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Swedish LGBTQ Activists' Responses to Neo-Nazi Threats

Anti-gender Politics, State Appellation, and Political Aspirations

ABSTRACT

LGBTQ communities and movements across Europe are under attack from various conservative and right-wing extremist groups. What are the political implications of such attacks for LGBTQ activists? Through qualitative interviews and psychoanalytical discourse theory, this article analyses LGBTQ activists' responses to threats from neo-Nazis in Sweden. By focusing on the problems, solutions and desires articulated by LGBTQ activists, the analysis asks: Who is called upon to handle the neo-Nazis, and how? What fantasies are expressed in such articulations? How may the response to neo-Nazis shape the subjectivities and political aspirations of LGBTQ activists? The analysis shows that the activists adhere to a fantasy of positive and conflict-free politics where the state is called upon to care for them through legal measures, which ties the activists to the state and might block other alliances. The activists also express a desire to inscribe themselves into the LGBTQ movement's history. This fantasy echo might strengthen a political collective and prove pivotal in future struggles. Taken together, our analysis demonstrates some of the effects of the neo-Nazi presence in Sweden and some of the wider political implications for the LGBTQ movement.

Keywords: LGBTQ, psychoanalysis, neo-Nazi, anti-gender, Sweden

THE RECENT UPSURGE in anti-gender politics has seriously affected LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) communities and movements across Europe. Attacks range from opposition to laws permitting same-sex marriage and parliamentary sanctions against the "promotion of homosexuality" to threats and violence from neo-Nazi groups (Gunnarsson Payne 2019; Korolczuk & Graff 2018; Kuhar & Paternotte 2017). Although this has been argued to constitute a hegemonic shift (Sager & Mulinari 2018), or a general victorious contemporary period for "the Right", local expressions of such developments and their consequences differ, and thus deserve careful contextual analysis (Paternotte & Kuhar 2018). For example, in some contexts, the state is considered the culprit (e.g., Russia, Hungary), while in others, such as Sweden, members of LGBTQ movements have lobbied and pushed the state, in part successfully, into providing rights and various forms of support. Also, in contrast to in continental Europe, anti-gender politics in Sweden is not directly connected to religious groups, but rather to right-wing conservative and neo-Nazi groups, which are united in their opposition to sexual and reproductive rights and in their promotion of narratives of a government-orchestrated "gender ideological" conspiracy (Gunnarsson Payne 2019; Martinsson 2020).

This article builds upon ten interviews with LGBTQ activists about their experiences of neo-Nazi attacks in Sweden. While the attacks themselves deserve scrutiny and have been analysed elsewhere (Linander et al. 2021), our intention here is to analyse the LGBTQ activists' *response* to the neo-Nazi presence, by focusing on the problems, solutions and desires that they articulate. We ask: Who is called upon to handle the neo-Nazis, and how? What fantasies (in the psychoanalytical sense) are expressed in such articulations? How may the response to neo-Nazis shape the subjectivities and political aspirations of LGBTQ activists? Answering these questions will help us gain a better understanding of the effects of neo-Nazi activities in Sweden and their political implications for the LGBTQ movement. By drawing upon a theoretical framework of political discourse theory, and taking a psychoanalytical approach, this study also aims to capture why certain responses

and practices "grip" the subjects, as well as the force that makes those responses seem self-evident (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 145).

In addressing these questions, we engage with different fields of research and strands of thought. The encounter between LGBTQ activists and opposing movements has been theorised in the field of social movements and counter movements research (see e.g., Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). This research illustrates how LGBTQ movements tend to be shaped by their struggles against opposing movements (Fetner 2008). Peterson et al. (2018) argue that post-war relations between social movements and the state in Sweden have been characterised by consensus and dialogue. Whether this results in an ability to influence policies, or in co-optation that neutralises protest, varies between movements. The LGBTQ movement has successfully pushed the Swedish state to implement a range of policies and laws, but at the same time, the state has been accused of being paternalistic and conditioning rights (e.g., the former requirement that someone changing their legal gender has to be sterilised; see Alm 2020). Alm (2020) explores notions of the state in Swedish trans activist narratives and argues that interpellation of the state can be seen as a way for activists to politicise trans people's living conditions and hold the state accountable for them and the harm the state has caused. Akin's (2017) interview study with queer asylum seekers illustrates how the asylum seekers use strategic manoeuvres to "fit in", i.e., to present themselves and their sexuality in a way that makes them readable as persons in need of protection, in the Norwegian asylum context. It thus shows how nation state policies and control shape the identities of asylum seekers. We also take cues from studies of LGBTQ activists' political agendas in the US, where a market- and rights-based approach has been argued to undermine the radical potential of LGBTQ movements (Spade 2011). Spade argues that a focus on extending legal rights in relation to hate crime and hate speech silences police violence towards LGBTQ people, especially LGBTQ people of colour (Spade 2011).

