

# Swedish geography and the time spirit 1933–45

– Resistance, subordination, or tergiversation?

## Inledning

Nedanstående artikel skrevs för Nordiska Geografmötet i Stockholm 2017, men har ändrats och kompletterats sedan dess. Den bygger på studier av svenska geografiska tidskrifter och andra publikationer från tiden 1933–45.

## Abstract

Nordic and Baltic geographers in the years 1933–1945 were surrounded by, and eventually under the rule of dictatorial regimes while Sweden remained peaceful and only partially subject to censorship. To what extent is this visible in the academic work of Swedish geographers, in their publications and in their reviews of publications of the surrounding world? The paper will address these issues of Swedish academic geography of the time. Most dissertations for licentiates and PhDs in human geography were chosen within the sub-discipline of historical regional geography of Sweden. In general, very few publications reflected the geopolitical situation surrounding Sweden. In the reviews sections, works of a Nazi character are criticized, and the number of German works reviewed declines rather abruptly after 1933. Soviet geography is only mentioned a few times. In 1938–40 the annual *SGÅ* published a geopolitical survey of Europe in a pro-Nazi (and pro-Soviet) spirit. The concept of race is used to differentiate Swedes, Finns, and ‘Lapps’. Beginning in 1942, there is a critique on the lack of social and geopolitical aspects in education and

research. The history of Swedish geography 1933–45 thus shows a resistance to Nazi German geography, a few examples of accepting of Nazi geopolitics, but in general an almost total lack of addressing the geopolitical realities of the surrounding neighbourhood.

*Keywords:* knowledge production, publishing, geography, geopolitics, Sweden, Nazi Germany, Soviet Union, racism.

## Swedish geography and the time spirit 1933–45

– *Resistance, subordination, or tergiversation?*

The Nazi take-over of Germany in 1933 started an escalation of geopolitical changes affecting Sweden’s neighbours, with increasing authoritarian tendencies in the states of the eastern Baltic. Until the breakout of World War II Sweden with a centre-leftist government pursued a passive foreign policy, referring to the League of Nations in international conflicts. As in September 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union attacked and divided Poland under the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the country found itself surrounded by belligerent powers and a broad coalition cabinet was formed. Later that year the USSR attacked Finland, leading to mass destruction and land losses, then forcibly annexing Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in August 1940.

In April 1940 Germany attacked and occupied Denmark and Norway. With the German attack on Soviet Union in June 1941 and USA:s entering the War in December, Sweden became squeezed in between Nazi–Allied warfare, keeping the country as a producer of iron ore and buyer of coal dependent on Nazi Germany while keeping trade and political contacts with the Allies, particularly the United Kingdom and the USA. Violations in the neutrality were committed, but after 1942–43 with a shift in the military power balance, Sweden turned its neutrality in favour of its occupied western and southern neighbours.

Nordic and Baltic geographers in the period 1933–1945 were thus surrounded by, some immersed into, authoritarian regimes of evil use of territorial space and of its inhabitants, especially the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In Germany, the purge on academics started almost directly after the Nazi take-over in 1933, affecting geographers not adhering to the Nazi '*Blut und Boden*' ideology and everybody related to Jewishness, resulting in a Nazification of German geography (see e.g. Rössler, 1990). Especially the German and Soviet territorial advances in the Baltic area starting in 1939 put Nordic and Baltic geographers in the area into extremely difficult situations (see e.g. Paasi, 1990; Nystad, 2012; Larsen, 2015; Barnes & Abrahamsson, 2017 and Bilska-Wodecka 2022). Academics had to take stand; 'voice, loyalty, or exit', in some areas choosing intellectual hibernation depending on the actual geopolitical time-space situation. This, of course resulted in very different possibilities, varying also over time in the various countries. Sweden, with the world's old-

est Freedom of the Press Act, (of 1766), in June 1940 enacted an emergency law on censorship but it was never used. Other types of restrictions (e.g. on distribution) affected Communist and Liberal Anti-Nazi publications especially during the first years of Nazi German and Soviet threat. Unlike most of their colleagues of neighbouring areas, Swedish academics were thus relatively free to choose themes for research, teaching and reviews, but writers and editors books and articles directly attacking Nazi Germany could be sentenced for risking Swedish neutrality, e.g. in a famous case of medical professor emeritus Israel Holmgren for a book *Nazisthelvetet* (Nazi Hell) in 1942, but he was pardoned and the book was published again in 1943 under the satirical name of *Naziparadiset* (Nazi Paradise).

The discipline of Geography was described by Torsten Hägerstrand in 1986 as "the study over struggles over power of the entry of phenomena and events into space and time" (Hägerstrand, 1986, p. 43). The definition indicates a possible study object of world events, big and small. In a highly debatable study on the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, Sarah K. Danielsson even suggests that the discipline of geography will lead to expansionism, national socialism and even to genocide (Danielsson, 2012). As indicated above, Swedish geographers after the Nazi takeover in Germany were in a situation of rapidly changing geopolitical situations in their vicinity, and they, as academics, citizens, and human beings, had to take stand. But to what extent is the situation of the European geopolitical situation and its narratives visible in the academic work of Swedish geogra-

phers, in their coverage of events, choice of research, reports and book reviews, and in their comments to e.g. the teaching of geography in schools and universities? Do geographers take a stand against authoritarian, racist or colonialist regimes and tendencies in the geopolitical environment of neutral Sweden?

The paper will discuss Swedish academic geography as mirrored in the publications of their geographical associations and the academic departments. Special attention will be given to references to German (and Soviet) geography and related disciplines, and to subjects particularly characteristic of the authoritarian regimes of the time, such as geopolitics, race, “primitive peoples” and *Lebensraum*, concepts that had different interpretations changing with time and political standpoints.

