

Introduction

The nation and the political left had a precarious relationship in the twentieth century. Socialists have often been torn between an internationalist heritage and their individual national political cultures and loyalties. The left has ultimately worked for global change, but found itself on political scenes determined by the nation state, and all shades of leftism have in one way or another related themselves to the all-pervading political power of the nation.

In the interwar period, socialist and social democratic parties adapted to the national political scenes by entering governments in individual countries and left their working-class-based ideology to embrace 'the people' instead. The communist parties on the other hand, were ideologically and strategically bound to the Soviet Union, which often gave them the reputation of being a fifth column working against their own nation. With the rise of the New Left in the late 1950s and early 1960s a third position was created, a position that only slowly developed its own ideology with yet another concept of nation.

The relationship between the left and the concept of nation is not only politically ambiguous, it is also a complex one from the perspective of the historian: Although the nation played a significant role for the left in the twentieth century, it would be too simple just to look for leftist nationalism, since the concept of nation touches on a much wider range of subjects than this political programme. Also, an investigation into conceptual definitions of the nation in the 1960s and 1970s, for example as a political or ethnic community, would be very limited since these discussions were mostly not on the agenda. As discussed below, the nation was the implicit scene of political action, not a concept to be defined.

The questions of this investigation are directed at the way in which the left conceptualised this scene. As a first step, this will be a descriptive venture: what were seen as the most important features of the nation, when and in what way did this concept of the nation change over time? The most important question, however, is to ask when and how a concept becomes challenged so that it must change. Who has the power over interpretation, and what is the relationship between the concept and its context?

The particular history written here will thus be a history of the language of the left. This is not to be confused with a history of the ideas or the ideology of the left as represented by its foremost theoreticians. In fact, the protagonists of that history will play only a supporting role in the following. Readers expecting to be enlightened about Marxist theory or similar schools of thought will be

disappointed. Instead, the spotlight will be on the dispersed everyday discussions on the left: journal features, letters to the editor and party publications that are often contradictory and hardly ever present comprehensive theories. Rather than in the classics of socialism, it was here that the concepts of the left were formed, in a network of propositions, proclamations and rhetorical attacks and counter attacks. It was within the constant discussions among the left that concepts won or lost their position as political pointers.

In asking these questions, the book takes its point of departure in the tradition of conceptual history. In this tradition, concepts are far from stable entities, indeed, the very definition of a concept in the tradition of conceptual history is its vague or abstract reference as opposed to the concrete reference of words. Words refer to some concrete entity connected to the immediate situation. For example, the 'party' understood as the concrete body of members and institutions – as in the sentence 'we shall discuss this in the party' – is a word use of 'party.' The concept of 'party', however, is more of an ideal type, as for example 'the revolutionary party' of the Leninist tradition ('mobilising the working class is the primary goal of the revolutionary party'). This does not point to the concrete party at hand, but to the concept of a revolutionary party as the catalyst of social change. Hence, concepts are characterised by their ideological potential; they describe ideals or models, construct images of the self and the other and set the horizon for possible, or indeed necessary, change.¹

As such, concepts are always in a state of tension: tension between those who attach different content and agendas to the concepts and attempt to eliminate alternative interpretations, and tension between the image of reality contained in the concept and concrete experiences. The impossibility of duplicating experience in language and, vice versa, the impossibility of experiencing without conceiving this experience through language create a constant imbalance. To understand the world, we have to use the medium of language to conceptualise experiences, however, language will always be a simplification, or an interpretation, of the concrete reference.² Moreover, the conditions interpreted through concepts change, overtaking them and requiring new interpretations. It is this constant dynamic between different interpretations of the concepts and between the concept and its reference that is at the centre of this book.

For the left these tensions might even be particularly pronounced. The Enlightenment heritage of the left, with its belief in the ability to describe the world rationally and change it accordingly, as well as the Marxist-Leninist belief in a politics based on an accurate understanding of the laws of society can be seen as attempts to overcome this tension between concepts and their reference: Attempts that often resulted in battles over correct interpretations and frantic searches for comprehensive models to describe reality perfectly and unambiguously. Often, once such a model had been established, things changed to shatter the foundations of the carefully established concepts.

The concept of crisis is of particular interest in this context. Following Reinhart Koselleck, crisis occurs at the moment where the existing order is challenged in a way that requires a resolution of the conflicting interpretations. The crisis is the point of decision, where the old interpretations are no longer valid and new constellations appear.³ The history to be told here takes its beginning and end at two such instances, the crisis of communism in the late 1950s and the crisis of the New Left in the late 1970s. Before embarking on this, some methodological remarks and definitions are necessary.

Comparison, Time and Narration – Methodological Remarks

Within the last ten years, there has been a growing literature on comparison in history.⁴ These considerations confirm the necessity for being explicit about the methods and objectives of a comparative study such as this.

The aim of the comparison here is first and foremost a heuristic and a descriptive one.⁵ The Danish and Swedish left are compared in order to discover new angles and perspectives that would have been less obvious without the comparison. For example the influence of puritanism on the Swedish left stands out as a much more present feature in comparison with its complete lack in Denmark, or there is the relative lack of a Danish blue-collar tradition, which becomes obvious when compared with Sweden. The comparison also helps as a reminder of the political, economic and geographical differences between the two countries, the different geostrategic situation in the cold war, the large difference in geographical size, the different economic structure and the different political situation, especially with regard to the social democratic parties.

