



Marketing Internationalism in an Era of Globalisation – The Swedish-South African Partnership Week, November 1999

By
Nikolas Glover

Abstract

The 'Swedish-South African Partnership Week' (SSAPW) was held across a number of cities in South Africa in November 1999. Involving a delegation of 800 Swedes and a program of more than 70 events, the purpose was to launch a new bilateral partnership. Funded by the Swedish foreign aid budget and billed as a national manifestation, the SSAPW is interpreted in this study as a staged performance through which social actors made sense of their nation's place in the international system. Seen from this perspective the SSAPW is analysed as an example of how the Swedish competition state staged globalisation as a national challenge and sought to adapt Swedish national identity accordingly. Specifically, I argue that it articulated a shift from the promotion of internationalist nationalism to what might be termed the ideal of 'entrepreneurial internationalism': from a national ideology centred on supporting Swedish popular movements working for solidarity with developing countries, to one promoting the creation of financially sustainable social partnerships within and across national boundaries. Fusing public diplomacy, development communication and export promotion, the SSAPW sought to educate the participating Swedes and Swedish corporations about their new relationship to each other and to the Global South in the post-Cold War world order.

Keywords: Swedish internationalism; Swedish-South African relations; Export promotion; Public diplomacy; Development communication; Partnership; Globalisation; Multinational corporations; Public relations

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In November 1999 the 'Swedish-South African Partnership Week' (SSAPW) was held across a number of cities in South Africa, with the purpose of launching a new bilateral partnership between the two countries. The Swedish delegation was spearheaded by Prime Minister Göran Persson and consisted of 800 Swedes: high-level ministers, diplomats, civil society representatives and business leaders. Over 70 events were included in the program in six different cities across South Africa. The national soccer teams played each other and cities were twinned. A binational committee was set up to support long-term cooperation, and government ministers signed an agreement on research collaboration. In Cape Town, over a thousand people participated in three days of workshops and seminars, and in Midrand, outside Johannesburg, over a hundred Swedish firms and organisations participated in an industrial trade show. As Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma, South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, quipped: "The Swedes haven't just sent their elites, they've sent the whole of Sweden" (*Dagens industri* [DI] 1999h).

The Swedish government evidently did consider the SSAPW to be a priority, allocating 25 million SEK from the foreign aid budget for the campaign (KU 2000:6). This was more than twice the 10 million Swedish kronor (SEK) it had contributed to Sweden's four month-long participation at the World Expo in Lisbon the previous year (Hammarström 1998:18). Previous accounts of this major investment have concentrated on two themes in particular. First, as much of the contemporary media coverage pointed out, it was directly linked to the fact that President Thabo Mbeki's government had just announced it was to purchase a total of 28 Gripen jet fighter aircraft produced in Sweden.¹ Part of the South African government's Strategic Arms Package, the agreement included a large offset-deal that promised major investment opportunities for Swedish firms. Wayne Coetzee, in his detailed study of the Gripen deal, has situated the SSAPW and its complex blend of aid objectives and trade interests in the context of Swedish-South African relations during the late 1990s (Coetzee 2018:111). The week has also been referred to in investigations into the allegations (later substantiated) of corruption in connection with the deal (Resare 2010). Secondly, a large share of the contemporaneous media reports and several official inquiries were dedicated to the embarrassing fiasco surrounding the promotion of a number of the pop concerts during the SSAPW. Ill-defined division of responsibilities within the organisation resulted in Swedish artists performing in front of empty arenas in South Africa. The debacle ultimately led to *Rikta Kommunikation* (hereafter Rikta), one of the largest firms in the Swedish PR industry, being forced to file for bankruptcy (Tyllström 2013:100-101).

Here, I deal with the SSAPW from a different angle, as a means of studying the historical intersection between public diplomacy, development communication

and practices of export promotion during the era of post-Cold War globalisation (Pamment & Wilkins 2018; Åkerlund 2018). Taking my cue from the organisers' description of the SSAPW as "a Swedish manifestation" (Rikta 1999b:3), I am specifically concerned with how that manifestation *addressed Swedish citizens* in the way it *engaged South African publics*. I would argue that it was no coincidence "the whole of Sweden" seemed to be represented. Inspired by Erik Ringmar (2012), I interpret the SSAPW as a staged performance through which social actors put their society's shared meaning into action and made sense of their nation's place in the international system. Applying his perspective, the SSAPW is seen as a social performance with "both [a] pedagogical and constitutive function" which reminded the public of how "their society works and which rules aid and constrain their actions, but the performance also helps them reimagine and recreate those meanings and rules" (Ringmar 2012: 2–3). Specifically, I propose that the way in which the SSAPW united public diplomacy, development communication and export promotion in the discourse of 'partnerships' and historical narratives, represented a new phase in the history of state-supported efforts to adapt and disseminate an ideology of strategic internationalism in Swedish society. As a national manifestation, the SSAPW served to educate the participating Swedes and Swedish corporations about their new relationship to each other and to the Global South in the post-Cold War world order.

The article is organised as follows. I begin by arguing that the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of economic globalisation prompted a collective reimagining of Swedish 'internationalist nationalism' in the 1990s. The remainder of the article is dedicated to identifying evidence of this shift in the context of the SSAPW. First I establish the needs of domestic development communication identified by Swedish authorities and show that the solutions could be found in the professional experience of public and corporate diplomacy in the young Swedish PR-industry. I then unpack how 'partnership' was performed in South Africa in parallel program events during the SSAPW, pointing to the dual discourses of cooperation and competitiveness. Thereafter, I turn to the uses of Swedish national identity and history in relation to South Africa, arguing that the way they were articulated in the SSAPW not only served to 'sell Sweden' abroad, but equally to convince businesses that there was still value in being (seen as) Swedish.