The scrutiny will be divided into three time periods: firstly, 1933–1937 beginning with the Nazi take-over in Germany, ending with Stalin’s purges in the USSR; secondly, 1938–42 with the Munich Agreement, the November Pogroms in Germany, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and Germany’s assault on Poland, USSR’s attack on Finland and illegal take-over of the Baltic states, Germany’s occupation of Denmark and Norway, Germany’s attack on the USSR ending with the Battle of Stalingrad. Finally, 1943–1945 marks the Allied advance but also a formal Nazi German take-over of Denmark, the flight of most Danish Jews to Sweden in 1943, the Soviet re-take of the Baltic republics and the end of the War in Europe. The division is arbitrary, but it partly reflects changes in the general Swedish attitude to chang-

ing world events. If this is at all mirrored in Swedish geography transactions, it is of course delayed by the often-long-time of production of articles and reviews, especially the in the annual publications.

### **Organization: academies, societies, publications and personalities**

The Swedish school system, enacted in 1927, consisted of a mandatory education of 6 years, starting at the age of seven, after 4 years a selected lower grammar (*realskola*) of 4 years and a high school (*gymnasium*) divided into 2-3 different specializations, ending in a baccalaureate. The ministerial arguments for the reform of the system are based on a democratic civic education for all, including mandatory history – with citizen education, but with geography as an optional subject. Readers in geography were chosen by the schools. With the exception of an experimental introduction of English decided in March 1939, German remained the first foreign language taught in state and municipal schools until August 1946, but a shift to English as the first foreign language was discussed before the school reform of 1927.

Scientific geography in Sweden was first established at Lund University in 1897, followed by Uppsala and Göteborg in 1901 and Stockholm in 1902. Swedish academic geography 1933–45 was taught at the two existing state universities, Uppsala, and Lund, at the university colleges of Göteborg and Stockholm and as economic geography at the schools of economics in Stockholm and Göteborg. Academic insti-

tutions were small, and doctoral students were heavily dependent on their professors and on their own efforts. Academic geography was very much organized as training of teachers for the high schools, the discipline included both physical and human geography, and most geographers tried to publish in both traditions while finally specializing into one of them. At the Schools of Economics (Handelshögskolor) the teaching of geography was a preparation for commerce and thus specializing in economic and urban geography and was not intended as part of a higher academic career.

A BA (fil. kand.) or an MA (fil. mag.) with geography major (usually 1½ year of study) would qualify for a position as *adjunkt* in the high schools while a licentiate (fil. lic.) or a completed PhD (fil. dr) was required for the position as *lektor*. Studies above an MA were usually done part time beside a position at a school, following professorial seminars and could thus take many years before final graduation. A licentiate degree required a paper presented to the doctoral seminar and accepted by the professor, while a PhD required a printed monograph, defended at a public event with at least two official opponents and possibility for questions and opposition from the audience, after which a committee of professors would grade the monograph and its defence. The honorary title of *docent* was awarded by a small committee after at least a PhD with honours or after additional scientific work and was usually considered necessary for applying a position as professor.

With the clear exception of the Schools of Economics and their dependence on

British and US influences, Swedish academia of the early 1930's was still heavily dependent on German scholarship, especially in the humanities. With the Nazi take-over, this influence quickly decreased, but a number of professors kept contacts with the regime. Contacts with the Soviet Union were always minimal. With the exception of a small minority of high school teachers, Swedish teachers clearly took a distance from the development in Germany (Höjeberg, 2016). However, *Riksföreningen Sverige-Tyskland* (The National Association Sweden-Germany) was founded in Lund in December 1937 with some prominent Lund professors as initiators and people like Eric von Rosen and Sven Hedin as members. While not openly Nazi, it worked for a positive understanding of the regime. Lund University was thus not free from pro-German influences during World War II (Oredsson 1996). Other Lund academics were openly anti-Nazi including the socialist lecturer of Swedish at Greifswald University Dr Stellan Arvidson who was quickly dismissed after the Nazi take-over in 1933 (Almgren, 2016, p. 65). The meetings between Lund and Greifswald universities held in 1925 and 1931 to be held in 1937 was cancelled by the vice-chancellor of Lund University (Naase 2016, p. 159). The only German geographer directly specialized on the Nordic countries and with a Swedish contact network, Gustav Braun, was dismissed from Greifswald in 1933 for obscure reasons, probably because of his contacts with a German Jewish shipping company. The only 'geographer' to visit Greifswald during the Nazi era was Hedin (Lundén 2016, pp. 83-88, Nase 2016, pp. 113–116).

Geographical research and reviews were published through a number of professional geographical organizations. The main association gathering geographers was the *Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi* (Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, SSAG), founded in Stockholm as such in 1877, also including many other academics and professionals interested in exploration and in geographical and anthropological investigation. The Society had a history of supporting scientific exploration, especially A.E. Norden-skiöld's circumnavigation of Eurasia via the Northeast Passage 1878–1880 with the ship Vega. At the time of the political take-over by National Socialism in Germany in 1933, the SSAG was still a rather exclusive club of elected members, mainly men with direct or indirect relations to geography and anthropology and a presence of members of the royal family at its meetings. The “domestic” members’ shown in *Ymer* 1938:1 p. 103–112 enumerates 877 individuals, including at least 78 women, mostly teachers. The king of Sweden was and is its “highest protector”. There is no history of the Society, but the 100 Anniversary edition of *Ymer* 1976/77 contains a number of reprinted articles from the early years of the Society with comments by active scholars, plus a brief survey by Staffan Helmfrid (1977). Chairman and members of the board were elected each year. Prominent members were the explorers and pro-Nazi followers Count Eric von Rosen and Sven Hedin, but also well-known anti-Nazis, such as geography professor Hans W:son Ahlmann (1889–1974), docent William William-Olsson (1902–1990), later to become professor of economic geography,

