitization discourse and scholarly efforts to analyze this field, should evade being locked into a one-dimensional, power-dependent reading, instead recognizing securitization as a non-linear and non-binary framework, with a sensitive ear to different political, cultural, social and religious contexts. Migration issues ‘have a tendency to resurface over time’ and ‘insights into how immigration flows and integration policies have changed over time, as well as into which alternatives that have been tried and rejected, can enrich us as citizens today’¹²⁰ As illustrated by the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’ in Sweden

¹¹⁵Ibid., 16, 19. See also K-C. Tan, *What is this Thing Called Global Justice?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹¹⁶Phan op. cit, p. 861.

¹¹⁷Latour, op.cit. Notably, sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman in the final chapter of a book published just before his death included a long citation by Pope Francis pleading for a culture of dialogue that ‘does not permit anyone to stand by and watch other people’s struggles. On the contrary, it is a forceful summons to personal and social responsibility’. Bauman, op.cit.

¹¹⁸Phan op.cit., p. 861. Phan also states: ‘While my perspective is that of a Roman Catholic and refers mostly to the Catholic Church, it is not difficult to extrapolate it to other Christian churches’. In addition to the official statements by the Swedish archbishop, examples of related statements are not hard to find among the rank and file in the Church of Sweden. For example, one priest refers to Leviticus 19:33–34: ‘When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God’. M. Löwegren, *Kyrkan borde göra motstånd* [The Church should resist] *Kyrkans tidning* [Church News] Debate article. 4 March 2013.

¹¹⁹See for example YLE Nyheter [YLE News]. 2018. *Orbán: Kristendomen är Europas sista hopp* [Orbán: Christianity is Europe’s last hope] <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2018/02/19/orban-kristendomen-ar-europas-sista-hopp>. See also W. Klaus, *Between closing borders to refugees and welcoming Ukrainian workers: Polish migration law at the crossroads*, in M. Gózdziak et al., op. cit., Ch 6.

¹²⁰M. Byström and P. Frohert, *Invandringens historia – från ‘folkhemmet’ till dagens Sverige*. Delmi 2017:5 (Stockholm: Delmi), Summary, p. vii.

things could change faster and more unexpectedly than anyone could imagine. In this article we have shown how the Church of Sweden have insisted on strongly defending the rights of children, families and refugees even when there is a global upsurge in the construction of ‘borders, fences and walls’.¹²¹

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¹²¹E. Vallet, op. cit.