The study builds on three main types of sources. First, I have obtained a selection of the official documents from the SSAPW from the archives of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs: the original tenders from Rikta and its competitors, the communication plan that the SSAPW was built on, and the published program and official booklet distributed during the week. Second, I have assembled a comprehensive bank of relevant newspaper articles. From the Swedish side, the search has included those dealing with South Africa and the

PR industry, primarily in the business daily *Dagens Industri*, but also from the broadsheets *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. From the South African side, the coverage of the SSAPW has been sought in a range of English-speaking newspapers available through the full text database *SA Media* (accessed via the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala). This press coverage has been complemented with articles in more specialised Swedish weekly or monthly business journals: *Konsultvärlden* (aimed at the consultancy industry), *Resumé* (media and marketing) and *Strategi* (aimed at the export sector). Third, the study builds on a selection of official reports and inquiries produced before and after the campaign. The former includes reports on the work of Sida (the Swedish international development agency) in the mid-1990s and the government's New Africa Policy from 1997. The latter include the three independent inquiries set up to assess the financial fallout of the SSAPW. The most important of these is the comprehensive report assembled in connection with the public hearings conducted by the Committee on the Constitution (*Konstitutionsutskottet*, hereafter KU)

Setting the Scene:

Internationalist Nationalism and the Competition State

In the aftermath of the Second World War, popular movements and semi-state organisations, backed by public funds, coordinated their efforts to educate Swedes into becoming engaged internationalists and supporters of the new development-oriented United Nations world order (Glover 2019b). This government-sponsored activation of popular movements, youth organisations and adult education associations continued in the 1970s and 1980s. With its significant development communication budget, Sida provided generous support to politically activist NGOs and their dissemination in society of a more radical, Third-Worldist internationalism (e.g., Diurlin 2019). The broad-based anti-apartheid movement enjoyed a close relationship with state authorities during these decades, and the organisations that channelled the Swedes' engagement could count on various forms of public support (Thörn 2018). From 1973 to 1994 over 1 billion SEK was distributed as direct official assistance to the ANC, channelled through more than twenty different Swedish organisations (Silén 1994:11). Indeed, the support was such that the African National Congress (ANC) was not first and foremost 'Soviet-backed', as it was often described, but rather 'Nordic-backed' or even 'Sweden-backed' (Sellström 2002:866).² In 1990, this Swedish commitment to the liberation cause, and the billions of Swedish *kronor* that over the years had co-funded it, received the ultimate public recognition. Nelson Mandela chose Stockholm as his first destination outside Africa after his release from prison. In a televised speech at the Swedish Riksdag in March 1990, he saluted

the “outstanding democratic institution” which had “stood in the front ranks of the international forces that have fought against the apartheid system.” “From here,” he proclaimed, “you have provided moral and political leadership which has inspired many others throughout the world” (Mandela 1990). The national euphoria surrounding Mandela’s visit has been described as the culmination of the “internationalist nationalism that Sweden’s post-war governments successfully promoted” (Thörn 2010:288).

Over the following years, the end of the Cold War and with it the dissolution of Sweden’s position as neutral bridge-builder between North and South, East and West, contributed to something of a national identity crisis (Ringmar 1998). The strong emphasis on foreign policy goals as a motive for a generous aid policy appeared to dissolve with the end of the Cold War (Hveem & McNeill 1994:24). Domestic criticism was directed at the Social Democratic government’s alleged claims of trying to act as a ‘moral superpower’ in international affairs, and in public debates the effectiveness of Sweden’s significant foreign aid programs over the years was questioned (Månsson 1994). At the same time, the liberation of Eastern and Central Europe introduced a new type of recipient of Swedish foreign aid, “transition countries”; industrial economies in need of investments and market institutions that would promote their economic growth (Åkerlund 2016; Åkerlund 2018). This required that Sida become better at supporting the formation of healthy market economies and dynamic private enterprise. Expanding this capacity in times of “systemic change” was a central ambition when Sida was reorganised in 1995 (Sida 1996:17; Appendix 4:3). Foreign aid was to be characterised by *mutually beneficial* development cooperation, and Sida’s Director General claimed to even be willing to dispense with the word ‘aid’ altogether, since it had the wrong connotations (Sida 1996: Appendix 7:3).

In the wake of all this, Swedish internationalism in the 21st century has been described as “situated at the crossroad between a historically constituted, social democratically inspired model and liberal reinterpretations of that model” (Bergman Rosamond 2016:475). Leaving party politics aside, the present study sees these ideological reinterpretations of *internationalism* as a function of accelerated structural *internationalisation*. During the 1980s, the economy of states and firms alike were being fundamentally reshaped by the increased mobility of capital, the globalisation of production and the speeding up of cross-border communications (Strange 1992). The mobility of capital meant that even for Western liberal democracies it became less clear which transnational corporations were actually ‘domestic’ and which were practically ‘foreign’, and therefore where their loyalties ultimately lay (Mytelka 2000:318). Sweden, a relatively open economy dependent on an internationally oriented business community, provides a case in point. After mergers and acquisitions during the early 1990s, many traditional national

champions of the country's export economy were technically no longer Swedish in the sense that less than 50 per cent of their share votes belonged to Swedish owners (Braunerhjelm 2001:10) By the end of the decade, the 20 largest Swedish firms only employed 34 per cent of their total workforce in Sweden, and a clear majority of their net investments were made abroad (SCB 1999:95-96). The same striking internationalisation processes dominated the Swedish defence industry (Britz 2010:179; Ikegami 2013:444). The boundaries of the national economy, and therefore also of the national 'us', were becoming increasingly difficult to define.