and Rickard Sandler (1884–1964), geographer, and social-democratic minister (Lundén 2016 b, pp. 194–196). *Sydsvenska Geografiska Sällskapet* (South-Swedish Geographical Society) was initiated in 1925 by Professor Helge Nelson at Lund University and remained closely associated with the university and also with local economic interest and public administration in southern Sweden. There were also local associations of geographers, including the *Geografiska Förbundet* (Geographical Association) in Stockholm, originally formed in 1918 as a break-away of younger geographers from the royalist and travel exploration-minded SSAG, and local associations of geographers at Uppsala and Göteborg. Members of the geographical societies included teachers and academics, officials in state institutions (statistics, meteorology, geology etc.) and specialists in related disciplines, such as anthropology, demography, and history.

The SSAG issued two publications, both published in four issues per year, *Ymer*, in Swedish with a multidisciplinary coverage based on geography and anthropology, and *Geografiska Annaler*, purely scientific, covering geography mainly in French, German and increasingly in English. *Ymer* started 1881 as a quarterly journal was made an annual publication in 1966. *Geografiska Annaler*, started in 1919, was divided in 1965 into two series, A, Physical Geography and B, Human Geography. In *Geografiska Annaler* the dominant subject was physical geography, particularly glaciology and scientific reports from field work in polar and volcanic areas. Articles in human geography were almost entirely within historical geography

(of times before 1900). Articles were selected by an editorial board but evidently very much by the main editor, a professor or docent. Both journals included a section of reviews with a rather diverse and varied selection of publications on review, *Geografiska Annaler* reviewing international and domestic scientific geography, *Ymer* covering travel, ethnography etc. but also purely scientific publications and dissertations, often reviewed by the editor, his doctoral students or by an expert in the field, for Swedish doctoral dissertations often the first opponent. Sydsvenska Geografiska Sällskapet issued *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* (SGÅ) 1927–2009, an annual which included scientific articles, reviews within geography and neighbouring disciplines plus a valuable chronicle of appointments, dissertations, and publications within Swedish academic geography. All articles and reviews in *Ymer*, *Geografiska Annaler* and SGÅ were suggested or selected by the editor or the editorial board, with no peer review. The journal *Geografiska Notiser* was started in 1944 as an organ for the national association of teachers of geography, *Geografilärarnas Riksförening*, started in 1933, including articles by and for teachers, but also by academic geographers. *Gothia* was published occasionally by the Geographical Association of Göteborg from 1932 to 1981 presenting dissertations and substantial reports, 12 issues in all. Uppsala dissertations and monographs were published as *Geographica*, 1936–1968, 38 in all. None of these occasional publications covered the geopolitical issues of the time.

## **Reviews and articles referring to German and Soviet geography and related themes 1933–1937<sup>1</sup>**

While the authoritarian Soviet system had been established since long, the German Nazi take-over happened within a year starting in 1933. But already from 1933 *Ymer* and *Geografiska Annaler* contain reviews of German geographical works with highly critical evaluations, written by Hans W:son Ahlmann and two of his doctoral students at Stockholm University College. As an example in *Ymer* 1935 Ivar Moberg reviews *Deutschland und der Norden*, 1935, in a very critical evaluation: "The 'Nordic idea' is a diffuse, ambiguous, and floating concept, and to the extent that it is used for and speculations on the philosophy of race, it has immediately to be stated that we have very little in common with it...Is there really any need for these new abstruse motivations and obscurely formulated passwords?" The only exception from a Stockholm perspective is vol. 17 (1935), of *Geografiska Annaler* which includes a review in German by J. Sölch, 138–139, of *Raumüberwindende Mächte* edited by Karl Haushofer. It is a lengthy review criticising the selection; "disconnected, uneven". As an example, Sölch refers to W. Wüst who especially mentions the religions when he e.g. discusses "attempts of total spatial conquest by foreign species (races), he also mentions the races." Sölch is thus critical of obscurities, but not of the contents themselves. In the same 1935 issue of *Geografiska Annaler*, 142, Ahlmann concludes a review with the following words: "We trust that what is said in the preface and in the prospectus regard-

ing geopolitics and national distress, and of the State and the nation making increasing claims on geography as on all other science, will not lead to a nationalization of German physical geography too". In a 1936 *Ymer* issue, 330, ethnologist Ragnar Jirllow reviews Arthur Haberlandt's book *Die deutsche Volkskunde*, 1935. Jirllow comments: "...in some other places in the publication we meet influences of National Socialism, something that sometimes seem to contribute to at places an appearing obscurity within terminology and systematics in the work, which apart from this is meritorious."

While Nazi German geography is thus very critically reviewed and the number of publications mentioned dwindling almost into zero, the Soviet Union is only occasionally mentioned. In a 1933 *SGÅ* review of a Swedish book by Torsten Streyffert (1933) on Russia's natural resources under the five-year plan, Lund doctoral student Allan Weinhausen remarks that the five-year plan has partially failed (Weinhausen 1933, p. 207). In the same issue geographer Margareta Almgren in a paper on "The evolution and development of Russian agriculture during the last few years" concludes that that the five-year plan leads to faulty decisions concerning sowing and cultivation, faulty locations, and faulty timing of sowing.