Using the concept of homonationalism, Puar (2007) shows that LGBTQ people in the US who are positioned within a homonorma-

tive narrative are constructed as deserving of protection. They thus become included in the nation state, and the nation state's ability to "tolerate" or "accept" them is considered proof of its progressive nature (see also Puar 2013). In a similar vein, states such as Sweden and Norway are often embedded within an "exceptionalism" narrative, where they are portrayed as homotolerant and a haven with regard to gay rights (Engebretsen 2021). At the same time, other LGBTQ people are constructed as not belonging and not worthy of protection (Kehl 2018, 2020; Puar 2007, 2013). Drawing on Puar's (2007) and Mbebe's (2003) work, Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco (2014) use the term "queer necropolitics" to denote a specific kind of liberal gay politics in the UK, in which some queer subjects are assimilated by the liberal state and seen as "reproducing life", while others are deemed disposable. However, as Kehl (2020) notes, it might be impossible to *not* want rights. Kehl (2020, p. 24) argues:

> We need to be able to maintain an awareness of the dangerous seduction of inclusion, but also the politics involved in inhabiting a position of not being able to "not want rights", rather than just focusing on the dangers of seduction and condemning the seduced.

Study Context and Material

Over the last few years, neo-Nazis have intensified their activities in Sweden (Expo 2019). The Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) and Nordic Youth have been present at, and sometimes attacked, Pride festivals and other LGBTQ events. NMR has also been present and acquired permits to distribute information and hold demonstrations in the vicinity of the LGBTQ movement's premises at the annual political event in Almedalen. Against this background, we were interested in interviewing people from LGBTQ organisations and networks who had had to deal with the neo-Nazi presence at events such as Pride festivals and Almedalen.

To reach potential participants, we contacted organisations and networks working with LGBTQ issues and LGBTQ events in Sweden. By

email, we asked if they were interested in participating, and those that responded affirmatively received written information about the study, after which those that remained interested were interviewed.

The material consists of nine interviews with ten participants, all of whom are LGBTQ activists or representatives of LGBTQ organisations, ranging from larger nationwide organisations with a broad focus, to smaller organisations with a more specific focus (e.g., organisations with a leftist or anti-racist approach). They represent organisations located in both urban and rural settings. Five participants identify as women, two as men and three as non-binary. All interviews were carried out individually (except one, which was attended by two interviewees at their own request) and, for practical reasons, via telephone. Before the interviews began, participants received oral information about the study and their consent was recorded. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide, containing questions about experiences of threats, violence, and safety or unsafety in relation to the participants' activism. Our intention was to avoid steering the conversation onto specific actors and in their responses, the participants talked about "nazis", "nassar" (slang for nazis), racists, nazi threats, nazi organisations and sometimes right-wing extremist groups. We have chosen to use the term "neo-Nazi" as this best reflects those organisations most often mentioned by the participants. The interviews lasted between 31 and 67 minutes. The study received ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr: 2019-02513). The decision not to use organisational names or reveal the gender identity of the participants and, in some cases, to omit place-specific information in the analysis was made with reference to the threats the participants face.

Theoretical and Analytical Approach: Discourse and Fantasy

For the analytical approach, we have turned to discourse theory (Glynos & Howarth 2007 which views discourses as inherently political, an ongoing struggle over meaning. To approach the activists' responses to the neo-Nazi presence, the desires they express when deliberating on and making sense of that presence, and the question of why certain discours-

es "grip" the participants, we turn to the concept of fantasmatic logics. This helps us capture why certain discourses resonate with the LGBTQ activists, and understand their force (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 145).