These economic processes were intimately associated with the politics of neoliberalisation, the range of reforms implemented in most nation-states during the late 20th century which sought to extend the role of markets and the reach of competitive logic in society (Peck & Tidell 2002). This has led scholars to identify a transformation of the state itself. The nation-state which had sought to contain capitalism was being transformed into a 'competition state' primed to attract capital. Its role increasingly became to "prize open the nation-state to a globalising world, in the interest of ensuring that citizens keep up" with the new pressures and demands of intensified global interdependence (Cerny 2010:6). As Pauli Kettunen has pointed out, the transformation of nation-states into competition states has thus profoundly affected notions of national identity and citizenship. Globalisation has been framed as a *national* challenge, and nationalism therefore remains "an inherent part of the globalised economy, appearing, especially, in the concern for 'our' competitiveness" (Kettunen 2011, 80-81). Here I contribute a study of a concerted effort to communicate this national challenge and adapt Swedish national identity accordingly (cf. Moisiso 2008). Whereas previous research has above all focused on the competition state's strategic efforts to 'internationalise' higher education and research (e.g., Åkerlund 2020), I focus on how the official development aid budget was used to this end. In 1996, a memo suggested that Sida take on the role of "Swedish Internationalisation Ministry", tasked with offering "knowledge, information, contacts and training to actors that need to find their way out into global contexts". It was of the utmost importance for Sweden's economic welfare, the memo argued, that more Swedish actors – even public agencies, councils and government bodies – were persuaded to "involve themselves globally" (Sida 1996: Appendix 4:4). The SSAPW is an example of how such thinking was implemented in practice.

Besides analysing the social performance I also highlight the "stage hands", aiming to contextualise historically the methods of the PR consultants and their industry. Andreas Hellenes has identified the introduction of a promotion paradigm in the field of public diplomacy in the early 1990s, "characterised by new forms of state-private collaboration [...] with the aim of strengthening the image of Sweden abroad as part of an economic agenda" (Hellenes 2019:411). This

new paradigm articulated the broader promotional culture that was transforming Swedish society during the decade. It was led by an expansive sector of communication specialists, market communication consultants and IT agencies, whose services were being enlisted by an ever growing range of firms, public authorities and civil society organisations (Broberg et al 2016). “Information technology”, declared the entrepreneurial IT-celebrity Jonas Birgersson, was in the process of building “the Swedish model 2.0”. New communication technology was supplying the infrastructure, he proclaimed, and in accordance with the motto “freedom, equality and broadband” the updated model would create a “new spirit of consensus” (*Resumé* 1999). Such visions were part of a broader discourse on how technologically-driven market communication was injecting dynamism into the economy and transforming society. The cultural and political potential of *events*, *brands* and *corporate sponsorship* was the subject of much theorization in Swedish policy circles and marketing literature dealing with ‘the experience economy’ of the late 1990s (Broberg et al 2016:105–106). According to this discourse, anything from services, products, knowledge and art could be combined, staged and monetized (e.g., Pine & Gilmore 1998; Behrer, & Larsson 1998).

While economic globalisation was dissolving the boundaries of the national ‘us’ at a structural level, the communications industry was marketing novel ways through which citizens could experience their shared community. As I show next, this was precisely the competence that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida sought when they launched a new direction in Swedish development cooperation.

The Aim: Communicating a “New Type of Aid”

In March 1997, Göran Persson’s government announced its ‘New Africa Policy’ in parliament, a comprehensive document which set out a course for closer and more egalitarian Afro-Swedish relations. The policy bore many similarities with the new policy vis-à-vis the Baltic region that was launched the same year, which also merged development assistance, public diplomacy and trade promotion (Åkerlund 2018:156). In line with the broader trends of global governance, the New Africa Policy placed the concept of partnership and the promotion of ‘mutual cooperation’ at the top of its agenda. In both the World Bank’s post-Washington Consensus development regime and in the new UN Global Compact the role of private-public partnerships were ascribed crucial importance (Carroll & Jarvis 2015: 290–292; Kettunen 2011:98–99). Explicitly claiming to apply the concept of donors such as “the World Bank, EU, UK, USA,” the New Africa Policy thus advocated the forging of partnerships between Sweden and African countries. The economic liberalisation throughout much of the African continent and the ongoing processes of globalisation demanded a new, more market-oriented type

of Swedish support. The policy envisioned multi-layered partnerships that were eventually to become self-sustained as the distinction between “aid related” and “non-aid related” relations was already losing relevance (Rskr 1997/98:122:78).

These partnerships were to be initiated and maintained by government parties, but business and civic organisations were ascribed crucial roles to play in realising them. Sida, one memo had envisioned in 1996, was to play the role of “idea provider”, “coordinator” and “inspirer” in the creation of mutually beneficial bilateral economic cooperation (Sida 1996: 20– 21, 31). The state’s function as mediator between Swedish society and its global surroundings was also identified in the New Africa Policy. Public agencies had to intervene by educating, informing and initiating:

Important components include trade, private investment, academic exchange, technical cooperation, culture etc. Parts of those contacts can be stimulated and subsidised by public agencies, others are completely built on voluntary initiatives from other actors (Rskr 1997/98:122:78).

