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# Rudolf Kjellén: Nordic Biopolitics before the Welfare State

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**Abstract:** This article aims to contribute to the history of biopolitical thought through a more accurate understanding of the Swedish professor of political science Rudolf Kjellén considered both in his historical and political context. Kjellén coined the term 'biopolitics', as early as 1905, in a two-volume work entitled *The Great Powers*, and developed it even further in a 1916 book entitled *The State as a Form of Life*. Because of the organicist analogies deployed by Kjellén, his biopolitical theory of the state is considered as a form of 'vitalism' or 'organicism' in the contemporary literature on biopolitics. Based on a close examination of texts only available in Swedish (and, to some extent, German) I argue that this fails to account for Kjellén's argument for a strong state and his analysis of the rationality of state action in a multiplicity of areas of state intervention, including the guarding, refining and securing of the population stock. This reading brings Kjellén's concept of biopolitics significantly closer to the reality that the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault described, using the same concept, more than a half-century later. Kjellén's writings also foreshadow subsequent developments of keen interest for biopolitical study in a Nordic context, particularly the rise of the social democratic welfare state and the social engineering of the population material, starting in the 1930s.

**Keywords:** Biopolitics, Sweden, Rudolf Kjellén, the State, Law, Social Democracy, Radical Conservatism, Nationalism.

## Introduction

Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922) was a Swedish professor of political science, a public intellectual, a member of parliament and the co-originator of a radical conservative movement referred to as the 'New Right' [Unghögern]. The most apparent reason why Kjellén is an interesting character in the context of 'Nordic Biopolitics' is that he coined the term 'biopolitics', as early as 1905, in a two-volume work entitled *The Great Powers* [Stormakterna],<sup>1</sup> and developed it even further in a 1916 book entitled *The State as a Form of Life* [Staten som Lifform].<sup>2</sup> This was some seventy years before

1 Kjellén, 1905, p. 23.

2 Kjellén, 1916.

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the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault used the concept of 'biopolitics' when analysing a rearticulation of sovereign power in the second half of the eighteenth century through which the security and welfare of the population became the centre of gravity of politics.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito and German Foucault scholar Thomas Lemke have both picked up on Kjellén's early use of the concept of biopolitics. Because of the organicist analogies deployed by Kjellén, both theorists consider his biopolitical theory of the state to be a form of 'vitalism' or 'organicism'. This reading stays true to Kjellén's vehement anti-liberalism and is by no means unfounded. However, it misses Kjellén's argument for a strong state and his analysis of the rationality of state action in a multiplicity of areas of state intervention, including the guarding, refining and securing of the population stock. This brings Kjellén's concept of biopolitics significantly closer to the reality that Foucault described, using the same concept, more than a half-century later. Kjellén's writings also foreshadow subsequent developments of keen interest for biopolitical study in a Nordic context, particularly the rise of the social democratic welfare state and the social engineering of the population material, starting in the 1930s.

This article aims to contribute to the history of biopolitical thought through a more accurate understanding of Kjellén, considered both in his historical and political context. This includes a close examination of texts only available in Swedish and, to some extent, German. It also entails placing Kjellén in relation to the distinctive form of biopolitics that developed in the Nordic countries in the course of the twentieth century: a strong welfare state intervening in and integrating the whole of society.

The first part of this article considers the perception of Kjellén in the existing literature on biopolitics, particularly in the writings of Roberto Esposito and Thomas Lemke. I will argue that both fail to go further than Kjellén's deployment of an organicist analogy for the state and, thus, both leave out Kjellén's argument for a strong and interventionist state in inter alia questions of law, economics and social and population policy. The second part of this article opens with a brief biographical sketch and proceeds through a close reading of Kjellén's *The State as a Form of Life*. My ambition is to show how Esposito's and Lemke's accounts of Kjellén are incomplete and, thus, to improve our understanding of the place of Kjellén in the history of biopolitical thought. In the third part of the article, I will relate Kjellén's biopolitical theory of the state to early twentieth century political developments in Sweden, particularly the adoption of a strong and interventionist conception of the state by the Swedish Social Democratic Party [Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti] and the rise of the Swedish welfare state.

3 Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 2003; Foucault, 2007.