Some reviews and articles mention concepts that might be interpreted as racist or belonging to an expansionist world view. *SGÅ* 1933, 57, has an article by Ragnar Numelin on migration of 'primitive peoples'. In *Ymer* 1935, pp. 262–272 anti-racist anatomist and anthropologist Gaston Backman of Lund University has an obitu-

ary of the Swedish medical anthropologist Carl Magnus Fürst (1854–1935) whose work included racialised ethnographic discussions of indigenous people. The article lacks any notion on evaluative racism, but Backman cites Fürst's positive evaluation of Greenlanders.

## 1938–1942 geopolitical notions and remarks

With 1938, the Nazi German territorial expansion begins, and in the years to come Europe and the world is thrown into a geopolitical turmoil of shifting allegiances and hegemonies, only partly reflected in Swedish geography. In *SGÅ* 1939, 197–200, Sven Norlindh writes on Geography in the schools of Greater Germany that "In difference to several other disciplines (e.g. German, history and biology), the German curriculum for geography is almost void of exaggerated Nazi ideologies." But "The last grade is entirely devoted to Germany a) the evolution of the natural landscape into a cultural landscape b) ... The work of the Nazi regime for colonization, production increases and defence." This last sentence seems to contradict Norlindh's evaluation of the lack of Nazi ideology.

Two geographers stick out as being either naïve or even enthusiastic to the Nazi German world view. *Ymer* in 1938 contains an article by Stockholm licentiate Nils Friberg on Germany's national motorways. Unlike earlier reviews and papers in *Ymer* from 1933 and onwards, this paper uncritically and almost enthusiastically presents Hitler's accomplishment in bringing about a national system of *Autobahnen*.

An even more pro-Nazi Germany paper is presented in *SGÅ* 1938, by Nils Björnsson, Lund geographer and member of the *Riksföreningen Sverige-Tyskland* under the title "Czechoslovakia and its boundary changes". Björnsson, writing in November 1938, fully accepts the Munich agreement, underlining the ethnic heterogeneity of Czechoslovakia, evaluating Germans, Czechs and Slovaks according to their cultural standing in a falling scale and establishing that with the truncation of the country, "most Germans and Hungarians and all Poles have now been united with their kinsmen."

In the next issue of *SGÅ*, 1939, Björnsson continues with a geopolitical overview "Germany's political-geographical development after the World War", submitted in November 1939. In the introduction he notes "the Polish war [sic!] that broke out on September 1" and continues that the German Reich has now regained its position, but by extending its domination beyond German ethnic territory, Germany is not a nation state any more. After the German-Soviet agreement Björnsson predicts an increase in trade and supposes the independence of the Baltic states is only a fiction since the establishment of Soviet bases. The German population of these areas shall be brought home and settled in the former German area of Poland. Björnsson in a footnote adds that Slovakia, protected by Germany, has entered the line of independent states.

In *SGÅ* 1940, Sven Björnsson returns with an essay "The boundary changes in Europe after the break-out of the war", written after Finland's defeat and land losses. The article starts with the aftermath

of the WWI peace treaties and mentions Germany's lack of raw materials, "the so-called Polish corridor" and Russia's containment. Germany has, through the former Polish areas, received a valuable contribution to its supply of provisions. For Russia, the gain lies in large tracts of forest and the harbour of Viborg. Björnsson however, regrets Finland's losses, but he continues without condemnation or explanation that in June 1940 the parliaments in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania decided that these states should be annexed to the Soviet Union.

After Björnsson's geopolitical essay, written in the autumn of 1940 in compliance with the Nazi German world view, and after the German occupation of neighbouring Denmark and Norway, not mentioned by Björnsson, the *SGÅ* does not include any more pro-Nazi German articles. Björnsson is however allowed in *SGÅ* 1943 to positively review anti-Nazi Ahlmann's *Norway, nature and economy*, (Ahlmann, 1943) remarking "... "Norway has perhaps been harder hit by the war than any other of our neighbours".

An exception from the general rule of neglecting German academic geography is made in *Geografiska Annaler* vol. 21 (1939), 166–167, where Stockholm licentiate Dagny Wallén (later Hedenstierna) presents in German works issued by the Kiel Geography Department without evaluation. One of these is a book on The North Germanic colonisation in the Atlantic Polar Region reviewed very critically by the Icelandic Stockholm doctoral student Sigurdur Thorarinsson (Sigurður Þórarinnsson), concluding "author puts too much weight on the 'racial traits of char-



acter, fighting delight, adventure desire, joy of death' etc."

In *SGÅ* 1939 Sven Grundström reviews Walther Pahl and G. Roswall, *The Political Face of the Earth*. The book originally in German by Pahl was added in the Swedish translation with an appendix by Roswall on the League of Nations, the Czechoslovakian crisis, and the Munich Agreement. Grundström's review is mostly positive and neutral, but he adds: "On the other hand, the information of political and military strategic matter that Pahl is operating with is not particularly convincing." This mildly critical verdict is clarified and sharpened in another review of the same book, in *Biblioteksbladet* 1939, 323. "The German origin of the work is indeed clear, and the Swedish revision has been confined to smaller retouches. The reviewer cites the introduction: "Only in cases where diverging political ideologies to a considerable degree influence the international intercourse has it been regarded necessary to beside the authoritarian conceptions insert the democratic counter-arguments, or where this is deemed superfluous, only indicate the ideological origin of the arguments". And he adds: "This citation from the Swedish introduction hints at strange attitude of the publishers and the Swedish 'co-writer', balancing Pahl's Nazi German world view with mildly critical comments."