“Stimulating” and “subsidising” contacts was thus a task for the authorities. The New Africa policy charged Sida with the task of “influencing [public] attitudes” towards Africa, since a more nuanced perception of the continent among Swedes would create the conditions for mutually beneficial exchanges (Rskr 1997/1998:122:96). If new partnerships were to be realised then they had to be actively marketed.

The SSAPW was the flagship launch of Sida’s adoption of the New Africa Policy and the “partnership ideology” it promoted (Stolten 2019:112). Political relations with the ANC government were well-established, and in commercial terms South Africa had become Sweden’s 10th most important export market. The number of subsidiaries of Swedish firms in South Africa had doubled from 25 to 49 in just four years (Davids & Spies 1999:7). The country was thus an obvious choice when kick-starting a new era of mutually beneficial, economically viable cooperation with Africa. In 1998, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs admitted that this meant that Swedish development cooperation was “moving in uncharted territory” and would therefore initially have to embark on “pioneering work, both in terms of policy and concrete project decisions” (UD 1998:14). According to the Committee on the Constitution, the SSAPW’s strategic blending of trade and aid with the aim of creating long-term relationships was “a new type of aid”, hitherto never attempted (KU 2000:21). The practical planning of this innovative ambition was directed from within a specially designated Project Secretariat made up of civil servants within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The work of the Secretariat

was in turn overseen by a Steering Committee that worked out of the central Government offices, led by the Prime Minister's state secretary and consisting of representatives from the Africa unit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and the Swedish Trade Council. However, much of the practical decision-making was sub-contracted to a private consultancy firm.

In the first months of 1999, the Steering Committee and Project Secretariat determined that the task of getting the detailed plans for the SSAPW right rested on gauging the South African interest, handling the PR and managing the media relations (Sjöberg 2000:29). The organisers therefore turned to the private PR sector. According to the industry press at the time, PR was an "offensive weapon" that was particularly suited for companies establishing themselves in "immature markets". The forefront of international PR was described as the use of "integrated communication", sponsorship deals and collaborations with non-profit organisations such as the UN, with the aim to construct the profile of a "good corporate citizen" (*Strategi* 1996a; Grönkvist 2000:121-122). The market for specialised PR-consultancies in Sweden had only emerged in the 1980s, but it was in the second half of the 1990s that it really took off (Tyllström 2013:85-95). Rikta, the firm that won the SSAPW contract in June 1999, had been founded in 1990 and was one of the success stories of this era. In 1996 and 1998 it won industry awards as best Swedish PR-agency, and in 1997 alone it recorded a 71 per cent increase in revenue (*Konsultvärlden* 1998b). The same year Rikta conducted an ambitious popular education campaign (*folkbildningskampanj*) with the purpose of improving the Swedish public's attitude towards Stockholm's candidacy to host the 2004 Olympic Games. Citing "a lack of communication" as the reason for the Swedes' scepticism, the agency organised a national information tour, a telephone hotline, "a homepage on the Internet", and the mobilization of 200 ambassadors to promote the cause from national and local sport associations across the country (*Dagens Nyheter* 1996). In 1998, the agency won a contract to improve the Central Government Offices' internal communications, complete with the charge of "providing employees with a shared frame of reference, [and instilling] a positive perception of the leadership while decreasing conflicts and rumours" (*Konsultvärlden* 1998a). By the end of the decade, Rikta was one of the largest actors in the Swedish PR industry, it was aiming to conquer the Nordic market, and a quarter of its clients were based abroad (*Konsultvärlden* 1998b; Rikta 1999a).

On these merits, Rikta could offer broad experience of both engaging grassroots organisations and working in government departments, it boasted an international professional network and represented an expansive industry bursting with confidence. Moreover, its in-house expertise included senior consultants with a background in the multinational corporations Saab, Electrolux and Atlas Copco, firms that were active in the South African market. Mikael Albinson,

the Rikta consultant leading the SSAPW project, had previously been Head of Communications at the Swedish Trade Council and in charge of the 'Sweden information' program during the 1995 World Championships in athletics in Gothenburg. He had also led the marketing strategy behind the Swedish pavilion at the World Expo in Lisbon (Rikta 1999a).

With Rikta's help, the Steering Committee and Project Secretariat set out to actively brand a new form of bilateralism (cf Wilkins 2018). In effect the agency became the key adviser and executive arm of the Secretariat. Using the foreign aid budget to hire a Swedish PR-agency for 8 million SEK to realise the SSAPW's comprehensive program was described as justified since "reaching out, creating an understanding of and insight into the characteristics of cooperation, is a natural part of an aid-funded drive" (KU 2000:16). Rikta's communication plan for the SSAPW, however, made no direct reference to the 'aid-funded' nature of the manifestation, instead treating the project as a PR task comparable to that of the Swedish pavilion in Lisbon. Although it stated that the goal was to lay the foundation of a long-term, two-way partnership, the main concern seemed to be projecting an attractive, contemporary and multifaceted image of Sweden that participating "actors/sponsors" could benefit from. According to the plan, the target publics were to be found in both countries. One outcome objective was consequently "that knowledge about Sweden and South Africa increases in the selected target groups, and that their disposition towards Swedish phenomena becomes more positive" (Rikta 1999b). The somewhat imprecise formulation nicely supports the perspective taken in this study – that even groups *in* Sweden might be persuaded to change their opinions of "Swedish phenomena". This dimension is examined in more detail below.