## Kjellén in the Literature on Biopolitics

In an incisive study of the history and different strands of biopolitical thought, Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito notes that Kjellén was the first to use the term.<sup>4</sup> Esposito argues that the concept emerges from Kjellén's 'vitalistic' conception of the state, a conception that is irreducible to constitutional theories of a liberal framework.<sup>5</sup> In such a conception, 'the political is nothing else but the continuation of nature at another level and therefore destined to incorporate and reproduce nature's original characteristics'.<sup>6</sup> Esposito further argues that a vitalistic conception of the state stands in sharp contrast or opposition to a Hobbesian conception, in which the state constitutes an artificial barrier in relation to nature and therefore serves to negate it.<sup>7</sup>

In his *Advanced Introduction to Biopolitics*, German theorist and Foucault scholar Thomas Lemke distinguishes between three ways of establishing a relationship between life and politics inherent in the concept of biopolitics. The first two approaches are 'Life as the *Basis* of Politics' and 'Life as the *Object* of Politics'. According to Lemke, both these approaches share the assumption that they take 'life' and 'politics' as isolated phenomena, and are, thus, unable to account for their relationality and historicity.<sup>8</sup> The third approach, the approach that Lemke associates with Michel Foucault, does precisely this – among other things, it takes account of the historicity and relationality of life and politics. It does this by considering how, at a certain point in time, life came to be dissociated and abstracted from its concrete physical bearers, and their biological features became measured and aggregated on the level of populations.<sup>9</sup> This is also intimately related to the rise of specific political knowledge and new disciplines, such as statistics, demography and epidemiology.

Lemke places Kjellén squarely in the category of 'Life as the *Basis* of Politics' and, in doing so, adopts a similar stance as Esposito. More particularly, Lemke understands Kjellén in the philosophical context of German *Lebensphilosophie* – with thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson – sharing the re-evaluation of 'life' and its adoption as a fundamental category and normative criterion of 'the healthy', 'the good' and 'the true', as opposed to the 'dead', the 'petrified', the 'abstract', the 'cold' or the soulless 'spirit'.<sup>10</sup> Lemke states that this is a:

4 Esposito, 2008. p. 16.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. p. 17.

7 Ibid.

8 Lemke, 2011. p. 4.

9 Ibid. p. 9.

10 Ibid.

... concept [that] understand the state not as a legal construction whose unity and coherence is the result of individuals' acts of free will but as an original form of life, which precedes individuals and collectives and provides the institutional foundation for their activities. The basic assumption is that all social, political and legal bonds rest on a living whole, which embodies the genuine and the eternal, the healthy and the valuable. The reference to 'life' serves here both as a mythic starting point and as a normative guideline.<sup>11</sup>

I find the categorisation of Kjellén's biopolitics as simply a form of 'vitalism' (Esposito) in which *life constitutes the basis of politics* (Lemke) to be simplistic. This understanding is based on Kjellén's adoption of an exaggerated organicist analogy for the state, an analogy that was common at the time and – as pointed out by Carl Schmitt in a 1925 appreciative review of the German edition of Kjellén's *The State as a Form of Life* – may be understood to serve the strategic purpose of breathing new life into the great myth of the state.<sup>12</sup> However, behind that exaggerated analogy there is an attempt to, at once, analyse and promote the comprehensive investment of the state in society and the rationality that can be found in a composite field of state intervention on questions of law, the economy, social welfare and, not least, population policy. In order to better understand that effort, I will first give a brief biographical sketch of Kjellén and then turn to a close reading of Kjellén's *The State as a Form of Life*.

## Rudolf Kjellén: Conservative, Anti-liberal, Nationalist

Rudolf Kjellén formed part of a group of conservative university professors whose contributions to public discourse as teachers, researchers, politicians and public intellectuals were significant in promoting a conservative and nationalist agenda in Swedish politics in the early twentieth century. While this suggests a predominantly Swedish focus, Kjellén was widely versed in the history of political ideas and extensively referred to international, particularly German, debates. He also wrote an influential book on great power politics, and most of his scholarly work was translated into German shortly after its publication in Swedish.