Lund doctoral student Helge Stålberg follows developments in Eastern Europe. In *SGÅ* 1939, written in October 1939, he presents "The science of geography in Poland", concluding: "It remains to be seen how the scientific investigations will develop in the future within the former Pol-

ish state territory". In the 1940 *SGÅ*, Helge Stålberg in an essay, "Reflexion on a Russian World Atlas", remarks about "Krayevedeniye [local geography]... all this research stands in the service of 'the socialist work for development' and has a strong stamp of propaganda" and about Soviet maps "It lies in the nature of things that one must study them with great criticism". Stålberg in *SGÅ* 1941, 225–226, reviews C. Axel J. Gadolin: *Eastern Karelia – the Finnish Borderland*, 1941, by the publishing company of the *Riksföreningen Sverige-Tyskland*. "The chapters are of varying value... The author directs sharp and indeed in many ways justified accusations against the Communist regime, but it must not be forgotten that the author belongs to a nation that is involved in a hard struggle with the Soviet Union. The author asserts without evasions, that Russia should be obliterated as an independent state. One asks oneself with scepticism, if such a condition can be lasting." In the same issue Arne Sandell, p. 227, reviews pro-Nazi Rütger Essén's: *The Russian equation*. Sandell gives a neutral description of the contents, including the following remark: "According to the author, to Stalin the Russian realm is central. A national direction would have substituted the earlier international and world-wide one, but this is not confirmed by the world events, the assault on Finland and the Baltic States".

*Ymer* 1941, 301–303, includes the speech by Count E. v. Rosen to Field Marshal C.G. Mannerheim of Finland on Vega day, April 24, 1941, on the awarding of the Hedin medal for his scientific production: It is a speech strictly related to Mannerheim's anthropological findings. von Ros-

en's speech is remarkable in concentrating on Mannerheim's fairly insignificant research. There is only a short reference to Mannerheim's political role defending "that the Scandinavian and Finnish tribes are not... thrown under foreign rule."

## Notions on Race and Cultural Levels

In this period, concepts of race and levels of culture are still abundant. As will be exemplified below, some geographers in 1933–45 mentioned three races in Sweden, mainly based on ethnicity, and readers in school geography differed widely in denying or accepting the concept of race. A reader for the high school, H. Olsson, *Lärobok i geografi för gymnasiet III*, Uppsala 1931, p. 62 asserts that all human beings consist of the same biological components and pure ethnic races are thus difficult to maintain. Another reader, S. Swedberg, *Geografi för det differentierade gymnasiet första delen*, Stockholm 1935, contains evaluative characterizations of European 'races' and instruction for measuring skulls (Wendt, 2015, 26–28)

In *SGÅ* 1938, 221, Lund professor Helge Nelson reviews Ragnar Numelin's: *The Wandering Spirit* (1936). The review is neutral but cites expressions like: "at a lower height of culture, ...with increasing culture, ...at a lower standpoint of culture". In *SGÅ* 1939 Nelson, 200, reviews Olof Bergqvist's *Among Swedes, Finns and Lapps* (1939). "His descriptions of Lapland of the 1890's relate to the isolation and backwardness of the Finnish-speaking peasantry, its ignorance and religious conditions." *SGÅ* also has a review

pp. 183–184, by Eva Maria Jönsson on *The race-types of Norden: Geography and history*, by the later infamous racist Bertil Lundman, writing without any evaluation concerning Lundman's description of "foreign elements": "Reliability is rather low depending on scant statistics... The racial history of Norden is in the following treated rather thoroughly."

*Ymer* 1942 had no article of geopolitical interest but came with a separate book; *Norrland, Nature, Population and Economic life*, containing a number of articles on Northern Sweden, some of which touched on race and minorities (*Norrland*, 1942). Folke Henschen, professor of pathology, writes on Geographical-pathological problems concerning Norrland (283–306)"...Upper Norrland, where one meets three different races, the Nordic, the Finnish and the Lappish, plus numerous individuals of obvious mixed race". C. Axel Calleberg under the title Nomads and nomad schools, 367–402, notes: "The Lapps are counted as a race of its own, the Lappish. Naturally enough they have mixed themselves with adjacent peoples, ... The children of the Lapps have shown themselves having just as good heads as other children", illustrated with a photo of a Sámi boy doing mathematics.

In the 1942 issue of the *SGÅ*, a *Festschrift* to Lund professor Helge Nelson, Olof Jonasson, 395–409, writes on The Swedes in the World: "Sweden's population has, at least in historical times to a minimal extent been cross-bred with foreign people. The immigration of Finns and Lapps are the only additions of people from outside, quantitatively of value to be mentioned in this connection. If any

people apart from these, living in Sweden, and also with Swedish citizenship, be mentioned, it would be the Jews.” Concerning the statistical number of Swedes, he writes: ”Rightfully should from these be excluded, as previously mentioned, foreign nationalities, i.e. some Finns, Lapps and Jews, particularly if these are not Swedish-speaking” (Jonasson 1942, pp. 396-37).

The same volume of *SGÅ*, (p. 339-354) includes an article by John Frödin, “Africa and Europe’s provision of tropical crops”. Frödin shortly describes the geography and history of Africa, writing that the slave trade (or “black ivory”) long was Africa’s contribution to world economy, depriving the black population of development. Frödin questions the colonial powers altruism in setting up colonies in these areas of low productivity, but sees possibilities for development, in spite of physical obstacles. The first penetration by “the white race” was made by the Arabs in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, crossing the Sahara. The most important precondition for establishing a “high culture”, beside the building of infrastructure, is the care for the black work force. Frödin sees a tendency to underestimate the development potential of the coloured races. The black agriculture has in several places shown a surprising power of initiative. Frödin exemplifies by a “Negro’s initiative” to import Cocoa trees to the gold Coast, and by innovations in agriculture by the *Vakaras* in East Africa, and stresses “*already before the advent of the whites*.” Frödin adds: “There is reason to count on the Negro as an important factor in the coming cultivation of Africa.” In the following, Frödin discusses the “Negro agriculture”

versus the [‘white’] plantation culture and their respective advantages in different settings. He cites Gudmund Hatt (1938) in condemning the system used in “English South Rhodesia, where 50 000 white settlers have been given the most fertile and healthy area of 20 million hectares, whereas the natives, 20 times more populous have been expelled to an area of 12 million hectares, contaminated by malaria and sleeping-sickness located in the most inaccessible part of the colony.” Frödin concludes that the future of tropical Africa is dependent on how the black work-force is being utilized and cared for, by being educated to higher and more independent methods of cultivation in cooperation with the whites.