The analytical potential of the comparison, by contrast, has consciously been given low priority in this study. This function of comparative studies can be seen as a parallel to a scientist's laboratory, where hypotheses can be tested to find causal connections. Apart from the mechanistic view of history implied in this method, it is also problematic in the sense that it requires two completely separated cases. The Danish and Swedish left, however, were often inspired by each other so that developments in the two countries were often interconnected. Thus, the comparison will not be a systematic account of two parallel histories, but rather an integrated description of two milieux. Sometimes, similar developments will be described as one, and sometimes the similarities and differences will be pointed out in separate chapters. The countries will also receive different attention, depending on the subject. The New Left, for instance, presented a much more radical break with the communist tradition in Denmark than in Sweden and will be weighted accordingly. Likewise, the revival of popular traditions was stronger and more developed in Sweden than in

Denmark. The main development is the same in the two countries, but this journey took different roads to reach the same destination. It is in the comparison of these different roads that new perspectives and questions can be found. Hence, the present comparison is different from the comparative perspective of historical sociology, since it does not attempt to construct causal models, but instead looks for similarities and differences to put the two different cases into perspective, to question the familiar and seemingly obvious in the mirror of the other.

The two cases of Denmark and Sweden are interesting as they are ‘most similar cases’ on one level, but vastly different on other levels. If one looks at Fernand Braudel’s famous three levels of long, medium and short *durées*,⁶ these differences and similarities become clear. In the long *durée* of the geographical level, the countries are not only different in size but also in climate and dispersion of the population. In contrast to the cultivated and densely populated Danish landscape, Sweden’s population is centred around dispersed administrative and industrial centres, separated by vast forests. Hence, the notions of centre and periphery play an important role in Sweden. On the medium-term level of political culture, both countries were dominated (although Sweden to a larger extent) by strong states and powerful social democracies that set the agenda for the welfare state. On the short term, the day-to-day level of the history of the left is the very topic of this investigation; hence it will be discussed thoroughly in the conclusion.

Historical and literary writing are often similar enterprises. As Hayden White proposed in his classic book on the subject, *Metahistory*, historians do not simply give an account of the past; they actively construct it in the act of writing. The very style of history writing prefigures the way in which the findings are presented and what conclusions are drawn from them. The emplotment (as Hayden White terms it) of the historian’s findings, the sequence in which he puts them together in writing, is intimately connected to the explanations and interpretations provided. Hence, the chronology of the work, as well as its progress as a history: its beginning, build-up, dramatic climax and end, are all connected to the particular interpretation and explanation that the historian wants to express.⁷ If one takes this insight to heart, it is also necessary to be explicit about the choice of emplotment and the reasons for presenting the history in one specific way.

In the present work, the choice originally stood between a thematic representation of different interpretations of the nation – one chapter on the nation in the global perspective, one about images of the Dane and the Swede etc. – and a chronological one. For a merely descriptive enterprise, the first would have been an obvious choice, as it gives the reader a good overview of the material. However, as the research in the source material progressed, it became clear that these themes often replaced each other chronologically so that one perspective of the nation at times became overshadowed by new events and other

themes. Moreover, the thematic ordering often has a too descriptive character of mapping the concept in all its aspects; it gives the reader an illusion of an encyclopedic enterprise, that this mapping is a comprehensive one. The chronological ordering, conversely, requires a much stricter argumentation in order to describe the interrelationship between concepts, as well as how and why new conceptualisations replaced old ones. This requires the historian to come to more explicit conclusions in an explanatory rather than in a descriptive way. For these reasons, the chronological ordering with a beginning, middle and end was chosen at an early point.

The narration presented here is placed between two crises, the crisis of communism and the crisis of the New Left. From 1956, the world communist movement was in a profound crisis. The concepts inherited from the Comintern period were being challenged by Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The emergence of the New Left was a direct answer to this challenge, which sought to give new and more adequate content to the language of the left. During the 1960s, this process of renovation produced a dynamic and pragmatic approach to the political language, far removed from the dogmatism of communism. Throughout the 1960s, the concepts of the left were continuously being contested and changed in relation to different political constellations on the left and events in the world. Hence, a complex mixture developed with shifting emphases on themes like Third World solidarity, anti-consumerism, Nordism or workerism. These themes appeared in relation to the concept of nation in questions about the national and the international, the status of the nation and the possibilities for change (see below about the nation). In the 1970s, the dynamic stopped and gave way to a period of ideological continuity, which at the end of the decade met a crisis much like the one of communism. Different themes dominated in different periods; now and again they changed profoundly, or they continued to exist, appearing at odd intervals in journal features or slogans.