The nineteenth century has been referred to as the 'age of liberalism' for the prevailing belief in the ability of the market to provide the greatest good to the greatest number and that the government should interfere as little as possible in order not to disturb its smooth functioning.<sup>13</sup> Kjellén was a vehement anti-liberal and took a firm stance against both economic liberalism and, perhaps even more so, to German *Rechtsstaat* conceptions of the state because of its formalism and its restriction of state

11 Ibid. p. 10.

12 Schmitt, 1925; cf. Schmitt 1988.

13 Berman, 2006. p. 12; Lagergren, 1999. p. 127.

action to the maintenance of the legal order. He did so at a time in which Swedish society went through dramatic structural and political changes: industrialisation, urbanisation, emigration, the disintegration of the union between Norway and Sweden and the looming questions of democratic participation of an increasingly organised and politically influential working class.<sup>14</sup>

By positioning himself against both liberals, socialists and old-fashioned reactionaries, Kjellén adopted a radical conservative stance.<sup>15</sup> This conservatism did not rest content with what was. Instead, it was committed to pursuing conservative and nationalist goals by way of state reforms:

We believe that national values and the rights of unborn generations is endangered if the organising, restraining and regulating hand of the state does not make itself visible to private interests and society at large. In this sense, we are truly spokesmen for the principle of the state.<sup>16</sup>

Kjellén was impressed by left-wing Norwegian anti-Swedish groups in the struggle over the union between Sweden and Norway for their nationalism.<sup>17</sup> He also admired the social cohesive elements of Swedish Social Democracy, wishing only that its class solidarity would be extended to the nation, creating what he, before the adoption of this term by the Nazi Party in Germany, termed ‘national socialism’.<sup>18</sup>

Further, Kjellén’s conservatism was patriarchal with authoritarian inclinations. He claimed that, to do itself justice, the Swedish People need a strong leader.<sup>19</sup> In his mind, women were even further away from common suffrage than men,<sup>20</sup> and Kjellén perceived liberalism as an emasculation of politics.<sup>21</sup> His own conception of politics, and indeed of the state, was, accordingly, explicitly gendered male.<sup>22</sup>

## The State as a Form of Life

*The State as a Form of Life* was published in Swedish in 1916 and soon thereafter in German under the title *Der Staat als Lebensform*. The book, which Kjellén himself held

14 Hall, 2000. p. 213.

15 Rosenblad & Söderholm, 2005. pp. 125, 24-47.

16 “Vi tro, att de nationella värdena och ofödda generationers rätt löpa stor fara, om icke statens ordnande, reglerande och stärfjande hand griper in i samtidens privata intresseflätning. På denna punkt framstå vi alltså som den statliga principens målsmän” Kjellén, 1906. pp. 36-37.

17 Elvander, 1975.

18 Edström, 2014. p. 12; Elvander, 1956. pp. 15-41.

19 Kjellén, 1906. p. 79.

20 Kjellén, 1908. p. 32.

21 Kjellén, 1906. pp. 45, 46.

22 Lagergren, 1999. pp. 109-111.

as his most important work, aims to provide an empirically grounded theory or a positive account of the state.<sup>23</sup> Kjellén saw the need for such an account in the expansion of state powers way beyond the confines of the liberal state. Kjellén held that political science – up until that point seized with questions of public law – needed to update its tasks, purpose and concepts in order to be able to analyse the ever more expansive state actions in an ever increasing number of policy areas.<sup>24</sup>

Patrik Hall summarises Kjellén's thinking in the following way:

More and more the state intervenes in society's and the citizen's daily lives. The conception of the liberals – according to which the state is but a passive legal order – where self-sufficient individuals take care of the progressive labour on the market, is, according to Kjellén, an unrealistic image of the work actually performed by the state. In reality, the state takes a leading role in questions of the economy, the exploitation of national resources, in questions of infrastructure but also in questions of culture. The state regulates the labour market, as well as social life. The state is a businessman, a progressive actor, indeed, the driving force in the development of society. It is, first and foremost, an organisation of power, more so than a legal order.<sup>25</sup>

Kjellén contrasts the prevailing study of 'state ideals' and 'juridical structures' with this study of the 'concrete reality' of the state. To learn about the reality of the state, he said: 'we need do nothing more than look into its common practices and the prevailing ideas around us. The state must, through its practices, reveal its true nature'.<sup>26</sup> From this, we understand not only that the type of analyses of the state that Kjellén performs is empirically oriented, but that he also takes an interest in the way in which the problem of government is formulated not only by public authorities but also in public discourse. Parting with the prevailing focus on questions of law and legitimacy, Kjellén argues that what should be studied is the practical rationality of politics, the actual and potential resources for the exercise of government.<sup>27</sup>

Kjellén's description of this political reality of the state is divided into five different spheres. Taken together he refers to this reality as 'biopolitical'. For this reason it is important to have a broader look at *The State as a Form of Life*, the various dimensions