The Lacanian understanding of the subject rests upon the understanding of the subject as a subject of lack, due to the limitations of language. We can never fully capture our identity through language, because some things always fall outside the capacity of language, bringing about a sense of lack (Lacan 1977). This constitutional lack gives rise to feelings of lost enjoyment, which in turn produce a constant desire for wholeness. By repeated acts of identification with available objects, the subject tries to compensate for that lack. Examples of objects relevant to this study include political movements, ideology and political subjectivity. However, since the subject is constituted by lack, the desire for wholeness can never be satisfied (Lacan 1993). In the same way the subject is lacking, so too is our comprehension of reality, which in Lacanian language is termed the "lack in the Other". A common-sense understanding of fantasy often connects it to the private and unconscious, but in a Lacanian understanding fantasy plays a central role in the constitution of political identities, collective mobilisation and political will (Glynos 2011; Stavrakakis 2007; Glynos & Howarth 2007; Healy 2010). In other words, fantasy in the Lacanian sense has nothing to do with pure individual imagination or naïve delusion; instead, it is seen as playing a central role in activism (Ormrod 2014). This understanding of fantasy builds on the ontological premise that the subject is inseparable from the social, providing an opportunity to theorise the connections between language and desire, as well as between subjectification and social fantasies (Healy 2010). As Jason Glynos puts it: "Fantasy has an *ontological* status vis-à-vis the subject: it is a necessary condition for political mobilisation and change as much as it is functional to social passivity and maintaining the *status quo*" (2011, p. 73). Fantasy is thus central when it comes to both maintaining and challenging social structures. In our analysis, fantasy is used as a tool to capture the inertia and force of certain discourses, to understand why change is often so hard to attain. Fantasy should thus neither be understood as a conscious state

of mind nor as a vision of utopia, but instead as an analytical tool to explore both what conceals the inconsistencies in certain practices in our empirical material and what allows for taking such practices for granted (Hamrén 2021). In contrast to an analytical focus on, for example, queer utopia (Muñoz 2009), which could highlight hope and a collectively imagined future, an analytic focus on fantasy calls attention to what is sustaining such ideas.

Fantasies shape and strengthen the practices and understandings of which we are all part, and our analysis focuses on the activists' dedication to different fantasies, which helps us to understand the political implications of such dedication. Analysing the dedication to certain fantasies contributes to an understanding of the fantasy's ideological aspects and its normative aspects, i.e., the ideal that the fantasy supports (Glynos 2011, p. 75).

In order to locate fantasies in our material, we employ the concept of fantasmatic narratives. A fantasmatic narrative offers a sense of logical wholeness to something that is inherently contradictory and backgrounds its political aspects (Glynos & Howarth 2007, pp. 145–8). By focusing on emotive language, we try to capture the activities and objects of desire to which the participants affectively attach. We also understand fantasy as "a setting for desire"; in other words, to adhere to a fantasy is to live "as if" (Scott 2011, p. 49). Following Scott (2011), we also regard fantasy as a condensed narrative of the context it describes (Scott 2011, 50). This means that the fantasy rearranges diachronic actions and contradictions into logical sequences of cause and effect.

Fantasy structures the subject's desire and subdues the anxiety arising from its constitutive lack. As such, fantasy offers the subject a sense of guarantee and this guarantee is commonly projected onto "the Other", making the Other responsible for, or holding the Other to account for, the subject's predicament (Chang & Glynos 2011). By focusing on who is called upon to handle the neo-Nazis, and on the feelings of disappointment or betrayal in connection to this, we can localise the guarantor of the fantasy; i.e., in what [or whom] the LGBTQ activists place their trust and hopes and who they hold responsible for their situation.

In trying to comprehend how the recycling of historical discourses or narratives is used to veil antagonisms, we also find Scott's (2011, p. 46) notion of a *fantasy echo* productive. A fantasy echo, Scott (2011, p. 48) argues, is an iteration of history, but never an exact copy of it. Like an echo, history bounces back in a slightly different form and with a slightly different meaning and, through repetition, effectively veils this transformation of the discourse and enhances the desire for the fantasy in question (Scott 2011, p. 53). Fantasy helps us understand how political and collective subjectivities are formed by the way in which they both internalise and resist social norms (Scott 2011, p. 51). A political identity is often articulated through fantasmatic narratives of history. These narratives are rendered as logical and sequential, thus veiling its contingency. When the history of the LGBTQ movement is told as a progressive and recurring narrative, one victory at a time in a continuously forward movement, it conceals narratives of conflict, struggle and reactionary responses (Scott 2011, p. 51). In this context, Puar (2007) challenges the idea that the LGBTQ movement continues to make linear progress, from a dark past towards a bright future. In fantasy echoes, history is replaced by repetition, and as Scott writes: "Writing oneself into the story being staged thus becomes a way of writing oneself into history" (2011, p. 51).