This poses a challenge to the chronological ordering of the material. Just as concepts are an interpretation of reality, the history of concepts is an interpretation and simplification of the concepts themselves. The historian cannot present an unambiguous image of the use of the concepts. In the sources, they are rarely defined explicitly and always used in a particular context. Hence, even as interpretations, they are never clear. Also, once a particular definition of a concept has been established, old uses of the concept may reappear in other contexts. For example, the Swedish left portrayed the Third World – particularly Vietnam – as a victorious revolutionary force. However, one can also find articles in Sweden that describe the Vietnamese people as helpless victims of a superior and pitiless American military force. The images of the Vietnam war were contestable, like all concepts, and hence impossible to grasp unambiguously. Here it is up to the discretion of the historian to decide how many of these articles it takes to present a challenge to the established concept. However, this

cannot be done arbitrarily either. A merely quantitative approach is meaningless. What should the threshold be, a fixed number of articles, a percentage of yearly articles written on Vietnam? Some writers had much more authority than others, and some books or articles had an impact that cannot be measured quantitatively. The historian can alternatively see how long a concept lasts in the sources, how many refer to or use the concept, but there is no fixed methodological point from where it is possible to unambiguously discard a concept as unimportant or outdated.

However, by ordering the material chronologically, this is exactly what the historian must do: to say, 'now, something different happened.' This is a necessary simplification to make a readable narrative, something different might indeed have happened, but something also remained the same. Time is not a road going from one place to another in two dimensions, but consists of many layers, like a geological formation where old layers are still present in the rock.⁸ Writing, however, is linear – or, to use a metaphor from electronics, sequentially connected. Even a thematically ordered text cannot mirror the simultaneousness of the layers of time. It has to divide them, extract the elements that are important for the argument and put them in a sequence, one after the other. Hence, the sequence chosen by the author is a result of a specific point of view, a certain interest.

This necessity of reducing simultaneousness into sequences brings the writing of history one step away from mirroring the material. However, the historian cannot put his findings into a pure sequence. The findings need to be ordered with a minimum of coherence so that the interpretation of one concept of, for instance, the working class is not followed unmediated by the interpretation of a concept of the Nordic countries. This would be more like writing an annal of events rather than a history.⁹ In sum, chronological history writing is also thematic. The interpretation of the historian is thus a double simplification, one of presenting many-layered time as a two-dimensional sequence, and one of constructing the elements of this sequence as independent themes. In this, there are no simple answers to questions about continuity or change; both exist side by side, or layer by layer, and are thus subject to a simplifying interpretation rather than categorical answers.

This double simplification should be obvious in the individual chapters; though the chapters and sections are put into a relatively chronological order, there is also a thematic element. Rather, the different themes surrounding the concept of nation have been placed in chronologically ordered main chapters, which are then split up into thematic sub-themes. This, as well as the comparative 'jumps' from Denmark to Sweden, breaks the flow of the narration, as if separated by successive 'meanwhiles.' The progress of the narration will happen in several parallel subplots, as the development of the concept of nation is followed in different countries, among different political groups and according to different themes. At the end, however, this network of narrations is put into a master narrative of crisis, innovation, stagnation and new crisis.

With all these limits to the possibilities of making history out of the past, one could ask if it is not a completely arbitrary enterprise, if anything goes. To counter this in a crude way, one could point to the difference between historical writing and fiction: that the historian cannot freely invent. The historian has to qualify his or her narrative by referring to the sources in a way that lets others test the validity of the propositions. But as history is an act of interpretation, there are no clear-cut standards of critique and, as a consequence, no final point of historical discussion. History remains an act of communication about the past. The question is thus not to present the final argument, but to make a plausible interpretation of the past. To do this, the historian must first make it clear from which point of departure the interpretation is made, define his main tools and concepts, and then, while presenting the interpretation, make the necessary references to the sources to enable others to challenge the particular history that is told. Moreover, it is necessary that the historian clarifies to him- or herself what the implications of the chosen tools are, in order to impose a measure of self-criticism, which makes a dialogue with alternative views possible. If these openings for critique are not made, research becomes either naively realist, by believing it can mirror reality, or a circular argument, where the answers are already given.¹⁰

The history at hand presents an interpretation of the concept of nation on the left from a specific point of view. The explanations in the following are not exhaustive nor do they refer to a notion of monocausality, but they are derived from asking certain questions of certain sources in a specific period of time. In the conclusion, once the reader is familiar with the present argument in detail, alternative interpretations using other chronologies and concepts will be discussed in order to see the span and the limits to the interpretations of this past, and put the present work into perspective. The rest of this introduction will define the tools of research in more detail and deepen the questions of the investigation.

What is the Left? Going beyond Ideology

There exists a quite extensive literature on the topic of the division between left and right in politics. Some authors want to keep the division, as they see it as an essential, bipolar structure of politics; others see it as a historically constructed and constantly changing concept. Tempting as it might be to enter this theoretical discussion, I choose to see it from the point of view of the pragmatic historian, looking for a concept that is open to new questions and new knowledge. Still, some kind of definition is needed.