23 Kjellén, 1916 p. V.

24 Elvander, 1961. p. 257.

25 "Mer och mer intervenerar den svenska staten i samhällets och medborgarnas dagliga liv. Liberalernas uppfattning av staten som en passiv rättsorganisation, där de självständiga individerna sköter det progressiva arbetet på marknaden, är enligt Kjellén en orealistisk bild av hur staten egentligen fungerar. Staten tar i själva verket ledningen i nationalekonomiska frågor, i exploateringen av naturresurser, i uppbyggnaden av infrastruktur, i kulturella frågor. Den reglerar arbetsmarknaden och det sociala livet. Staten är själv en affärsman, en progressiv aktör, i själva verket den drivande kraften i samhällsutvecklingen. Och den är framför allt en *maktorganisation*, mer än en *rättsorganisation*." Hall, 2000. p. 206.

26 Kjellén, 1916. p. 9.

27 Björk, 2014. p. 305.

of the state that it seeks to conceptualise and what Kjellén was trying to achieve with this book.

Kjellén has one adversary in particular in *The State as a Form of Life*. Because of his association with the 'New Right' movement, you might expect it to be socialism. However, this is not the case. Kjellén's adversary in this book is a liberal conception of the state, in which the state is thought of in terms of *Rechtsstaat* or the rule of law state.<sup>28</sup> According to Kjellén, such thinking reduces the state to a simple 'juridical-administrative fact', a minimalist state whose duties are fulfilled as soon as the law has been asserted.<sup>29</sup> In making this claim, Kjellén refers not only to the most prominent legal theorists of the time, but also to Manchester School Liberalism. He also points to the origins of this conception in John Locke and Immanuel Kant.<sup>30</sup> Parting with this liberal, juristic conception, Kjellén emphatically claims: 'the state is greater than its constitution'.<sup>31</sup>

It should be mentioned in this context that Kjellén's project to push back a liberal conception of the state includes its prominence in academia, particularly in the political sciences. Kjellén charges the political science of the time with being blinded by liberal ideology and thus having limited itself to juridical or formal aspects of the state, or, in other words, with having become, and this is meant as a pejorative, a kind of 'legal science'.<sup>32</sup> He also wanted to educate a new cadre of public servants that would replace lawyers in the public administration of the state.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, Kjellén understood well that public administration is the pursuit of politics by other means (to use Bo Rothstein's travesty of Carl von Clausewitz), and that if you want to change the politics of the state you need to change the way the state is administrated.<sup>34</sup>

Far beyond the maintenance of the legal order, the modern state is also interested in the material well being of its constituents, but also in questions as far removed from the legal order as education and culture:

In fact, there is an abundance of cases in which the state approaches the individual in word and deed, stretching all the way to financial support: in housing, the building of roads, vocational training, to mention but a few tasks on the agenda of the modern state. It might come as a surprise that the state shows its interest for the individual even without any connection whatsoever with formal law or the legal order. And this does not end with the material well being of individuals. By assuming responsibility for the education of the people at all levels, the state also assumes responsibility

28 Kjellén, 1916 pp. 4-7.

29 Ibid. p. 6.

30 Ibid. p. 4.

31 Ibid. p. 160.

32 Ibid. p. 7.

33 Ibid. pp. 6-7.

34 Rothstein, 1996. p. 11.



for culture in a broad sense. In fact, the entire cultural sphere is soon within its reach, a far stretch from the simple task of maintaining the legal order.<sup>35</sup>

In keeping with this insight, Kjellén claims that ‘the state is invested in the well-being of the citizens and the national project in its entirety’.<sup>36</sup>

This investment in the population and the national project takes five different forms: *regimentspolitics* (or constitutional and administrative law), *geopolitics*, *ethnopolitics*, *political economy* and *sociopolitics*.<sup>37</sup> The primacy of politics in Kjellén’s thinking is noticeable by the addition of ‘politics’ to areas that, in liberal theory, are often thought of as distinct from the political sphere, such as the law, the economy and, of course, ‘society’.<sup>38</sup>

From what was said earlier about the state being greater than its constitution, we understand that the rule of law is not an end in itself for Kjellén. In the areas of regimentspolitics (or constitutional and administrative law), political expediency, utility and necessity are the guiding principles.<sup>39</sup> ‘The state is primarily a sphere of interests and power, not a sphere of law.’<sup>40</sup> In questions of international relations and international law, Kjellén is very much in tune with the realism of the time.<sup>41</sup> He argues that the relative weakness of law in relation to state interest and power is evident in international relations.<sup>42</sup> However, he also claims that while the state usually reveals itself as a creature of law in domestic politics, occasionally, state interests and power become sufficiently acute so as to cause the ‘destruction of law’ [spränga rätten].<sup>43</sup> No wonder that Carl Schmitt, one of the foremost critics of the liberal *Rechtsstaat* and theorist of the exception and the normal state in law, wrote a favourable review of the