We read our transcribed interviews in an iterative process through the lens of our theoretical approach of discourse theory and the psychoanalytical tools presented above. By doing so, we identify three dominant fantasmatic narratives in the activists' responses to the neo-Nazi threat. These three narratives form the three themes in the analysis presented below. Firstly, we analyse how the neo-Nazi presence leads the participants to turn towards, and hope for, certain ways of understanding and doing politics. Secondly, we analyse the participants' investment in the state, i.e., the police and legislation. Thirdly, we explore the participants' attachment to the past. These three themes are then further developed in a process of dialectic reading with previous research. In the concluding remarks, we discuss the political implications of these findings for a politics that aims to bring about social change.

A Fantasy of the Political as Conflict Free

This first theme centres on a desire for certain kinds of politics, articulated by the interviewees in their response to the neo-Nazi presence. Interviewee Robin argues that, because of the neo-Nazi threat:

We haven't really talked about what we want to be in the future. What do we want to do in our organisation, how should we work? How should we work together in this group?

The neo-Nazi threat is articulated as limiting the formulation of a politics for the future. Eli touches upon similar issues, and when the interviewees are asked what they would like to do instead of having to deal with neo-Nazi threats, they respond:

> Shift the tone of debate and its focus towards concrete issues [connected to LGBTQ people], instead of constantly having to focus on being reactive and reacting to things that others claim or think. And that's what's left, because we can't develop our knowledge and ideology as much, and continue to communicate things that we think are constructive and what actually helps. Instead, we must use our energy, or part of that energy, on responding and resisting and saying "No, this is not OK". Things that are completely useless, if you're thinking strategically and long term.

What is being expressed here is that the threat makes the movement "reactive" and forces it to waste energy on "responding" and "resisting". This is an experience that other participants share, Kim says:

> Well, even if I hate this formulation, but to "work a bit with the positive things", like talk about rights and not threats, possibilities and not just focusing on the resistance based on the "opponents'" agenda, but to have our own agenda.

In Eli's and Kim's narratives, "resistance" in relation to their "opponents'" agenda is seen as something negative, something they wished they did not have to focus on. Alex expresses similar ideas:

> We don't want to construct neither our movement nor this demonstration [a specific pride parade] as something that's dependent on a special group or a political party's hatred or politics […] It's easier to come together around something that's pleasurable and positive.

The Lacanian logic of fantasy builds upon the notion of "the Other", and a fantasy is partly sustained by the idea that if only "the Other" – here the presence of neo-Nazis – can be eliminated, the fantasy will be fulfilled (Glynos 2011, p. 72). Through such an understanding, this feeling of possibilities, of fulfilling the fantasy of a conflict-free politics, gives the subject a sense of enjoyment by accusing the Other of "theft of enjoyment" (Chang & Glynos 2011, p. 111).

Mouffe (2005) argues that conflicts and adversaries are crucial for democracy, but that the political arena today is increasingly being formulated in economic, technical and moralistic terms, and based on belief in a politics that can achieve consensus and solutions that benefit all. This belief is, argues Mouffe (2005), closely bound to the (neo)liberal understanding of the political and its focus on individuals. In fact, when asked about what may have given rise to the neo-Nazi threat, Kim argues against fixation on any particular organisation and for instead looking at what empowers neo-Nazis. Kim says:

> I want to blame individualism, this focus on individuals. When we're raising issues, everyone wants a person they can pity, because a focus on individuals is like a better-selling narrative.

While Kim expresses a desire to focus on something positive, they also describe an urge to move beyond the obvious and scrutinise the kind of political claims that can be successful in a contemporary political discourse, and how that may enable the rise of neo-Nazis. Mouffe (2005) argues that the silencing of conflicts in politics tends to lead to a formulation of conflicts as a battle between good and evil and between people instead of different political ideals. With such an understanding, it can be argued that the desire for a "positive" or "pleasurable" politics may

silence the LGBTQ movement's conflictual relationship with hetero-normative institutions, such as government organisations.

While a focus on "positive things" seems to be a conscious decision for some, Charlie says that because of the neo-Nazi threat, the movement has been forced to reduce its "pushing of positive stories" and instead highlight the threats. Lo, a representative from one of the larger LGBTQ organisations, says:

> As an organisation, we have, for several years, chosen to say: "It's going in the right direction, it's cool". We have wanted to signal a sense of hope and safety because the community has needed that. And it has been important, and is still important, which means that it also hurts us, as an organisation, to say, like: "It's hard right now" or "We're scared right now".