From the beginning, I have to discard an institutional definition, defining the left as a limited number of groups or parties. My first point of departure was 'groups left of social democracy.' While this is a perfectly usable, common-sense definition, it is nevertheless too broad and imprecise as an analytical tool. First,

non-organised individuals increasingly influenced the leftist scene during the 1960s, and these would be excluded from an institutional framework. Secondly, some important – mainly Swedish – leftist intellectuals were actually members of the social democratic party while working in the context of the New Left. Thirdly, the definition would presuppose a clear, two-dimensional space, where groups could be ordered neatly from right to left, to make it clear what is actually left or right of social democracy. When social democratic parties do not play any major role in this project, it is not because of a belief that they are not on the left, but because they worked in another context from that of most of the agents described here, their focus was on the parliamentary scene and on government – an arena from which most of whom I define as the left were excluded.

One possibility would be to look at the ideological definitions of ‘left’: what is at the core of leftist ideology? One of the most well-written attempts to answer this is Norberto Bobbio’s book *Left and Right. The Significance of a Political Distinction*. After an interesting discussion of left and right as a spatial metaphor with many positions between the two poles, Bobbio arrives at the rather essentialist conclusion that ‘left’ can be reduced to a leading principle of equality: the leftist position will always be the more egalitarian one.¹¹ A similar attempt to reduce the concept of ‘left’ to an ideological core has been made by Steven Lukes in the article ‘Qu’est-ce que la gauche?’¹² Less convincingly and considerably more vaguely than Bobbio, he ends up with a definition of ‘left’ as a principle of ‘rectification’, a never-ending fight against exploitation and oppression.¹³ Both authors are politically on the left wing themselves, which to a large degree influences their conclusions. Unfortunately – and partly for this reason – none of them would be very useful as a tool to separate left from right. Most obviously, Lukes’ definition is problematic. Who would not try to correct wrongs and fight oppression? And who is to decide what for example oppression is? Did Margaret Thatcher’s fight against the oppression of the individual by the welfare state make her a champion of the left? Definitions such as this one clearly come from a rhetoric figure on the left, which defines itself in ethical terms where ‘left’ is good and ‘right’ is evil.¹⁴ Norberto Bobbio is far more convincingly: egalitarianism is a large element in left-wing ideology. But on the other hand, one cannot help posing oneself the question: can the whole political culture, red banners with hammer and sickle and singing the ‘Internationale’, be reduced to an idea of egalitarianism? The argument of the book itself is, for example, often built up dialectically, a clear inheritance from Bobbio’s Marxist origins. But what is the link between egalitarianism and dialectics? And, if one thinks further, how does it fit with the elitist elements in Lenin’s idea about the party leading the masses? The answer must be that reducing ‘left’ to some core idea is not going to get you very far.¹⁵

Another way to look at left and Right as a political division, is to go back to its historical roots in the French revolution, where ‘left’ was associated with change and ‘Right’ with conservatism in the original meaning of the word. Jean

A. Laponce argues in his book *Left and Right. The Topography of Political Perceptions* that this practical division reflecting the agenda of the French revolution has developed into a myth 'of a cosmic conflict between two abstract forces – one called left, the other called right.'¹⁶ The original purpose of the division has vanished so that the two concepts have freed themselves from any reference to particular ideological points of view.

The historical point of departure leads to the conclusion that the concept 'left' is a construction continuously being reconstructed. It seems that instead of looking for a clear and stable definition of 'the left', one should take a look at the people that define and redefine what it means to be on the left. Before reaching his essentialist conclusion, Bobbio writes extensively about left and right as spatial metaphors indicating proximity and distance. It is a key to finding possible allies in the political game, a space in which to place yourself in relation to others – friends, allies or enemies.¹⁷

A definition stressing space and relativity leads to another theory, namely, that of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of social space or field, as 'a set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through their mutual exteriority and their relations of proximity.'¹⁸ This way of looking at the left as a space structured by related positions seems to me the most open and comprehensive point of departure. Instead of struggling with more or less abstract ethical or philosophical measures, it suggests a much more pragmatic approach: to look at the network of people recognising themselves and others to be 'on the left.' They take different positions, some more powerful than others, but always defined in relation to other positions in the same space. This also allows the use of the theoretical apparatus of Bourdieu to pose questions about the distribution of power and resources (capital) in the field, and how this capital is used in the struggle for more power and resources.¹⁹ I shall not make explicit use of Bourdieu's concepts; rather I intend to use the theory as a way of thinking that avoids reconstructing the left in purely ideological terms. Concretely, the relations in the field can be followed in the source material by looking at who write in the journals and periodicals, whose books are being reviewed and who participate in debates, who are recognised as partners in discussions and who are solely objects of criticism. By asking these questions, it is not too difficult to construct a well-defined and delimited concept of the left.

By defining the left as a political and social field, it becomes similar to any other political milieu. It has no particular ethic or historical mission as in the ideological definitions, but becomes normalised, 'demystified', as a political milieu no different from other ones. The left did not have an ideology in a different sense from other political groups, it was a field of competing positions, competing interpretations and competing concepts.

The Concept of Nation

The concept of nation is one of the most discussed topics of the history discipline. The history of its construction, its political potency since the eighteenth century and its continuous potential for conflict has made it a favourite topic for research. When looking at Denmark and Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s, however, none of these three perspectives were very present. The nation-building process in the nineteenth century had resulted in a remarkable consensus about the nation as the natural stage for political action. It was not contested by ethnic conflict or serious border disputes, or by the displacements of people following the war. Explicit nationalism was hence only rarely mobilised in the political language; the nation went without saying. As described below, the left used nationalist arguments at specific points, but the actual political results of this mobilisation were poor in the self-secure and uncontested nation states of Denmark and Sweden.