### 1943–1945 notions of geopolitics

In spite of the changes in the geopolitical balance, the coverage in geographical publications is remarkably scant, in spite of an ongoing debate on the scope of geography related below. The exodus of the ethnic Swedish minority from Estonia has caused some comments on the situation in the eastern Baltic. *SGÅ* of 1943 publishes an article by Per Wieselgren, “The Swedes of Estonia during the occupations”, a balanced relation of the situation (1943). “In the beginning the happiness was great [among] the Swedes over the Germans’ victory.... But they were in general not happy about the prospect of being Nazified. ...the German desire to exploit the occupied areas creating a mismanage of the Baltic area has resulted in a sinking mood...but at foremost the fright for a return of the Bolsheviks

that ...evoked a desire for exodus to the motherland". The summary – in German! – concludes: "...the liberation by German troops which was greeted with vivacious happiness. The many rigidities of the German East Politics have certainly later influenced negatively."

In the same publication, Helge Nelson reviews Wieselgren's *From the Hammer to the Swastika. Estonia 1939–1941* and Carl Mothander's *Barons, Peasants and Bolsheviks in Estonia*. Nelson: "Wieselgren competently introduces us to the last years of tragic transitions, when independence was crushed and replaced by Russian Bolshevik governance and German conquest... the short, but sanguinary Russian rule, when at least 60.000 Estonians were expelled from Estonia, and gives a frightening description of what Bolshevik conquest means to Western culture. But also German subjection, if better than the Russian one, did not promise a good future."

In 1945, the only article or review relating to geopolitics in *Ymer* (or in any of the other publications) is by geography professor Ahlmann's "From Moscow and Lenin-grad. Experiences from the Jubilee of Soviet Union Academy of Sciences, June 15-30, 1945", with a comment on the situation in the USSR shortly after the end of the European War. "... expression for a vitality, a go-ahead spirit and an *in spite of everything!* that the rest of the world will observe and understand its significance. ... The present order may seem to us as strange as anything to our ideals about personal freedom... there exists out here... despite an idealism that is lacking or less prevalent in other peoples."

## **Notions on Race and Ethnic Stereotypes**

The concepts of race, primitive people and ethnic stereotypes are still used. *Ymer* 1943 includes a short essay by Gerd Enequist, "School geography and the citizens' education in economics". Enequist without further comments notes "Concerning Australia the working capacity of e.g. the Australian Negro, the White, and the Chinese are compared, and for North America the Indian, the White and the Negro." *Ymer* 1944 includes an essay by Ragnar Numelin, "Peace rituals and peace symbols among primitive peoples." In *Geografiska Annaler*, Vol. 26 (1944, 399–402), C.E. Nordenskjöld reviews *The Swedes and the Swedish Settlements in North America* by Helge Nelson (1943): "Professor Helge Nelson, the foremost authority on the Swedish race in North America. ...A characteristic feature of the Swedish-Americans is that, if they marry non-Swedes, they generally mate with cognate races, particularly Scandinavians ...Linguistically, the Swedish race also includes Swedish-speaking Finns."

## **Debate on the scope of geography**

Beginning in 1942, there was a sudden upsurge of discussion on the place and scope of geography in Sweden. While mainly concentrating on the role of human geography in general, it also touched on the inclusion of contemporary circumstances and the role of political geography in its coverage. The discourse was started in *SGÅ* 1942 by William William-Olsson, in an essay with the headline "Geography, its aims and methods", who started his intro-

duction with a statement that the public debate on geography has been absent after Sten De Geer's "sharply chiselled essay" "On the Definition, Method and Classification of Geography", published in *Geografiska Annaler* in 1923 (William-Olsson, 1942, De Geer, 1923). William-Olsson refers to Richard Hartshorne's "The Nature of Geography", published in 1939. The SGÅ article includes a figure translated from Hartshorne's work, showing "The position of geography in relation to systematic sciences", including among systematic sciences *Rasbiologi* [Racial biology] with its spatial interpretation as *Rasernas geografi* [geography of the races] and under Political Science its counterpart in Political Geography. William-Olsson's discussion is on the relation between the systematic and the spatial aspects, and he does not directly address the subjects mentioned in the figure. But in the essay he asks: "Why do the young Swedish geographers, when not dealing with physical geography, so overwhelmingly deal with the geography of times gone by?" His paper is a plaidoyer for including humanistic and social science aspects into the scope of geography. His article is commented by political scientist Edvard Thörnqvist in an article in *Svenska Dagbladet* in December 1942 commemorating the death of Rudolf Kjellén in 1922. Thörnqvist deplores the poor status of political geography in Swedish schools, refers to the misuse by German geopoliticians of Kjellén's theses and points out that even the young docent William-Olsson while advocating social science in the use for planning omits the "weight and value" of including research and teaching of political geography. In another es-

say in SGÅ 1942, 497–506, Professor Filip Hjulström discusses the teaching of geography in the high schools. Supporting a strengthening of economic geography, he points out that a better knowledge of geography among young people will promote the judgement also in the political debate: "Exact knowledge may confute the unreliability e.g. of a superficial geopolitics that under the disguise of science has become a tool in political propaganda". Helge Nelson, in an article on "Geography as a science – A survey of its development until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" in SGÅ 1944 asserts that a discussion on the scope of the subject as a science is common in Germany, but not in Sweden. His paper from 1916 was never printed until now, because of disinterest among his peers. The lack of social science aspects in both the teaching and academic study of geography is also criticised in an essay by David Hannerberg in the 1944 December issue of *Geografiska Notiser*.

