In a purportedly globalized society, news journalism is a bastion of the nation state. In innumerable ways, the nation provides the basic outlook with which news construes the world and presents it to its audiences. In Sweden, as in most member nations, EU politics tends accordingly to be portrayed as if it belongs to the domain of the foreign. In the case of a plane crash or a natural disaster, the coverage multiplies in magnitude if only the fewest people at home are affected by it. Also, previous research shows that ethnic minorities tend to be defined as non-members of the nation, especially in crime reporting.

In this dissertation, the relationship between news journalism and nationalism is explored. The point of departure is that nations cannot persist without nationalism – that is, without practices that function to reproduce and transform this central, yet fragile form for societal organization. The study attempts to identify general mechanisms and structures of news discourse that can establish national frames of reference within which social reality is made meaningful by citizens. Both news material and actual audience decodings are included as empirical objects of study. This research design facilitates a novel contribution to a field of research that is largely dominated by studies of media output only.

The study finds that phenomena deemed undesirable by the prevailing moral order tend to be symbolically expelled from the national community that news audiences recognize as their own. Furthermore, it is shown how this conjunction of morality and nationality in news decoding is the empirical outcome of features inherent in news journalism as a textual system, and of the structure of asymmetry between news decoding practices and elite news journalism as a knowledgeable institution.