However, the concept of nation is broader than struggles over its definition or political mobilisation on a nationalist programme. As John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith notices, the nation implicitly or explicitly reaches into a great number of other fields; it has a 'kaleidoscopic' form that 'spills over into any number of cognate subjects.'²⁰

In the following, I shall search for a point of departure in some of the main works on nations and nationalism to see which elements they emphasise in their analysis of the nation. It must be noted, however, that – and this is crucial – I do not focus on nationalism, but on the concept of 'nation', which is quite a different thing. Nationalism, to use Ernest Gellner's simple definition, is 'primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent.'²¹ Nationalism is thus a certain political use of the concept of nation. The concept itself, though, is prior to and independent from this particular use.

When it comes to the nation itself, finding clear and useful definitions is virtually impossible, as Eric Hobsbawm writes: 'there is no way of telling the observer how to distinguish a nation from other entities *a priori*, as we can tell him or her how to recognize a bird or to distinguish it from a mouse or a lizard. Nation-watching would be simple if it could be like bird-watching.'²² As a consensus has developed around this view²³ – as well as for the above-mentioned reasons – I shall do no further attempt to define 'the nation' as such, but choose a more pragmatic approach by looking at the historical roots of the modern concept of nation and by applying some methodological tools.

Most serious work on the nation stresses its constructed character; it is a phenomenon that prior to the French and industrial revolutions existed at best in protoforms in connection with a certain political unit or as a concept with a different meaning from that it received after the rise of political nationalism. Two standard works on the subject; Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism*

since 1780 and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, both underline the connection between the growth of a modern, centralised, industrial state and the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century. Nationalism and the modern concept of nation were products of a historical development from an agrarian society with little contact between the state apparatus and its subjects to a society with strong state control, central education and the necessity of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. For Gellner, the development of nationalism is unequivocally dependent on the transition to industrialism, and thus seems to become a stable element once this transition has occurred. It seems implicit in his book that once a homogeneous culture has been spread through standardised, widespread education, nationalism is stabilised in the form it took during the transition period.

Hobsbawm, while basically inspired by Gellner and sharing the same assumptions, has a more dynamic view, which sees nationalism develop in certain phases during the nineteenth century and reaching its 'apogee' between the world wars. In the second half of the twentieth century, nationalism, according to Hobsbawm, 'is simply no longer the historical force it was in the era between the French Revolution and the end of imperialist colonialism after the Second World War.'²⁴ He discards the Third World liberation movements as not nationalists but 'nation-builders' (a rather subtle difference) and the seeming upsurge of nationalism after the break up of the Soviet empire as 'unfinished business of 1918–21.'²⁵

This chronological framing of nationalism is to some extent defensible when the subject is nationalism as a well-defined political programme. It is problematic, however, if one seeks to analyse the concept of nation in situations where the nationalist programme has not yet been made explicit, or – in the case of this project – where the nationalist programme has been victorious and is no longer on the agenda. The specific cases of Denmark and Sweden in the second half of the twentieth century are those of societies where the standardised education, language and centralised government were already established within a national framework, but – as we shall see – this in no way meant that the national question in its broadest terms was dormant. On the contrary, even on the supposedly internationalist left, it kept on being a concept used in a number of different contexts and with a considerable potential of political mobilisation. However, it was not necessarily connected to the explicit nationalist agenda, with which it is most commonly connected in the research on the nation.

An alternative to the historical, structural connection between 'nation', nationalism and modernity and its relation to the nineteenth century could be a more open conceptual analysis that goes beyond the specific political context and scans the multitude of synchronic and diachronic changes of the concept itself. This also avoids the difficult question of an a priori definition of the elusive concept and turns its elusiveness into good use by taking the point of departure in the many, changing definitions instead of searching for one, stable

model. Such a starting point would follow the methods of conceptual history and begin with the signifier 'nation' itself to follow the ways it is used and its relations to other concepts.

Rolf Reichardt has proposed the idea of constructing a 'conceptual field' around the concept of interest. This is quite simply a framework in which to place different words in relation to the concept: which words are used to define what the concept is and what it is not, to describe its properties, and to show how these properties have manifested themselves historically.²⁶

The 'flat' character of the field metaphor is very attractive, especially as an alternative to the word 'discourse', which as a spatial metaphor has two levels: one at the surface, where you find the concrete phenomenon and one underlying structure, which generates the surface according to some rules or guiding principles. The structuralist heritage of the concept of discourse implies the risk of constructing coherent structures of meaning, the deep connectedness of language, to a common system. Discourse analysis hence tends to make synchronic 'cuts' through language to construct or even claim to discover a united system as an underlying frame of rules generating statements:²⁷ in the words of Michel Foucault, 'the mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed.'²⁸ The findings are connected to a hidden order that makes them sensible. By doing this, the concept of discourse has large elements of immobility where time seems suspended in the synchronous 'cut' of discourse analysis.²⁹