Performing Partnerships – Collaborative and Competitive

Rikta prided itself in offering clients "a coordinated view of communication." In an "increasingly complex communication environment," the agency promised solutions based on the conviction that "the only truth that matters exists in the mind of the receiver" (Rikta 2000:10). This radical ontological claim was put to the test in the SSAPW. The partnership that was to be launched had to take into account the 'truths' of different target groups in both Sweden and South Africa. It also had to lay the basis for potential partnerships between the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida, organised business and a range of private companies. The organisers' challenge in such a "complex communication environment" was how to coordinate a national manifestation while taking this range of positions

into account. The solution was to stage tailored and targeted interpretations of the partnership, while marketing them together as a whole, with a single campaign logo, official homepage and program (Rikta 1999b).

The focal point of the SSAPW, according to Rikta's strategy, was the "Trade and Investors Expo" at the Gallagher Estate in Midrand (Rikta 1999b). The Expo was funded by corporate sponsors, exhibitors' fees and with additional funds from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (KU 2000:15). According to Rikta, the competitive South African market, which had seen a series of foreign delegations over the last years, demanded an expo that was not a merely a sales pitch on behalf of Swedish firms. In fitting with the overarching ideology of partnership, "mutuality" was said to be essential: "Simply [displaying] national matters that lack direct or indirect connection with SA are considered uninteresting by the South African journalists" (Rikta 1999b). Consequently, the fair was billed as an experience, "an exciting platform from the two countries' business communities to meet and discuss trade and investment issues":

The Expo is not only a trade fair but also introduces the visitor to a special experience of business cultures, presenting a very different lay-out [sic] and atmosphere. Fashion shows with Swedish designers, Swedish food, musical performances, artists and athletes, add to the richness of the event (S-SAP 1999b).

The inauguration of the fair included speeches by Prime Minister Göran Persson and Minister of Industry Alec Erwin, a Swedish-South African gospel choir, vodka tasting and a Swedish smorgasbord (DI 1999f). In an adjacent section of the hall an artificial "forest tour" allowed visitors to go for a bicycle ride in "a landscape of images and installations where elements of Swedish and South African culture appear in new combinations" (S-SAP 1999b). A seminar program in the adjoining conference centre covered issues such as globalisation and "Democracy and Economic Growth". In meetings and speeches it was repeatedly emphasised that the purpose of partnership was not only to increase Swedish exports, but equally to provide South Africans with points of entry into the Swedish – and by extension, European – market (S-SAP 1999b; *Business Day* 1999b; DI 1999f). Moreover, the Expo saw the introduction of an innovation in Swedish aid history: with the aim of promoting viable Swedish-South African joint ventures, Sida had created a venture capital fund financed by the Swedish aid budget. The fund was to invest in enterprises that would contribute to sustainable commercial relations and benefit disadvantaged groups in South African society (DI 1999b; DI 1999g; Svensson 2005:16–17). In all, the Expo was framed as an *experience* incorporating cultural and political dimensions, catering for policy-making elites and corporate

visitors. It promoted the prospect of market partnerships as both an opportunity for Swedish businesses to gain a foothold in the South African market and as a means of practical collaboration that would assist the South African economy.

The “Civil Society Encounter” in Cape Town provided a stage for forging social partnerships between the democracies of Sweden and South Africa. As the official plans for the SSAPW had begun taking shape, some of the leading Swedish organisations engaged in the liberation movement in Southern Africa had separately started planning a series of workshops in South Africa to coincide with the official bilateral manifestation. Embodying the ideal of ‘mutuality’, the Swedish government proposed that the project be co-ordinated by Sida and incorporated into the official program (Davids & Spies 1999:9). The resulting three-day Civil Society Encounter ballooned into an enormous event. Over 1200 individuals registered, as did 45 Swedish organisations and 280 South African projects and organisations. More than 30 seminars, workshops and meetings were held, each attended by between 20 and 150 people (Davids & Spies 1999:1; 9). On the one hand, the Civil Society Encounter, with workshops on democracy, human rights and the media, was framed as an organic continuation of the cooperation built during decades of solidarity work between politically activist NGOs in the two countries (Davids & Spies 1999:9). On the other hand, the reference to civil society in the title signalled something new. Like ‘partnership’, the popularity of ‘civil society’ had grown rapidly in the 1990s and attained a central position in national and transnational democratic debates (e.g., Kaldor 2003; Glaser 1997:8-11; Trägårdh 2008:576–579). In his inaugural speech, Prime Minister Göran Persson urged all the participating organisations to “go beyond *traditional* patterns of co-operation” and strive for “a *true* partnership” characterised by “common values, interests and clearly defined common goals” (Davids & Spies 1999:15, emphases added). ‘True’ partnerships then, demanded that civil society behaved in a more professionalised fashion than non-governmental organisations previously had (Carroll & Jarvis 2015:292; Kaldor 2003:589). At the same time, the boundaries of civil society were quite diffuse. While the concept typically referred to the social sphere beyond the state, in Cape Town the public sector was also included in the Encounter. According to Persson, this was because it “carried human ideas” and was “an expression of human efforts to advance together” (Davids & Spies 1999:15). Among the participants therefore were representatives from 50 universities and tertiary education institutes, and 27 government departments (Davids & Spies 1999:1;9). A key reason for this considerable official presence was the bilateral Research Partnership Programme in Science and Technology, signed by government ministers during the week. In part an instrument of aid-funded development cooperation, the agreement was also an expression of the competition state’s goal to ‘internationalise’ higher research and education

(Davids & Spies 1999:49; cf. Åkerlund 2020). ‘Civil society’ partnerships could thus quite naturally accommodate both the state’s competitive logic as the well as the grassroots alliances of activist NGOs.