The only geographer to directly address the position of political geography is John Frödin who in *Ymer* 1945 discusses a committee proposal to establish a Social Science Research Council. Criticizing the proposal, he suggests two additional geographical sub-disciplines to be regarded, social geography and political geography. Referring to Hannerberg's article in the first case, he in the second sees the term political geography as badly chosen, but in his definition of the "field" he very much relies on Thörnqvist's discussion in 1942, in turn very much based on Kjellén's own definitions. The lack of good quality political geography is not a lack of interest but a lack of preconditions. Citing Thörnqvist

1942, he concludes that the political geography produced in Sweden is poorer in quality than even in quantity.

### **Comments on the changing response to nazi ideology**

A scrutiny of *Geografiska Annaler*, *Ymer* and *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* 1933–1945 shows that, with a few remarkable exceptions, the geopolitical events in the near neighbourhood were rarely the focus in the journals and yearbooks. *Ymer* had a wider scope, but with some minor exceptions it is only Ahlmann's report from the Soviet Union in June 1945 that directly refers to world events, with his clearly reserved admiration of the idealism of the Soviet people, but the paper is mainly a neutral report on the position of academic geography in the country. Friberg's article in *Ymer* 1938 suggests an admiration of Adolf Hitler who resolutely enforces the motorway plans. In the speech by the strongly pro-Nazi anthropologist explorer Count Eric von Rosen to honour the awarding of the Hedin medal to Field Marshall Mannerheim on Vega Day, April 24, 1941, there is nothing of Nazi influences, the scientific production is the reason for the award, only in one sentence there is a reference to his defence of Scandinavians and Finns against the enemy.

The minutes of the SSAG published in *Ymer* contain two references to geopolitical lectures held at the Society's ordinary meetings in Stockholm, in March 1943 by Edvard Thernmænius, *Varför inte en politisk geografi?* [Why not a political geography] and in September 1944 by Ivar Högbom, *Politiska gränser*, [Political

boundaries], but remarkably none of them was published by *Ymer*.

*Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* shows a partly different picture. Sven Björnsson, 1905–1950, *docent* in geography, around 1940 also wrote articles in the journal *Tidskriften Riksföreningen Sverige-Tyskland* (see above) and he became member of the board of the organization in March 1941 (Oredsson, 1996, 113–115). Björnsson's geopolitical essays from 1938–40 contain a number of formal statements about the territorial expansion of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In both cases, but particularly the German one, the explaining background is mentioned as the land losses after World War I. The exception from a "neutral" explanation is the clearly evaluating sentence which "normalised" Nazi Germany's expansion during 1938: "To this no remark can with reason be made, as it refers to areas that were also historically, economically and culturally related to the German realm." Concerning the expansion in 1939 Björnsson only remarks, "In 1939 the exertion of power to the greatest extent areas with predominantly foreign ethnic element, and Germany has thus ceased to be a nation state." The assault on Poland is referred to as "the Polish war" reflecting an avoidance of the guilt of the German perpetrator. The occupation of the remains of Czechoslovakia is only mentioned indirectly, and Slovakia is referred to as an independent state, "protected" by Germany. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the partition of Poland, Björnsson informs about the balance of production of the gained territories the victors will get. Without any sign of causal reasoning he writes: "Since the autumn of 1939 there were Russian troops

stationed in the Baltic States and in June 1940 the parliaments in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania decided that these states should be annexed to the Soviet Union”, omitting the fact that these decisions were made after illegal pressures and fake referendums. If any emotion can be read in Björnsson’s text, it is a regret of the territorial losses of Finland and Romania. After 1940, there are no more geopolitical articles by Björnsson in the *SGÅ* except for his very positive review of Ahlmann’s book on Norway in 1943, possibly indicating a change of world view. (Björnsson wrote the entry on geopolitics “Geopolitik”, for the *Svensk Uppslagsbok*, [Swedish Encyclopedia], Malmö, 1950, condemning the Haushofer school as “quasi-scientific”.) Articles by Stålberg in 1940 on Soviet maps and Wieselgren 1943 on the Estonian Swedes show a critical attitude towards the Soviet and Nazi German regimes.

The reviews contain interesting nuances. In *Geografiska Annaler* 1935 a German professor is allowed to write a – fairly critical – review of a German geopolitical anthology, but he does not seem to attack the Nazi intimations but formal imbalances and details. Siegfried Passarge’s ethnically (or racially) coloured *Landschaftskunde* is heavily criticized by Torsten Ekström in 1933, and next year Ekström criticizes Otto Maull for German ethnocentrism. An even clearer repudiation of new German geography is done by Ivar Moberg, and reviewers Ragnar Jirlow, Sigurdur Thorarinsson and Hans W: son Ahlmann make clear statements against Nazi and racist tendencies in the German publications. The reviews in *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* are less outspoken politically, but

Grundström’s review 1939 of Pahl’s book only gives a weak but cautious reservation. Looking at the time aspect, the period 1933–1937 shows a continued, but declining coverage of German scholarship, but with an astonishing sharp critique of the tendencies towards a Nazi discourse, especially from the Stockholm-based *Ymer* and *Geografiska Annaler*, often written by Hans W: son Ahlmann and his doctoral students Ekström and Moberg. At the same time as the beginning of German (and Soviet) geopolitical advances in 1938, the coverage of German publications ceases, but two geographers stick out as accepting, even admiring the Nazi German political and geopolitical world view: Friberg in his *Ymer* presentation of der Führer’s Autobahn, and particularly Björnsson in three geopolitical overviews in *SGÅ*, 1938–40.