Koselleck presents a more dynamic point of departure where the 'diachronic principle' is at the core of the analysis; the ambition is not so much the reconstruction of a semantic field but to show the change over time of the relation between the concept and its reference: 'The naive circular relation between word and fact and back is broken. There is a field of tension between those two, which is soon dissolved, soon resurfaces, soon seems insoluble. Change of a word's significance, material change, altering contexts and the necessity of new definitions correspond in ever changing ways with each other.'³⁰ The aim is thus to watch for changes in the semantics of the concept and how it relates to social, cultural and political change, or the other way around: how and why a concept keeps its content despite of changes. In this way, conceptual history is also a heuristic method to open new questions about social and political phenomena. It points to social change that is put into language by changing old or inventing new concepts, and it points to the political struggles about the definition of the concepts to fit a certain ideology or agenda.³¹

To return to the conceptual field, Rolf Reichardt developed a scheme of definitions, antonyms, properties of the concept and examples of its historical manifestations.³² Roughly following this scheme, but making it more concrete, I have isolated three questions that have been important for the left's concept of nation in order to outline a heuristic tool for the investigation:

1. Following Koselleck, a common feature of all interpretations of the nation has been the inside/outside relation of the nation (*innen-außen-Relation*),³³ or the relationship between one's own nation and other nations, who are 'we' and who are the 'others.' This, as Koselleck also notes, is often articulated in 'asymmetrical counter concepts.' The definition of one's own nation often implies a distancing, a non-recognition, of the other. The virtues of the nation are emphasised by establishing unfavourable images of other nations. As we shall see, the Europe of the EEC and particularly the United States are thus established as 'others', different from Denmark and Sweden. In a wider perspective, this attribution of a particular virtue to one's own nation is often connected to the mission of the nation in the world, to fight the foreign evils or to embark on *missions civilisatrices* abroad.³⁴

For the left, however, the construction of counter images was accompanied by an accentuation of the nation as part of a bigger entity, internationalism. Here the relationship between inside and outside was established by incorporating the nation in an international agenda, as a component of a larger community with a role to play in accord with the other. Here, the counter concepts are no longer asymmetrical, as they imply recognition of the other; each nation has different roles to fulfil for the greater good. The ideal of proletarian internationalism of the world communist movement was a prototype for this type of definition of the nation, an idea of disciplined solidarity and cooperation to work for a global mission.

2. The second main element that Koselleck outlines for the concept of nation is the above/below relation (*oben-unten-Relation*). This points to the internal stratification of the nation as rulers and ruled. Here, the nation – or the people – either refers to those with the privilege of rulership (the citizen or the Greek *demos*) or those who are ruled over (the subject or the Roman *plebs*).³⁵ It has both connotations of privilege and deprivation, the people are those with the natural right to rule, or the mass whose role it is to obey and follow.

For the left, this gets particular connotations through the Marxist concept of class. Capitalist society is an upside-down mirror of the ideals of rulership: the proletariat that produces value is the real people in the sense of those with the right to rule, but have been deprived of this by the minority of parasitic capitalists who rule society. The proletariat is hence the 'people' in the sense of subjects, but should be the 'people' in the sense of citizens. The revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat are the installation of the just order, where those who produce value rule over the bourgeoisie. The

Marxist interpretation also entails an economic component through the fusion of ownership and rulership. It is not the citizens who rule through political rights, but the capitalists who rule through their ownership of the means of production. This brings in a specific tension for the left in relation to the state and to political agency: who are the rulers and the ruled, what is the relation between political and economic power, who is the backbone of the nation, who count as legitimate rulers? This opens the way for questions about the relationship between social class and the people and their relationship to the state.

3. Apart from these two sets of questions identified by Koselleck, the relation of the left to the nation requires a consideration of historical time and agency. As the left defined itself as the carrier of progress, it had to imply a philosophy of history, which designated a goal to progress towards. The nation was put into a historical context of past and present, which pointed to a specific future. This entailed historical examples of the definitions of the nation as for example repressive, democratic or independent, but it first and foremost gave meaning to present events as part of the destiny of the nation.

The idea of progress involved an agent of change. Sunil Khilnani argues that the question of legitimate agency has always been a key issue on the left: who is the legitimate agent of historical change, the nation, the people, the working class or the masses? With whom should the left ally itself, and which group did the left represent?³⁶ Hence, the inclusion of a legitimate agent of change was necessary for the left to place the nation in a historical development between past and present.

The investigation of the concept of nation below will thus focus on the propositions related to these three fields: what are the arguments for putting forward a proposition, how and why do these propositions change? Also, how do some questions gain more relevance than others, and why do some answers become plausible or implausible over time? These networks of propositions, of questions and answers form the concept of nation.

One keyword is contextualisation on both the political and the social level. What particular circumstances made it opportune (or even necessary) to launch or reinterpret a concept? Political competition, the need to associate/dissociate oneself from allies and opponents, is one possibility; another one is events or changes that request reinterpretation or give an opportunity to launch new agendas, or – indeed – developments that question concepts that once were valid. In sum the relation between context and concept, transformations and crises.