35 “I Självfva verket vimlar det omkring oss af fall, där staten går individen tillhanda med råd och dåd, ända till penninghjälp: vid bildande af egna hem, utdikning av mossar, anläggning af vägar, yrkesutbildning genom resor, för att här taga några exempel på måfå ur den moderna statens dagordning. Det måste frappa, att staten här visar sig intresserad för individens gärning utan att något sammanhang längre kan påvisas med den formella rätten eller samsfundsordningen. Och detta intresse stannar ingalunda vid individens materiella välgång. Genom att (helt eller delvis) öfvertaga folkuppfostran i alla instanser framträder staten med stora andliga kulturintressen. Hela kulturlifvet visar sig till sist falla inom dess horisont, lång bortom rättens gränser.” Kjellén, 1916. p. 11.

36 “intresse för medborgarens välbefinnande och det nationella arbetet i hela dess vidd”. Ibid. pp. 11-12.

37 Ibid. pp. 36-37.

38 Lagergren, 1999. p. 96 f.

39 Kjellén, 1916. p. 34.

40 “Staten är primärt en intresse- och maktssfär och icke en rättssfär” Ibid. p. 175.

41 Falkemark, 2014.

42 Kjellén, 1916. pp. 25-26, 162-164.

43 Ibid. p. 25.

fourth German edition of *Der Staat als Lebensform*, praising the book for its anti-liberalism.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of geopolitics, more than anything else, has earned Kjellén a place in the history of the social sciences. For not only has geopolitics become part of the doxa of political science, particularly international relations, but it is also widely used in the public discourse about peace and war and international affairs more generally. Kjellén understands geopolitics as the study of the state as a spatial phenomenon, i.e. as territory, realm or empire.<sup>45</sup> Kjellén stresses that while other entities – such as the church, companies or labour unions – may exercise significant powers and even expand across the world, without the necessary connection to its own territory they cannot gain the form and stature of the state.<sup>46</sup>

There is also the question of the economy, the state as a household or political economy. What is absolutely fundamental for the perspective on the economy provided by Kjellén is that he reverses the liberal understanding of states serving markets and points to how commerce can serve the state and to the state as a commercial actor. Further, instead of providing universally applicable laws Kjellén stresses the individuality of states in terms of the policies pursued, depending on if the state is a gross exporting or a gross importing country, if it is an agrarian or industrialised country and the extent and variety of natural resources etc. Although he cautions against making it a 'fetish' that blinds against the significance of economical exchange between peoples, Kjellén prefers autarky and delimited markets rather than free trade on a world market, and notices with approval how protectionism is currently gaining ground against nineteenth century free trade 'cosmopolitanism'.<sup>47</sup>

The question of the state as society or sociopolitics concerns the social forces relative to the state.<sup>48</sup> The notion of 'sociopolitics' constitutes a deliberate parting with a long tradition of political thinking making a distinction between society and the state (Kjellén mentions Aristotle's *Koinonia* and *polis*, Cicero's *societas* and *civitas*, Rousseau's *volonté de tous* and *volonté generale* etc.).<sup>49</sup> Kjellén recognises that economic relations, to a large degree, determine sociopolitics: opposition between producers and consumers, agrarian and industrial groups, protectionists and proponents of free trade, and, more generally, between capital and labour. He can appreciate that these 'associations' may conceive of the state as the ultimate price for their struggle, to be used for partisan interests. Against such co-option, the state must seek to further the common, 'public'

44 Schmitt, 1925.

45 Kjellén, 1916 p. 39.

46 Kjellén, 1916. pp. 40-41. See also Lundén, 2014.

47 Kjellén, 1916. pp. 132-134.

48 Ibid. p. 137.

49 Ibid.

interest and avoid taking sides, other than when objective national interests so demand.<sup>50</sup>

Kjellén sees in Bismarck's social state a prophylactic measure against civil unrest. This includes social legislation such as retirement insurance, safety- and work environment legislation but also mediation in cases of conflict between industry and labour. However, he also stresses that tensions in society and the use of general strike and sabotage may force the state to adopt similar means for securing the legal order as when an external enemy gather at its borders, including the use of armed forces.