It is interesting to note that both Charlie and Lo articulate the neo-Nazi threat as undermining positive narratives. Such an articulation, read through the lens of the Other, strengthens the fantasmatic idea of the LGBTQ movement's political direction once the neo-Nazis are eradicated. Communicating that something is difficult or scary, on the other hand, is articulated as hurtful to the organisation. This is especially interesting because of the explicit critique of narratives implying that we are "done" with LGBTQ issues. Lo says that the threat from neo-Nazis:

> … challenges the whole picture of this: "Oh but it's fine to live as an LGTB person now that we have the right to marry and have children" and live in big cities and be middle class and white and such. It [the threat] also points out that a lot remains to be done, but also that it really differs depending on who we are, how we look, how we're treated. It's not just about the rights we have ... well, that we have legal protection against discrimination and the right to marry is one thing, whether we have real access to that protection and those rights is another.

Hence, Lo argues that the neo-Nazi presence might help challenge the understanding that the struggle is over. Eli also says:

> Don't get me wrong, but when Nazis show up, that can be a political gain for the LGBTQ movement. Because that makes clear what rights we've had to fight for, and why it's possible to have Pride festivals around the country. That LGBTQ people are out and about is not necessarily in itself perceived as something political, but it becomes clear that it is, after all.

Here, it is argued that the neo-Nazi threat lifts the veil that has been shrouding political issues, or that it makes the conflict visible. This, according to some interviewees, is productive. Some of the things mentioned by Eli, such as the right to be visible and take up public space, have been central to the LGBTQ movement for a long time, but are sometimes assumed to be goals already achieved in the Swedish context. In the quote above, Lo also describes how the neo-Nazi threat not only challenges the idea of all goals having been achieved, but also makes visible the differences within the community or movement, pinpointing yet another kind of conflict. This is something Lo links to having the opportunity to exercise rights – an argument that ties into Spade's (2011), about a key drawback of investing in a rights discourse being that opportunities to exercise such rights are stratified, often along the same lines of inequality that the rights are intended to counterbalance, for example in relation to class or race (see also Kehl 2020). Eli touches upon a related matter when asked about the kind of long-term work their organisation does in relation to neo-Nazi threats, saying:

> More and more, we [the organisation] are working with internal racist structures, trying to map how racism is expressed [within the organisation] and how to work against it.

Mika also openly objects to the idea of a conflict-free politics in articulating a desire to use violence in order to make it "damn hard to be an organised Nazi". As mentioned earlier, a fantasy is marked by its status, by whether or not it stirs up acts of resistance (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 145), and fantasy as such can include aspects of reproduction as well as defiance. The later quotes from Lo, Eli and Mika can be argued to

challenge the fantasy of politics as conflict free, because they reveal a desire for a different approach towards the political, a desire to politicise the LGBTQ subject as well as to highlight its racialised nature (see also Kehl 2020; Wasshede 2021). This alternative narrative can be seen to represent a desire for a different political strategy, often connected to a radical queer politics (see Engebretsen 2021), which carries the promise of transformed relations of domination (Scott 2011, p. 49).

The fantasy of the caring state

To capture whom the LGBTQ activists are calling upon to handle the neo-Nazis and how, we here focus on where the LGBTQ activists place their trust and hopes and who they hold responsible for their situation. We do so by pinpointing feelings of disappointment and betrayal. When asked about a public call for others to take responsibility in the struggle against neo-Nazis, issued by members of the LGBTQ movement, Robin says:

> Many groups could stand in solidarity with us, but I want to especially mention he police, because they have such a long way to go. I mean, throughout the organisation, there is a need for a better understanding of hate crime and hate speech.

Here, Robin expresses a desire for solidarity and recognition from the police force. Charlie argues in a similar way about hate crime and hate speech, saying that the police cannot handle these issues because they lack the competence for it. Chris also describes the police as the principal ally from which expressions of solidarity and recognition are most craved:

> When we weren't able to be present in Almedalen, a lot of people from various civil society organisations expressed their support […] but I don't know how far that will take us. That's not really where we look for support, we want some kind of change, that someone creates a space where we can be ourselves and feel safe, so it's mostly the police we target in our critique.