A third dimension of the partnership covered ‘culture’. This included co-produced theatre productions as well as a series of music concerts. These were a combination of aid-funded arrangements on the one hand and, on the other, purely commercial events that were intended to recoup their own costs through ticket sales and private sponsorship deals. Among the former were the jazz concerts with participating musicians from both Sweden and South Africa (Sjöberg 2000:38). However, it was the commercial events that made the headlines. When the SSAPW program was unveiled in September, the organisers declared that the “Swedish artist elite”, “some of our most famous pop stars” were lined up to perform: “The Cardigans, Dr Alban, Eagle Eye Cherry” and “probably” Roxette and Abba’s Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson (DI 1999c). Of these it was ultimately only Dr Alban that actually made it into the program, as well as a less specific “tribute to Abba.” These acts were accompanied by the internationally lesser-known tenor Titro Beltran, singer songwriter Uno Svenningsson and acapella outfit The Real Group. One of the advantages of the cultural program was that it could quite literally allow Sweden to perform as a multi-ethnic society. The fact that it was a nation with a significant immigrant population was underlined in the official booklet produced for the SSAPW (S-SAP 1999b:6,18), and acts like Dr Alban (originally from Nigeria) and Beltran (originally from Chile) quite literally performed this national trait alongside the otherwise all-white delegation of politicians and business representatives. As one PR agency pointed out in its rival bid to win the contract for the SSAPW, Sweden’s “increasingly multi-ethnic character, not least in culture and sport” was one of the characteristics it shared with South Africa (Kreab 1999). The emphasis on the commercial pop music component in the program also aligned with prevailing interpretations of the importance of the experience economy during this era. As Rasmus Fleischer has noted, the idea of a Swedish “music miracle”, that Sweden had become one of the world’s leading exporters of music, had become so popular by the mid-1990s that the government even established an annual prize to highlight the achievements of the industry. First presented in February 1998 (to The Cardigans), Minister of Commerce Leif Pagrotsky explained how pop music was changing the international image of Sweden, “away from the grey and technocratic, towards an image of Sweden as a young and modern country”. There was widespread agreement in the press that this in turn would help sell Swedish products abroad (Fleischer 2016:158). In this way, the collaborative and competitive logics of a cultural partnership were both present in the SSAPW program: it served to foster mutual understanding *and* promote Swedish economic interests.

Ringmar argues that social performances can be seen as “a source of governance”, a means of “providing order and structure to interstate relations also in the absence of a central authority or a single director” (Ringmar 2012:19). The SSAPW can be understood in similar terms, with its repertoire of parallel ‘experiences’ – the trade fair, the civil society summit, the cultural events – all intended to perform the key concept of partnership. Staged separately but united under the banner of the SSAPW, they pointed in a similar direction: the ideal of co-operation neither could nor should be held separate from the realities of competition. As the New Africa Policy stipulated, partnerships should be based on concrete goals and aim to be (economically) sustainable, and therefore they had to be able to engage market actors: attract investors, corporate sponsors, and/or paying customers. The many individuals and groups already involved in a range of existing social relations and bilateral ties learned to understand them in light of this new mould. As one South African journalist put it, the aim was to forge a relationship based on “the long tradition of support and co-operation [...] but taking it into a more visionary economic realm” (*The Star* 1999c). The SSAPW performed this central message by showing how the different dimensions of partnership enhanced each other: business interactions were facilitated by cultural experiences; transnational civil society activities were state sponsored; and the cultural sector was headlined by commercial pop acts. The staging of contemporary Swedish internationalism by means of such “integrated communication” was close to what the PR-press described as “the forefront of international PR” (*Strategi* 1996a).

The Narrative:

‘Sweden’ and ‘South Africa’ – Partners in Time

The end of apartheid fundamentally altered Swedish-South African relations, as did the increasingly transnational operations of capital. Precisely because of these major historical shifts, the SSAPW emphasised historical continuity. As a social performance, it served to inscribe the politics of the past with economic value. Not only that, but in line with the New Africa Policy and the general marketization of development cooperation, it also aimed to make such an objective politically acceptable (cf Coetzee 2018:103; Stolten 2019:113–115). In the words of one South African journalist: “Cynics may talk about payback time [...] but any superficial examination of the new partnership will show that it is meant as a return to normality” (*The Star* 1999a).

The trade embargo that Swedish governments had implemented during the 1970s and 1980s had been divisive in Sweden. Harsh debates took place between activist groups, often leftist and self-described ‘anti-imperialist’, in the one camp,

and the liberal-capitalist proponents of ‘constructive engagement’ in the other. The former advocated the politically motivated isolation of the South African regime, the latter that business contacts, trade and investor relations were the best way of effecting change in South Africa (Glover 2019a; International Council of Swedish Industry 1983). Whatever effects this embargo may or may not have had on the South African economy, Sweden and Swedish businesses were by the early 1990s estimated to have lost billions of Swedish *kronor* as a result (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1992a; *DI* 1992a). In part it was this history of “moral and political leadership” that Mandela paid tribute to in the Swedish parliament in 1990.