On the whole, *SGÅ* tends to present articles and reviews more in favour of a German view. After 1942 reviews are increasingly covering only publications in Swedish (some of which from Finland, reflecting its volatile geopolitical situation), Björnsson favourably reviews Ahlmann’s book on Norway, and Wieselgren while strongly condemning the Soviet take-over of Estonia also mentions German atrocities. Even in this period, book reviews and articles in both *Ymer* and *SGÅ* may contain sentences on race and primitive peoples that may not be acceptable today (see below).

### **A Note on the Discourse and Wording on Race**

The discourse of the time contains a semantic vocabulary that today might be recognized as racist. It was a time when the

concept of race had a different and *not always* evaluative and pejorative connotation.

In the Ymer appendix book on Norrland the nomad inspector Calleberg comments on the alleged lack of beauty of the "Lapps" showing a picture of a nice girl to prove the opposite, but also defends their intellectual capacity – "as intelligent as others". Professor Henschen, an ambivalent pro-Nazi with Jewish relatives, mentions three races in northern Sweden, including people of mixed breed. Nordenskjöld in his English review uses the word race to define the Swedes, and Jonasson in *SGÅ* 1942 makes a distinction between Swedes and people "from the outside", Finns and "Lapps", people that are in reality autochthonous to northern Sweden. He also makes a statistical distinction of Finns, Lapps and Jews, with the strange (dis-)qualification "if they are not Swedish-speaking". Numelin in several articles divide people into primitive and developed, and Gerd Enequist, in an article about school geography, writes rather naively about the working capacity of different "races". The well-known racist Bertil Lundman is reviewed by Jönsson and Enequist with only minor remarks, but these publications by him may not contain any evaluative racism.

Frödin's article on Africa is a deviant contribution in many ways, not only by his choice of subject, but primarily in his strong belief in the potential of the indigenous population. He refers the first penetration by the "white race" to the Arabs and mentions that the slave trade deprived the black population of development. Comparing "Negro" and colonial cultivation he sees advantages of both depending on the

setting, but he does not question colonialism itself, except for the reference to Gudmund Hatt's strong condemnation of 1938 of English South Rhodesia's extremely discriminating (read: racist) settlement policies.

## Conclusion

Already from the early years of Nazi rule, Swedish geographers were clear in their condemnation of the increasing regimentation and decreasing scholarliness of German academic writing, and rather soon the reviews of German geography disappeared from Swedish publications. But this also meant that the scrutiny of the politicized German geography and geopolitics was neglected. It takes 9 years from Hitler's regimentation (*Gleichschaltung*) and 19 years from De Geer's discussion of the definition of Geography for a debate on the lacunae in the coverage of spatial phenomena, especially social and political geography to emerge. The most remarkable finding concerning Swedish geography at of time of dictatorial regimes, wars and occupations surrounding the neutral Swedish realm, was however the almost total absence of political geography from the publications (Lundén 1986.)

In human geography, historical regional geography of the "*Landschaft*" type, covering a one single time before 1900 was predominant for licentiate and doctoral dissertations, with the exception of some urban studies concentrating on domestic Swedish objects. The only Swedish geographer working with a wider spatial scope, both in his influences and his choice of objects, was Sten De Geer, who died in 1933.



As pointed out by William-Olsson and Thermænius in 1942, Swedish geography after De Geer's death more or less totally refrained from social and geopolitical aspects. Albrecht Haushofer, in his posthumous book asserts that the Swedish political geographer Kjellén did not have any following in Sweden, where only Sten De Geer is of geopolitical interest. (A. Haushofer, 1944, 17f). De Geer's early death put an end to a relationship with Estonian geographer Edgar Kant, later to become vice-chancellor of Tartu University during the German occupation, fleeing to Sweden in 1944, where he provided the impetus for the modernization of human geography. Only two Swedish scholars, none of them geographer, seem to have discussed the concept and development of geopolitics during the time covered. Political scientist Edvard Thermænius in 1937–38 (and 1942) points at the reasons why the geopolitics discourse in Sweden more or less died with Rudolf Kjellén: "They are obviously of geopolitical nature: Sweden has no geopolitical aspirations, so the subject is not important at home". He is thus confirming Kjellén who denied any reasons for irredentist claims by Sweden (Lundén, 2021, 262–265). Historian Lydia Wahlström in an essay published in 1941 discussed the discursive background to the *Lebensraum* theory and Germany's conquest in an excellent survey, giving a critical but balanced view of Ratzel and Kjellén and the reasons for their appropriation by Karl Haushofer and – with important limitations – by Nazi ideology.

As an answer to the original question: Resistance, subordination, or tergiversation,

one might say: All of it. The history of Swedish geography 1933–45 thus shows a general resistance to Nazi German geography, a few examples of accepting of Nazi geopolitics, but in general an almost total lack of addressing the geopolitical realities of the surrounding neighbourhood.

## Notes

1. In the case of reviews, comments and excerpts refer to the reviews, and not to the works reviewed. If an excerpt is in Swedish or German, the translation into English is mine.. Texts in English (mainly from *Geografiska Annaler*) are cited without changes.

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