Ethnopolitics has two sides. First, it concerns the question of the nation and its relationship to the state. It serves to be mentioned that Kjellén denounces the idea of a nation based on race, referring to the 1882 study of the nation by Ernest Renan *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* and by looking at the decidedly mixed racial character of all states.<sup>51</sup>

... wherever we look and the further we pursue this project, the more we get lost in a disarray of human groups, mixed with each other to such a high extent that uncountable variants and crossovers emerge instead of the clear types that the genealogical hypothesis presuppose. There is no use trying to measure the extent of the crossing of human groups, but simply affirm as a scientific – but today also public – truth that ancestry is insufficient as far as accounting for the nation.<sup>52</sup>

Kjellén recognises the importance of language, psychology and cultural types, and settles in particular for a 'healthy' self-affirmation as a crucial feature of the nation. The nation is less interested in truth and right and more interested in itself and what belongs to it.<sup>53</sup> The nation is conditioned by its subjective understanding of its characteristics, its internal belonging and its external separation.<sup>54</sup>

Ethnopolitics has a second side that makes it, along with geopolitics, the 'natural aspect' of the state. This is demography or the question of the population stock.<sup>55</sup> Kjellén emphasises that, as part of the 'natural side' of the state, ethnopolitics has a rather fundamental affect on politics. From Kjellén's writings on the subject, it is clear

50 Ibid. p. 145 f.

51 Renan, 2010.

52 "Således, hvart vi se, och ju djupare vi se, desto mera förlorar sig blicket i ett virrvarr av människogrupper, blandande sig med hvarandra i större eller mindre intensitet, så att oräkneliga varianter och öfvergångar uppstå i stället för de rena färgerna, som den genealogiska hypotesen synes förutsätta. Vi syssla icke med att uppmäta procenthalten i dessa blandningar; vi endast fastslå som ett vetenskapligt och numera allmänt erkänt resultat, att den genealogiska synpunkten icke räcker att lösa nationens gåta." Kjellén, 1916. p. 88.

53 Ibid. p. 96.

54 Ibid. p. 102.

55 Ibid. p. 77.

that this is the case because ethnopolitics institutes the political subject of the population conceived not as a legal subject but as aggregated biological life.

Kjellén stresses that 'purely physical changes in the constitution of the population' – through, for example, emigration and nativity rates – is a key concern and has an imperative influence on both domestic and foreign policy. He relates, in particular, to debates on under- and overpopulation, and discusses several ways in which the state can act to deal with the former in particular. An associate to Kjellén, Gustav Sundbärg, headed the 1907-1913 government investigation into emigration from Sweden, and they were both members of the National Association against Emigration [Nationalföreningen mot emigration]. Kjellén stresses that an increasing population is always a sign of strength and a decreasing population a sign of bad health.<sup>56</sup>

While making a link to political economy in providing incentives for population growth, Kjellén makes a link to geopolitics with regard to the space that the population inhabits. He finds in this perspective an explanation for the imperial endeavours of Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, Japan and Italy. Remarkably, Kjellén maintains that their actions are placed under a 'law of necessity' that forces them to reach outside of their territories to cater for the needs of their constituents.<sup>57</sup> The same is not true for the colonies of France, the United States of America in the Philippines and Russia in Europe. This is because these are all peoples who, like Sweden, have yet to fill the space of their respective polities and therefore ought to engage in internal colonisation instead.<sup>58</sup> In these considerations, it is clear that Kjellén is influenced by German geographer Friedrich Ratzel's concept of 'Lebensraum',<sup>59</sup> and the German general and geographer Karl Haushofer would later build on both Ratzel and Kjellén in a body of work legitimising Germany's Third Reich expansionist strategies.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to see that Kjellén keeps the different elements of regimental politics, geopolitics, political economy, sociopolitics and ethnopolitics apart, strictly for heuristic reasons. In reality, however, they are all interconnected or mutually constitutive. If we study these elements in their interconnectedness, we are, according to Kjellén, able to grasp the true nature of the state, a reality that Kjellén refers to as biopolitical.

In the next section, I turn to consider Kjellén in the context of *national* political developments, particularly the subsequent social democratic embrace of a conception of a strong and interventionist state not unlike that propagated by Kjellén.