Literature and Sources

The study of the left in the post-war period, particularly in Scandinavia, is a fairly new field. The two main focuses of the history writing have been the communist parties and the events of 1968.

For the communist movement, the main works concentrate on Southern Europe, especially the large communist parties of Italy and France.³⁷ Many of the basic questions for this research have only relatively recently been answerable, as the necessary archival material was not available before 1991 (one example is the mapping of Soviet funding to other communist parties³⁸). The Nordic communist parties, however, have been quite unevenly investigated. For the DKP the main works are Morten Thing's *Kommunismens kultur* and Kurt Jacobsen's biography of party leader Aksel Larsen,³⁹ which cover the period until around 1960. Jacobsen's book is especially rich in its detail and thorough use of the archives of the DKP. Steen Bille Larsen has written about the DKP between 1945 and 1975, but in a somewhat shorter form than the two other works.⁴⁰ The SKP (after 1967 VPK), on the other hand, has received considerable attention, probably because of its transformation into a reformed communist party in the 1960s. The main work is Jörgen Hermansson's *Kommunism på svenska*, which seeks to describe the SKP/VPK's ideological development from 1943 until the time of its publication in 1984. While emphasising the ideological development, it also provides a good overview of the general history of the SKP/VPK,⁴¹ while other works focus almost exclusively on the ideology of the party.⁴²

The history of the New Left is a less developed field of research than the history of communism. Only within the last ten to fifteen years has the research liberated itself from the hegemony of the participants' self-reflection. This has especially been the case for the research into the events of 1968, where the literature, particularly in Germany, has grown considerably in the last years.⁴³ Whereas the earlier literature built largely on memory or oral history,⁴⁴ it is now possible to make a more detailed picture founded on archival research. Moreover, most of this research goes beyond 1968 and deals with the 1960s or 1970s and the New Left, making it possible to obtain an overview over the history of the European New Left. A few but thorough books use a longer chronology to tell a more general history of the left.⁴⁵ Other works again take the opposite perspective and deal with the 1960s and 1970s, incorporating the left in the history of social and cultural change in those decades, adding more detail to the picture of the left in the period.⁴⁶

The literature on the New Left in Denmark and Sweden consists for a large part of studies of particular movements and parties. Apart from the communist parties, the Danish New Left parties of SF and VS have been the subject of fairly detailed studies. SF is described in Jens Kragh's books *Opbrud på venstrefløjén* on the foundation of the party and *Mellem socialismens velsignelser og praktikable fremskridt* on the party's policies in the 1960s.⁴⁷ The first years of VS have been

described by Per A. Madsen and Jens O. Madsen's *Fra sandkasse til kadreparti?*⁴⁸ The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Vietnam Movement have been described in *Kampagnen mod Atomvåben og Vietnambevægelsen 1960–1972* by Johannes Nordentoft and Søren Hein Rasmussen.⁴⁹ The latter author has continued the research in the political movements in the book *Sære alliancer*.⁵⁰ The student movement has been investigated by Steven L.B. Jensen and myself in the book *1968 – og det der fulgte*.⁵¹ Lately, the small violent group known as *Blekingegadebanden* has been thoroughly described by the journalist Peter Øvig Knudsen in *Blekingegadebanden*.⁵² While these works provide valuable references to the history of the left in Denmark, there is no single academic work spanning the whole left through the 1960s and 1970s. Until now, this has predominantly been the domain of a very lively debate in the newspapers.⁵³

In Sweden, there are more works with a broader scope, although the movements still play a major role. The Maoist Vietnam Movement has been studied in Kim Salomon's *Rebeller i takt med tiden*, which generated some debate,⁵⁴ Sven-Olof Josefsson has studied the student movement and the events of 1968 in *Året var 1968*,⁵⁵ while the New Left within the communist party has been dealt with in the literature on the SKP/VPK described above. In terms of comprehensive studies, Kjell Östberg has described the years around 1968 in *1968 när allting var i rörelse*, which, however, does not provide great detail.⁵⁶ Thomas Etzemüller has written an insightful comparative study of 1968 in Sweden and Germany, which deserves mentioning.⁵⁷ Lastly, Martin Wiklund has written an impressive dissertation about 'critical narratives about modern Sweden' covering the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – which unfortunately was only published during the finishing stages of the present work.⁵⁸

Hence there exist a number of studies that give quite a detailed description of single movements, but relatively little in terms of comprehensive histories with a longer chronology. One aim of the present work is to provide an interpretation of such a history seen through the concept of nation.

The source material on the left in Denmark and Sweden is quite rich in terms of both size and accessibility. The organisations themselves were very productive publishers, especially the non-communist left, which usually had little of the self-censorship of democratic centralism. Indeed, publishing was the immediate *raison d'être* for many of the groups, who were in reality politically ambitious editing boards of leftist magazines and journals. For this reason, the organisation and its journal often had the same name. In the following, the organisation will appear in normal typography and its journal in italics: *Clarté* is thus the journal of Clarté.