Lo also shares experiences of dialogue with the police in planning a large event:

> We had a disagreement with the police about their plans of how to handle this, we kept asking for constant presence […] and their response was always […] "we will have them under surveillance" rather than "we will be there for you". (Our emphasis)

Lee argues in a similar way to Lo about Almedalen, where their organisation chose not to participate due to the police's formal decision to grant permission for neo-Nazis to be present at the event. They state: "It was so incredibly obvious the police was completely ignoring our safety by making that decision." The quotes above illustrate a sense of betrayal and resentment towards the police because they are not fulfilling the activists' desire for a knowledgeable police force that understands the conditions under which the LGBTQ movement is operating, that shows solidarity with them and protects them accordingly. A key component of the logic of fantasy is the guarantor, who is positioned as the party responsible for the subject's current predicament and future. In the quotes above, the interviewees articulate the view that the responsibility for the situation resides with the police, which can therefore be argued to be the designated guarantor (Chang & Glynos 2011, p. 118). This attachment to the guarantor produces what we may call a fantasy of the caring state, as the police is a highly visible and symbolic representative of the state (Bradford 2014). The police is "the embodiment of the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force" (Ericson 1989, p. 205), but also holds an important function in reproducing the symbolic order (ibid.) and is, to some, a part of an imagined national community (Anderson 1983). The state, embodied by the police, becomes a "caring Other" (Chang & Glynos 2011, p. 119).

When asked why members of the LGBTQ movement are reluctant to take part in events such as Almedalen, Alex responds that it is because the police practise a "colour blind" interpretation of the law and because:

> In Sweden we allow this kind of Nazi organisation […] Perhaps we
> should try a different decision, not allowing Nazi organisations? […] I
> think it's weird that we allow Nazi organisations in Sweden.

Alex expresses resentment towards the police and Swedish legislation for allowing Nazis, speaking of a "we" who allows Nazi organisations, and referring to the nation as a "we". This arguably binds together the police, the legislative body of government and of the nation state, with parts of the LGBTQ movement. The fantasy of the caring state can be argued to consist of a combination of a desire for the state to "acknowledge our existence" (i.e., recognition), a desire for the state to "know us" (i.e., understand our predicament) and a desire for the state to "care for us" (i.e., protection). While both Robin and Chris express gratitude for the support they have received from other NGOs and social movements in facing neo-Nazi threats, they also express an explicit lack of interest for that support. As Chris puts it: "That's not really where we look for support". The linking to the state as expressed in the above quotes by Robin, Charlie, Chris, Lo, Lee and Alex may thus block possible alliances with other actors and social movements when it comes to tackling neo-Nazi presence.

As Brown (1992) argues, accepting political protection from the state will require giving up power – both individual and collective – because the price one has to pay for institutionalised protection is an agreement "to abide by the protector's rules" (ibid., p. 8). From such cues, we argue that there is a risk in assuming that turning to the state for protection from neo-Nazis is unproblematic and will only open up possibilities for LGBTQ activists, as it may also entail the production of dependent and disciplined subjects. This also corresponds with Akin (2017), who discusses how queer asylum seekers in search of protection need to adjust themselves in order to come across as worthy.

Subsequently, the fantasy of the caring state expressed here, that binds the LGBTQ movement to the state, may block other political pathways and also prevent critique of the state per se. Robin expresses a desire for the police to show solidarity, but also says that "not all

LGBTQ people trust the police" and, when talking about the community, Billie says that "not everyone benefits from a police presence". Eli explains the complicated political situation vis-à-vis the police in the LGBTQ movement:

> Many of us who are active [in the movement] don't have citizenship, like *sans papiers* or asylum seekers who may face deportation. Focusing on and expecting the police and law to protect us is very paradoxical, and that ties into the question of whether we want the police to participate [in Pride events]. Should the police walk in uniform at Pride next to asylum seekers or *sans papiers* who risk deportation?

As Eli illustrates in this quote, when parts of the LGBTQ movement look to the state for a principal ally – in so doing binding the movement to the state – it may block out critique of the repressive elements of the state, such as the migration authorities and police surveillance and pursuit of LGBTQ *sans papiers* and asylum seekers. In analysing the aftermath of the police killing of Michael Brown Jr in Ferguson, in the US, Sharron (2019) critiques those who understand care as being always benevolent, arguing that the state uses notions of care – an idea of the caring state – to enable violence. Although care and violence may seem like opposites, they are in tandem, Sharron argues, essential for the police's and other institutions of the state's production of legitimate governance. This aligns with Spade's (2011) argument about the mainstream LGBTQ movement in the US; by appealing to the state for legal reforms, it tends to overlook state violence and reproduce the very power relations it seeks to challenge. The appeal for legal reform, according to Spade, obfuscates how homophobia and racism operate, and empowers the state and its institutions by providing an opportunity to make claims on legitimacy and fairness (see also Alm 2020; Kehl 2020). Similarly, Eli's quote illustrates both how police presence might create an unsafe environment for LGBTQ people who lack citizenship, and how walking in the Pride parade in uniform may create goodwill and serve purposes of legitimising the police. Eli's statement can be seen as a queer

protest: as a commentary on the pinkwashing of police presence at Pride and carceral Pride politics more generally (Engebretsen 2021; see also Wasshede 2021). In contrast to Alex above, Eli formulates a "we" with *sans papiers* and asylum seekers, rather than a "we" with the legislative body of the state, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of solidarity across national borders (see Engebretsen 2021). Eli also highlights the implications of identifying with the state:

> I think it's problematic when legislation and the police are portrayed as always being on the same side as the LGBTQ movement […] we see really big problems with rights and LGBTQ-phobic legislation, so of course there's a risk of a shift, […] that this alters the political discussion.

The repeated appeals to the police and the legislative body of the state reveal how fantasies incorporate conflicting logics, in this case between state protection and persecution. They also highlight how this fantasy may inform the conversation; with whom the movement should seek solidarity and collaboration, and on what matters the movement should focus. These last quotes however, illustrate that not all of the interviewees are invested in the fantasy of the caring state, that some rather contest it – a kind of protest that Wasshede (2021) argues is central to a radical queer movement. The fact that some identify with the state while others identify with the community also suggests that identification with collectives may differ, both between activists and depending on context.

Fantasmatic echoes: making sense through history

A common theme in the narratives the LGBTQ activists provide in making sense of the neo-Nazi threat concerns references to a history of neo-Nazi encounters . Kim says:

> Fifteen years ago, I lived in a town where kicks, punches, assault were really common […] and I believe that kind of violence has decreased. But, at the same time, I can see that threats of violence from, like, Nazi groups, have become more vicious.

Kim compares recent developments to the situation 15 years ago, contrasting and relating them to a history of neo-Nazi violence directed against LGBTQ people. Likewise, Eli makes sense of the present threat through references to the past:

> I mean, there's always been a real threat from right-wing extremist groups. But ten years ago, their presence was marginal and their resources limited. They would of course turn up at the occasional event, but it wasn't something we actively had to address.

By contrasting the past with the present, Kim and Eli frame the neo-Nazi threats and violence as something that has always been there. Robin narrates this continuum in a slightly different manner:

> We have, for sure, continuously had problems, I think that's important to say. I mean, what was it, some 20 years ago, there was a report in which [this city] was called the gay-bashing city. And it was really obvious what kind of threats we were living under then. I'd rather say that we've had a fairly calm period...what can I say, around 2014 was some kind of positive peak (laughs) […] We do have a right-wing extremist milieu that comes and goes, like in waves, so to speak. And we can see that, in the past, we've had periods that have been more intense.

In the quote above, Robin describes the threats and violence as coming in waves throughout history. It seems important to the interviewees to recognise and reflect upon the past when describing the present situation. Robin continues:

> We've always been under threat. As long as we've been around, the organisation has been under threat […]. So that's not new. What is new I'd say is that the threats have become more intense, and they've been more organised.

When making sense of the neo-Nazi presence, narratives of the present are made intelligible through connecting them with the past. A fantasy

echo, Scott writes, "signifies the repetition of something imagined or an imagined repetition" (2011, p. 48). In line with Scott's understanding, the intertwining of narratives of the present with the past signifies that an identification with collective struggles is made through affinities between activists' present and their past. Alex explains that:

> In Sweden, we've always had these Nazis. And I'm thinking, when I was really young, I mean in the eighties, and John Hron [14-year-old boy murdered by Nazis], I mean, ...it has always existed. These earlier threats illustrate that it has always been like this, nothing new.

In a similar vein, Charlie tells us that:

> I mean, it's a bit like returning to the nineties. There are divisions [within the organisation] in Sweden […] In [this city], they've been shot at, had rocks thrown at them and stuff. But it was a lot more in the past. […] But now it's back.

Likewise, Mika refers to the nineties when making sense of the present:

> Well, it's, we think it's connected with racist and homophobic political parties, when racism and homophobia gain legitimacy in parliament, then the Nazi movement outside parliament increases. And that's evident; in the nineties, that was the first time we had an openly racist party and then Nazism and neo-Nazism were really strong. So, you can definitely see a connection there.