56 Ibid. p. 122.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Abrahamsson, 2013. pp. 37-44.

60 Elvander, 1956. pp. 22-23.

## Kjellén and the Dawn of the Social Democratic Welfare State

In *Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century*, Sheri Berman writes the following about political developments shortly after Kjellén's death:

... although obviously differing in critical ways, fascism, national socialism and social democracy had important similarities that have not been fully appreciated. They all embraced the primacy of politics and touted their desire to use political power to reshape society and the economy. They all appealed to communal solidarity and the collective good. They all built modern, mass political organizations and presented themselves as 'people's parties'. And they both adopted a middle ground with regard to capitalism – neither hoping for its demise like Marxists nor worshipping it uncritically like many liberals, but seeking a 'third way' based on the belief that the state could and should control markets without destroying them.<sup>61</sup>

There has been some speculation about where Kjellén would have positioned himself in relation to the political developments described by Berman.<sup>62</sup> What is certain though is that Kjellén was a keen proponent of the basic principles that Berman identifies as the link between fascism, national socialism and social democracy. Indeed, when Berman turns to what she refers to as the 'Swedish exception' – the dawn of the welfare state (as opposed to fascism or national socialism) – she analyses transnational socialist revisionist debates and developments within the Social Democratic Party, but also debates between the right and left on the role of the state, including key actors such as Rudolf Kjellén and the leaders of the Social Democratic Party at the time.<sup>63</sup> The argument is not that Kjellén caused or inspired the Social Democratic Party's shift from the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism, class struggle and state-scepticism, to a strong state, cross-class cooperation and the primacy of politics – all key components for the 'Swedish exception' – however, he did most certainly have a role in the discourses and the political environment in which these changes would take place.

What brings Kjellén and early twentieth century Swedish social democracy together is the role of the state in dealing with a rapidly developing industrial-capitalist society. We get a sense of that commonality in the mutual interest in an active population policy, state-initiated social policies, fighting liberal legislation protecting private property as far as the exploitation of natural resources are concerned (particularly in the northern parts of Sweden), the development of heavy industry and a more effec-

61 Berman, 2006. pp. 16-17.

62 Elvander, 1956; Lewin, 2014.

63 Berman, 2006 pp. 152-176.

tive agricultural industry. In fact, these commonalities were something that both Kjellén and Hjalmar Branting acknowledged at the time.<sup>64</sup>

In a book tracking Swedish nationalisms over six centuries, Patrik Hall describes a shift in the beginning of the twentieth century from a romantic and nostalgic nationalism, where Sweden's time as a great power played a significant role, to a very different kind of nationalism in which the state takes a new role as a leader and organiser of society. Rather than looking back at a glorious past, this nationalism looks to the future and seeks to achieve what is considered to be in the material interest of the people. Hall conceptualises this shift as one from 'cultural' to 'material' or 'integrative' nationalism, and considers Rudolf Kjellén to be an important forerunner.<sup>65</sup>

Kjellén was one of the earliest and ideologically most consistent proponents of state interventionism; of a state that leads the national development in all areas of the national home. Of course, the Social Democratic Party would not take Kjellén's political program onboard, but they would embrace this basic view on the state wholeheartedly.<sup>66</sup>

Analysing the basic *agreement* on the role of the state and the *disagreement* on the political program to be pursued, Hall alludes to a crucial concept for the social democratic welfare state: the People's Home [folkhemmet].

The right-wing origins of the concept of the People's Home are well documented and thoroughly analysed.<sup>67</sup> Although the concept was originally introduced in Swedish domestic politics by Alfred Peterson from the Agrarian Party [Bondeförbundet],<sup>68</sup> and had also been utilised by Carl Gustaf Ekman from the Liberal Party,<sup>69</sup> the concept was primarily associated with Rudolf Kjellén.<sup>70</sup> Kjellén had referred to this concept in a 1912 debate with the Social Democratic Party leader Hjalmar Branting. He used it in that context to question the Social Democratic Party's loyalty to the nation because of its internationalism.<sup>71</sup> Further, Kjellén saw in the Social Democratic Party's class-based analysis and policy proposals a class egotism that was harmful for the broader solidarity with the nation.<sup>72</sup>

64 Hall, 2000. p. 209.

65 Ibid. p. 210.

66 "Kjellén var också en av de tidigaste och ideologiskt mest konsekventa företrädarna av statsinterventionism; av en stat som leder hela den nationella utvecklingen i samtliga delar av det nationella 'huset'" Ibid. p. 261.