The publications are the main source for the investigation: journal articles, pamphlets and books. The communist daily newspapers have not been used for practical reasons. While they present a vast amount material, they were edited by the same people that wrote in the theoretical journals (*Tiden*, *Vår Tid* and *Socialistisk Debatt*) and reflected the same views. Only when the newspapers

contained material unavailable in the theoretical journals have they been consulted, particularly the running debates of the early 1960s in SKP's *Ny Dag*. The paper, at that time a weekly, has been used in the period 1970–1974 when the VPK did not issue its theoretical journal *Socialistisk Debatt* and its affiliated organ *Tidsignal* had closed. For the Maoist KFML/SKP, the choice has been the other way around: to use the weekly *Gnistan* instead of the theoretical *Marxistiskt Forum*, which featured the same limited number of writers.

Unpublished material has been used only sparsely. The archives of the parties and groups are available and present an interesting material for the internal history of the left, but for the present problem, they do not yield much more information than is already available in the printed material, and hence no systematic research has been done. However, the archives have been consulted for certain questions about the relations of power within the groups (where this information has not been available in the literature), particularly at times of conflict, when the published debates seemed to reveal only the tip of the iceberg.⁵⁹ Some of the archives of the journals have been consulted for practical information such as the number of subscribers and copies printed. The discussions within the editing boards, however, often echoed what was printed in the published debate and have not been followed systematically.

Finally a word on the organisations investigated. The comparative perspective has posed limitations on the details of the investigation in terms of describing all the organisational facets of the left. Until around 1970, the number of organisations remains fairly small and manageable. After this, however, the number of groups and factions rises beyond the feasible, and the differences between the groups become ever more subtle. I have decided to have a reasonably high threshold as to what groups to investigate. Following the definition of the left above as a general rule, only those groups that have a position significant enough to be referred to by other groups have been included. Groups with a mainly local appeal or groups too small to be noticed by the main organisations have been excluded. As such the KFML(r) in Sweden, albeit very close to the threshold, has not been included, nor have the Trotskyist groups or the Danish Maoists.

Notes

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2. R. Koselleck. 1999. 'Begriffsgeschichte und Geschichtsbegriffe', in K. Acham (ed), *Geschichte der österreichischen Humanwissenschaften*, 1, Wien: Passagen Verlag.
3. For a longer consideration of the concept of crisis see the conclusions.
4. This has particularly been the case in Germany with works such as H.-G. Haupt and J. Kocka (ed.). 1996. *Geschichte und Vergleich*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, H. Kaelble. 1999. *Der historische Vergleich*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.

5. See: H.-G. Haupt and J. Kocka. 1996. 'Historischer Vergleich: Methoden, Aufgaben, Probleme. Eine Einleitung', in H.-G. Haupt and J. Kocka (ed.), *Geschichte und Vergleich*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, pp. 12–13.
6. F. Braudel. 1976. *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen*, Paris: Colin, pp. 16–17.
7. H. White. 1974. *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
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13. *ibid.*, p. 381.
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17. Bobbio, *Left and Right*, pp. 57–59.
18. P. Bourdieu. 1994. *Raison pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action pratique*, Paris: Seuil, p. 20. Translation taken from the English version, *Practical Reason*, 1998.
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20. J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (eds). 1994. *Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3.
21. E. Gellner. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 1.
22. E.J. Hobsbawm. 1992. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Programme, Myth, Reality, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5.
23. Apart from Hobsbawm, see Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, pp. 5–7 and Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism*, p. 4.
24. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 169.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 164–165.
26. R. Reichardt. 1985. 'Einleitung', in R. Reichardt and E. Schmitt (eds), *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680–1820*, 1–2, Munich: Oldenbourg.
27. See: M. Foucault. 1969. *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Gallimard.
28. M. Foucault. 1970. *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage Books, p. xvii.
29. Foucault himself considers this problem in Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, pp. 216–17. For a sympathetic critique of particularly early Foucauldian discourse analysis, see H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow. 1982. *Michel Foucault beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, London: Harvester Press, pp. 79–100.
30. Koselleck, 'Einleitung', p. XXIII [my translation, TEJ].

31. R. Koselleck. 1979. 'Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte', in R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
32. Reichardt, 'Einleitung', p. 85.
33. R. Koselleck. 1992. 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse', in O. Brunner et al. (ed.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 7, Stuttgart: Klett Verlag. pp. 145–46.
34. Ibid., p. 146; see also R. Koselleck. 1979. 'Zur historisch-politischen Semantik asymmetrischer Gegenbegriffe', in R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
35. Koselleck, 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse', p. 145.
36. S. Khilnani. 1993. *Arguing Revolution. The Intellectual Left in Postwar France*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 7.
37. One important work is M. Lazar. 1992. *Maisons rouges. Les partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours*, Paris: Aubier.
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43. For example I. Gilcher-Holtey. 1995. *Die Phantasie an die Macht. Mai 68 in Frankreich*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp; I. Gilcher-Holtey (ed.). 1998. 1968. *Vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; W. Kraushaar. 2000. *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.; J. Kurz. 2001. *Die Universität auf der Piazza. Entstehung und Zerfall der Studentenbewegung in Italien 1966–1968*, Cologne: SH Verlag. D. Siegfried.
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