However, in the years after Mandela’s speech, his public recognition of the Swedish contribution to the liberation cause seemed to be becoming obsolete. As Mandela embarked on an extensive world tour, ‘not even his enormous personal moral stature [...] could hide the fact that for most of the developed world at least, economic considerations now took priority over ethical ones’ (van der Westhuizen 1998:440). From a Swedish perspective, the humanitarian gold medal that Mandela had publicly awarded ‘Sweden’ back in 1990 had to be converted into a capital that retained value in the new world order. As future representatives of the South African competition state vying for foreign capital, the ANC-leadership provided a way to do so by helping to reunite the different camps within Sweden. As they embarked on international tours to court foreign investors and calm firms jittery at the prospects of post-apartheid South Africa, Mandela and Mbeki embraced Swedish industrialists with the same warmth as they did veteran activists of the struggle. By virtue of their being Swedish, capitalists and entrepreneurs were notified that their sacrifices were acknowledged irrespective of their apartheid-era politics. This included firms such as Trelleborg (rubber, tires), ABB (heavy electrical equipment), SKF (ball bearings) and Alfa Laval (industrial equipment) that in 1992 publicly spoke about how they had managed to circumvent the Swedish sanctions policy (*DI* 1992b; *DI* 1992c). Even industry tycoon Peter Wallenberg, who in 1992 infamously likened Sweden’s support to the liberation struggle with the scenario of a foreign power giving money to “the Lapps” so they “could cause trouble” for the Swedish government, was wholeheartedly embraced (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1992b). Although Wallenberg counted among the most prominent domestic antagonists of the Swedish anti-apartheid movement, Mandela reportedly promised his firms preferential treatment as a thank you for the Swedes’ long-term and continued support of the ANC (*Sunday Times* 1992; Sellström 2002:843). This conciliatory diplomacy paved the way for the broad-based, united Swedish front in 1999.

The entire SSAPW centred on re-presenting the historical ties between Sweden and South Africa by ignoring the conflicts between erstwhile anti-imperialists and big business. It presented a monolithic ‘Sweden’ that had supported the struggle over the years and was now looking ahead to a bright future. Glossing

over political strife, the SSAPW's goal was simply to "weave together different narratives" (DI 1999a). The official booklet distributed during the week for instance combined the heroes of the past with the champions of the present. On the one hand it included an interview with ex-government minister and long-time anti-apartheid activist Pierre Schori reminiscing about Olof Palme's commitment to South Africa. On the other, it included a long piece lauding the dynamic nature of Swedish enterprise in the process of "inventing the future" (S-SAP 1999a:16). In his speech in Midrand, Göran Persson made a similar effort to link modern IT-innovations with the ideals of the freedom struggle. He highlighted how the new communication technologies, in which Swedes evidently excelled, were in his view making globalisation an "essentially positive process". Mobile phones and the internet helped "dreams and ideas cross borders more easily", and thereby they "contribute to a better understanding and a higher degree of solidarity between people" (*Business Day* 1999a). To paraphrase Jonas Birgersson, this was 'Swedish internationalism 2.0'.

At the Gallagher Estate, Sweden was represented by 100 exhibitors, made up of private companies, private industry associations and public agencies. Saab's pavilion had the most prominent position near the entrance, and the biggest spaces belonged to Volvo, Scania (buses) and Sida. Both the private, offset-related Saab Business Value Development fund and the aid-financed Swedish-South African Partnership Fund, conceived and directed by an external management consultant, were marketing their services in the main hall (S-SAP 1999b; Svensson 2005:16-17). In this context there was no trace of the fact that the actual 'Swedishness' of the industrial sector was actually becoming less clear during this period. A long line of heavyweights, including ABB, Saab, IKEA, Volvo and Stora, had either entirely or partly been incorporated into foreign groups, or become majority owned by foreign corporations (Braunerhjelm 2001:10). Because the SSAPW was staged as a bilateral affair, with the Expo providing a meeting place for *two* 'business cultures', participating business interests were simply Swedish. The Gripen consortium was for instance consistently conflated with Sweden both by Swedes and South Africans, despite it being partly British-owned (Coetzee 2018:107).

If anything, the international orientation of the business community made its essentially Swedish character even more important to emphasise. The official booklet described the long Swedish history of entrepreneurial spirit, innovations and creativity, the implication being that the current ownership structure of the participating corporations was of secondary importance. These characteristics were also used to explain the ongoing IT-revolution in Sweden as well as the much-hyped boom in Swedish pop music exports and design. The national historical continuity was made explicit with the assertion that the "The New Economy" of the 1990s had led to the "rebirth of the Swedish entrepreneur":

Internet entrepreneurs are fulfilling a centuries-old Swedish tradition of engineering innovation. But this time, in a new shape. At the same time, the old industrialists, with the Wallenberg sphere (owners of Stora Enso, pharmaceuticals giant AstraZeneca and telecommunications giant Ericsson), Rausing (Tetra Pak) and Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA) have all entered the new Internet market (S-SAP 1999a:13).

In line with this business-minded national self-characterisation, Persson handed over prizes awarded by Sida and the Swedish Innovations for Development Association (IDEA) to South African inventors with entrepreneurial skills. IDEA's chairman explained that "Sweden had built its wealth on good inventions" (*The Star* 1999b). Moreover, the final of a national speech competition among South African high school pupils of disadvantaged schools was held at the fair. Co-sponsored by the Swedish Institute and telecom company Ericsson, the competition was entitled "Make yourself heard", which was also the slogan of Ericsson's ongoing marketing campaign in South Africa (*The Sowetan* 1999; *Saturday Star* 1999). It was somewhat ironic that these awards were presented to South Africans during the SSAPW in light of the official booklet's willingness to poke some friendly fun at the Swedes' eagerness to be do-gooders abroad. In his light-hearted characterisation of the Swedish national character, professor of ethnology Åke Daun could well have been talking about IDEA and the Swedish Institute when he described Swedes as "international, cosmopolitan, and we travel the world to be involved in human welfare, freedom and peace. We [...] hope that Swedish solutions will help other people" (S-S-SAP 1999a:6).