67 Ibid.

68 Hallberg & Jonsson, 1993; Hallberg & Jonsson, 1994; Lagergren, 1999; Dahlqvist, 2002; Björck, 2011; Edström, 2014.

69 Hallberg & Jonsson, 1993. p. 17.

70 Björck, 2011.

71 Hallberg & Jonsson, 1993 pp. 17-18.

72 Berman, 2006. p. 164.

When Branting's predecessor as the chairman of the Social Democratic Party Per-Albin Hansson subsequently took up this concept, he was in fact addressing this precise allegation. He stated: '... we have often been called unpatriotic. But I say: there is no more patriotic party than [the Social Democratic Party] since the most patriotic act is to create a land in which everyone feels at home'.<sup>73</sup> Mats Dahlgvist argues that the contest between the right and the left over the concept of the People's Home forms part of a struggle to appropriate and redefine a key political concept. Per-Albin Hansson used the concept of the People's Home to counter allegations of disloyalty to the nation from the right and, at the same time, to change the Social Democratic Party from a class-based party to a people's party.<sup>74</sup> Such a stance had a long history in the Social Democratic Party. Indeed, the Social Democratic Party had favoured a relatively mild view of class conflict from the outset.<sup>75</sup> Per-Albin Hansson's appropriation of the People's Home concept did have its internal critics among the left in the party,<sup>76</sup> but Hansson would insist on considering the Swedes first as citizens and only secondarily as workers or bourgeoisie.<sup>77</sup>

The implicit integrative nationalism of the concept of the People's Home worked to the advantage of the Social Democratic Party in its shift from a class-based to a people's party, but Dahlgvist rightly stresses the tremendous differences between Kjellén and the Social Democratic Party with regard to what the concept holds in the future for the inhabitants of the People's Home. While Kjellén pursued a conservative, nationalist agenda and used the concept to challenge the Social Democratic Party's internationalism and class solidarity, the Social Democratic Party appropriated the concept and redefined it to pursue an egalitarian agenda, the equal right to certain social standards.<sup>78</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

This has been an attempt to provide a more in-depth and contextual understanding of the place of Rudolf Kjellén in the history of biopolitical thought. Although I do not claim that Esposito's and Lemke's conclusions about Kjellén's 'vitalism' or 'organi-

73 "Man har ofta kallat oss socialdemokrater fosterlandslösa. Men jag säger: det finns intet mera fosterländskt parti än det socialdemokratiska, så sant som den största fosterländska gärningen är att så ordna vårt land att alla där känna sig ha sitt hem." Hansson quoted in Hallberg & Jonsson, 1994.

74 Ibid., Berman, 2006 p. 165.

75 Dahlgvist, 2002. p. 461.

76 Berman, 2006 p. 157.

77 Hallberg & Jonsson, 1993. pp. 78-79.

78 Edström, 2014. p. 34.

cism' are unfounded; Kjellén's analysis and promotion of the investment of the state in society and to the rationality that can be found in a composite field of state intervention in questions of law, the economy, social welfare and population policy, complicates the matter significantly. In fact, Kjellén's description of the ever-increasing distance between the question of the legitimacy of the state and its formal, juridical structure and the expansion of the state into an ever-increasing number of policy areas seems to mirror what Foucault later would analyse, in a significantly more critical genealogical fashion, as the governmentalisation of the state: the bringing under state control and rationalisation of governmental practices beyond the formal structures of sovereignty.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the 'natural side' of Kjellén's ethnopolitics is an attempt to capture and analyse the institution of the political subject of the population conceived not as a legal subject but as the aggregated biological life of the population.<sup>80</sup> This is not a conception of the relation between life and politics in which the one determines, or makes the other its object (as Lemke and Esposito seem to think), but, in fact, approximates what Foucault later would refer to as biopolitics.

Kjellén writes that 'the free will of the state is in many ways anchored in necessities in the ethnopolitical domain' and that the 'political freedom' of the state is framed by the question of the population stock [folkstock].<sup>81</sup> As a political scientist, Kjellén analysed its various parameters and rationality. As a member of parliament and a public intellectual, Kjellén gave the question of the securing, developing and fostering of the Swedish population stock significant attention.<sup>82</sup> This early investment of both science and politics into the question of the population is not only biopolitically significant in and of itself, but foreshadow the intensive social engineering of the Swedish population material that began in the 1930s.

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79 Foucault, 2007. p. 109.

80 Cf. Lemke, 2011. p. 4.

81 "Sålunda är statens fria vilja på mångfaldigt sätt förankrad i nödvändigheten äfven i dess etniska sida." Kjellén, 1916 p. 123.

82 Kjellén, 1908 pp. 35-37.



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