In all the quotes above, the interviewees are referring to history in one way or another. However, they do not describe a joint moment in history; on the contrary, they all focus on different times and histories. What seems to be important in their narratives is the reference to history per se. In light of Scott's (2011, p. 50) work, we understand these recurring references to history as a condensed narrative and as an aspect of fantasy, as a way to make sense of the present by merging it with history in a successional order.

As mentioned earlier, fantasy – here in the form of a fantasy echo – plays a central role in collective mobilisation and political will (Glynos 2011; Stavrakakis 2007). By connecting the present with the past, the interviewees equate their current experience with the experience of past struggles. The fantasmatic echoing and reiteration of the past depicts the neo-Nazi presence as a continuum that connects present and past activists, making them part of the same, ongoing struggle. As Lo puts it: "Most of us have been through this before. But it was a long time ago." The LGBTQ activists are writing both themselves and the LGBTQ collective into history, and at the same time writing the movement's history, which may strengthen the collective bond through repetition. The reuse of collective struggles may thus work to mobilise future struggles through the investment in being part of something bigger than a mere present.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we have shown how the presence of neo-Nazis shape the political aspirations of LGBTQ activists. We conclude that the neo-Nazi threats contribute to a dominant fantasy of a positive and conflict-free politics, although not all of the interviewees adhered to such a fantasy. We argue that such a fantasy conceals conflicts, which in turn tends to reshape them into a moral battle between good and evil, rather than a battle over ideology. If such an attachment to a fantasy of conflict-free politics is a general trait among other LGBTQ activists, it may silence the LGBTQ movement's conflictual relationship with heteronormative institutions.

We have also addressed who the LGBTQ activists call upon to handle the neo-Nazis, and how. The narratives illustrate a sense of betrayal and resentment towards the state, often personified in the police, for their lack of solidarity, lack of knowledge about activists' predicaments, their failure to provide protection through legislation on hate crime and hate speech, and for not outlawing Nazi organisations. We understand this as a fantasy of the caring state, in which the police become a "caring Other". Although there is no inevitable contradiction between wanting

rights and striving for radical solutions, awareness of the conditionality of inclusion in such "universalist" rights underlines the importance of not being seduced into focusing too narrowly on such rights. Furthermore, investment in the fantasy of the caring state binds the LGBTQ activists to the nation state and positions it as a guarantor for their fantasy. This, we argue, may block possible alliances with other actors and social movements.

As fantasies conceal conflicting logics, the fantasy of the caring state may also block critiques of repressive elements of the state, such as the migration authorities, police surveillance and the pursuit of LGBTQ *sans papiers* and asylum seekers. Appealing to the state for legal reforms may overshadow state violence and reproduce the very power relations it seeks to challenge, because the ability to exercise such rights is stratified. This can obfuscate how homophobia and racism operate and empower the state by providing it with the opportunity to claim legitimacy and fairness.

When the activists speak about the neo-Nazi threat, they often refer to history and make sense of the current neo-Nazi presence by connecting it to the past. Through a fantasy echo, they write themselves into history in a successional order, a history in which they identify with an ongoing collective struggle and thus become part of that continuous struggle. Because fantasy plays a central role in political mobilisation a political collective is reinforced, which may prove productive in future struggles. Rather than seeing this fantasy echo as a desire for (overcoming) the past – a "queer nostalgia" (Haritaworn 2015) – or a preoccupation with the past, which hinders the formulation of a utopian future (Wiegman 2000), we understand these historical narratives as reinforcing a political collective. In light of growing individualism, we understand the fantasy echo of past struggles as productive because it enables the formation of a political collective that is pivotal for mobilising social movements.

Connecting to our previous study (Linander, Lauri & Lauri 2021), in which we analysed the fears that the neo-Nazi presence invokes for LGBTQ activists, we see this fortification of a political collective as a

protective shield. This is because the neo-Nazi presence was described as less daunting to confront as a collective compared to facing it as an individual.

Having analysed these LGBTQ activists' responses to the neo-Nazi presence, we have shown some of the effects that such a presence has for LGBTQ activism in Sweden. We argue that the neo-Nazi presence prompts the development of a fantasy of a positive and conflict-free politics and a fantasy of a caring state that binds together parts of the LGBTQ movement with that very same state, potentially blocking other alliances and critique of the state. Such effects highlight some important political implications for the LGBTQ movement that extend beyond the immediate effects of threats and violence. While such conclusions are discouraging, the activists' articulation of a fantasy echo, in which they write themselves into the history of LGBTQ struggles, arguably strengthens a political collective, which may prove pivotal for the LGBTQ movement's future struggles.

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