For all the talk of globalisation as de-territorialisation then, the SSAPW served to confirm the continued importance of national traits and the (competition) state. The marketing of businesses as carriers of a national spirit remained important even as those same corporations pursued multi-domestic strategies that, in the slogan of the Swiss-Swedish multinational ABB, aimed to allow them to be "at home anywhere" in the world. Meanwhile, in Swedish debates, business leaders were applying public pressure on the government to create a more 'business-friendly' climate, threatening otherwise to move their operations abroad (*DI* 1999d; *Strategi* 1996b). Under such circumstances, the state's diplomatic competence to represent corporate interests, create commercial opportunity and bolster the transnational credibility of firms became particularly important (Jones & Clarke 2018). The SSAPW's focus on bilateralism allowed the organisers to prove their worth in precisely these areas by effectively weaving together two metanarratives – one explicit, the other implied. The explicit metanarrative was that private corporations, their innovations, technologies and capital were the saviours of nations. The Gripen deal offered the most obvious articulation of this narrative. The investments

pledged in the offset deal would do nothing less than “save South Africa” according to *Dagens industri* (1998) while an advertorial supplement in the same newspaper, produced on behalf of the consortium, declared that “Sweden is taking off with the Gripen” (Industrigruppen JAS 1999). The implied narrative was on the other hand that grateful nations were able to repay corporations for their assistance. “110 firms have joined with the hope of getting value for money after 30 years of development aid”, one article bluntly stated (*DI* 1999e). In both narratives Swedish internationalism was marketised. In the first, as a progressive form of business culture that led Swedes to be drivers of progress and prosperity around the world. In the second, as a form of image capital, or, in the parlance of the day: brand equity.

Conclusions

What, after all, was the Swedish-South African Partnership Week? As Rikta would have it, the truth ultimately lay in the mind of the receiver. Drawing together a broad range of interests and actors under the banner of a new partnership, the point of the SSAPW varied depending on the point of view: at once a spectacular case of nation-sized event marketing, an ambitious forum for open-ended bilateral workshops and an innovative form of development cooperation. It was itself a performance of partnership: different actors bought into a shared project with a common goal, in order to further their respective interests. This integrated performance reflected the refined model of “true partnership” that Göran Persson spoke of, in contrast to the “traditional co-operation” associated with previous incarnations.

I have argued that SSAPW represented a new phase in the dissemination of state-supported strategic internationalism in Swedish society. Borrowing some of what Ringmar calls his “theoretical props” (Ringmar 2012:6–9), the SSAPW can be described as providing Swedes and South Africans with a *script* – the joint mission of forging of a “new partnership” – which structured the narratives of their historical relations and national traits. The script’s *vocabulary* (e.g., ‘mutual interests’, ‘traditional co-operation’, ‘civil society’) allowed them to (re-)imagine their roles in relation to each other within the *frame* of a new set of international rules (competition, globalisation). By situating ‘partnership’ at the centre of the performance, established Social Democratic interpretations could be united with (neo)liberal interpretations of internationalism fit for the late 20th century competition state. The SSAPW represented a shift from the promotion of internationalist nationalism to what might be termed the ideal of ‘entrepreneurial internationalism’: from a national ideology centred on supporting Swedish popular movements working for solidarity with developing countries, to one promoting the creation of financially sustainable social partnerships within and

across national boundaries. To this end, the strategic use of professional *corporate* public relations replaced what might be called Sida's use of *corporatist* public relations during the previous era (cf Glover 2019b).

In their book on transnational activism, Keck and Sikkink identify the 'boomerang pattern of influence', to illustrate how domestic NGOs apply pressure on their own government by seeking allies in the international community through which their appeals then bounce back with greater effect (Keck & Sikkink 1998:12). The SSAPW has here been analysed in a parallel but inverted fashion: it has dealt with how a government produced a social performance abroad in an attempt to influence 'its' own citizenry. An important reason for the way in which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida staged the performance in South Africa was that the events and publicity, as well the South African reception, would 'engage' Swedish citizens back home in partnerships, 'subsidise' their contacts with the Global South and 'influence' public opinion about Africa. And at the Gallagher Estate, the government agencies, I would argue, were not only marketing themselves to South Africans but also to their corporate compatriots in the neighbouring exhibition stalls. It is in this sense that the SSAPW, with its significant budget set aside for 'information' and its fusing of civil society activism and business agendas, was a social performance with at once "pedagogic and constitutive functions." It served to teach Swedes and Swedish firms about the updated rules and meanings of internationalism while also directing them to cooperate and compete as progressive partners in the new Millennium.

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Author presentation

Nikolas Glover is an associate professor and senior lecturer at the Department of Economic History, Uppsala University. His research has spanned public diplomacy, the history of foreign aid and business history. Presently he is working on two research projects: Neoliberalism in the Nordics (funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) and Advertising, gender and citizenship in Sweden during World War II (funded by the Swedish Research Council).

¹ This was later reduced to 26 aircraft.

² For a comparative overview of the Nordic countries' support to the liberation struggle, see von Hanno Aasland (2002).

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