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Nationalist Contradictions

On the Relations between Homonationalism and Nationalist Anti-LGBTQ Politics and Activism

ABSTRACT

What exactly do we mean by "nationalism" when we research and critique homonationalism? The question has become ever more important since much anti-LGBTQ politics and activism is articulated as nationalist – being performed in the name of "the nation". Examining what the 'nation' in homonationalism is taken to be, I argue that more careful attention should be given to (homo)nationalism as part of a contradictory process. The argument goes hand in hand with the necessity of tracing changing historically and geographically specific nationalist strategies and aims, such as liberal and far-right nationalist reproductions of homonationalist discourse, and how they shape one another. While it includes empirical examples, the article's central aim is to make a theoretical contribution to how we might theorise the contradictory articulations of gender and sexuality in nationalist ideology.

Keywords: Nationalism, homonationalism, far-right, anti-gender

THE CONCEPT OF homonationalism, coined by Jasbir Puar (2017/2007), refers to how LGBTQ rights have become interwoven in imperialist and nationalist politics, projects, and discourse. In many Western contexts, homonationalist discourse racialises homophobia by attributing it only to southern or eastern hemispheres (Jungar & Peltonen 2017), or to migrants and racial minorities in the Global North (Wahab 2021). As such, homonationalism has been central in Western nation-states' justi-

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fication of a range of actions, including border regimes, wars, and economic exploitation. This justification mainly consists of Western nations claiming that they have surpassed sexual oppression, while southern nations – and people – still need to enter modern times of acceptance (Rao 2020). The concept of homonationalism hints at the centrality of the nation as an institution and nationalism as an ideology in these processes. A crude narrative of how both have changed since the late 1990s would be that 'the (Western) nation' has gone from being universally and restrictedly heteronormative to now include and even embrace a selection of non-heteronormative modes of being as these showcase the nation's modernity, and its enlightened and civilised population. This homonationalist embrace is by definition an exclusionary one, rejecting and even villainising non-citizens, racialised citizens, and a range of queer identities and practices further away from national norms marked by whiteness, upper classes, cisnormativity and gender conformity (e.g. Haritaworn 2015; van Gent, Brugman & De Craene 2023).

While the concept of homonationalism has served well in critical analyses of co-options of LGBTQ struggles for racist and exclusionist politics, it still lacks in addressing the fact that even though the heteronormativity of 'the nation' changed, it never went away. Instead, homonationalist discourses have evolved alongside persisting attacks on LGBTQ people, spaces, and rights, such as those labelled heteroactivist or anti-gender (see Browne & Nash 2020; Boulila & Browne 2023; Butler 2024). While homo- and transphobic attacks and discourse are by no means restrictedly conducted by specific religious or political groups, many are being carried out in the name of 'the nation' or as part of nationalist ideologies. The role of 'the nation' in both homonationalism and anti-LGBTQ attacks and discourse have received increased attention, not least in the Nordic countries. Previous studies have begun to nuance the homonationalist concept by tracing how homonationalist discourse interacts with anti-gender politics and campaigns through opposing definitions of citizenship and national values (Hansen 2021; Evang 2022). This article adds to these discussions by suggesting a more prominent role for the concepts of nation

and nationalism in research on homonationalism and anti-gender politics and activism.

In Sweden, nationalist oppositions to different sexual rights have been expressed by various groups and organisations, including neo-Nazis and nationalist political parties, such as the Sweden Democrats (SD). These actors are evidently nationalist, in the sense that their ideologies and practices concern glorified national (white) pasts and frame migrants as a threat to the nation's 'purity'. But what has been their role in shaping homonationalist discourse, in not only embracing but also opposing it? While homonationalist discourse spread in the 2010s, there have been several concomitant nationalist attacks on LGBTQ people, rights, and spaces.

These include threats and attacks from the neo-Nazi group the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) targeting LGBTQ movements (see Linander & Sandberg 2020; Engebretsen 2021; Linander, Lauri & Lauri 2021, 2022). In Sweden, another neo-Nazi group, Nordic Youth (NY), also made a tradition of counterprotesting Stockholm Pride between 2015 and 2018, at occasions attempting to block the Pride Parade (Dalsbro 2019). Simultaneously, the political party SD have used their influence in local and state parliaments to object, hinder, or dismantle different laws and policies intending to improve LGBTQ lives (RFSU 2020). These various actions are nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism: taken by actors opposing LGBTQ people and rights through either parliamentary activity or activism as part of their nationalist projects. In the Nordic countries and elsewhere, they organise both against sexual rights and against a homonationalist discourse. It is therefore crucial to research how these opposing nationalist articulations of sexuality (homonationalism contra heterosexist nationalism) work in relation to each other on various scales: globally, regionally, nationally, and locally.

Focusing on the national scale in my own work, I have examined the political and discursive relationships between homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism in Sweden. Drawing on critical discourse analysis (per Fairclough 2015) of news media publications (n=320) and public documents (n=70), I analysed how

various actors and institutions in Sweden have responded to nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism. The critical discourse analysis was combined with a theoretical, dialectic approach in which I sought to understand the ways in which homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism are not merely opposites but related processes and projects: opposing elements in a nationalist contradiction. This is a contradiction in the Marxist sense (Harvey 2014; Ollman 2003), meaning that real social processes simultaneously undermine and oppose each other. By contradicting each other, homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism reproduce nationalism through the very struggle over its sexual and gendered meaning. Hence, homonationalist discourse has been strengthened rather than weakened by nationalist anti-LGBTQ activism. Any instance reacting to nationalist anti-LGBTQ activity may quickly question nationalist movements' authority to speak on behalf of the nation – a nation still assumed ideologically and territorially homogeneous, but to which neo-Nazis and far-right parties pose a threat.

As an illustrative example from my discourse analysis, one can consider a publication described as coming from "the LGBTQ movement", published in several newspapers and on RFSL's (Sweden's largest LGBTQ civil organisation) web page (Hedlund et al. 2017). It was written in direct reaction to neo-Nazi protests at Pride marches, demanding increased protection, and was signed by 15 Pride festival organisers, civil organisation chairpersons, and politicians (five right-wing and one left-wing). They opened their piece as follows: "How a country treats LGBTQ persons, disabled, Jews, Muslims and other minorities is a litmus test of how well the country defends democracy and human rights" (Hedlund et al. 2017). The article goes on to express national pride (writing "we are proud of how far Sweden has come") and pleads for support from nation-state institutions, subscribing to – and reproducing – the assumption of a nation-state (Sweden) that is represented as a "culturally singular, territorially bounded national community" (Goswami 2002, 785). This national community is taken to be in competition with other nation-states, having its success measured not in economic growth but in human rights.

The debate article represents a tendency to reify homonationalist discourse in reaction to nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism in Sweden. Thus, it also suggests that the two opposite articulations of sexuality in nationalism both undermine and mutually reinforce each other. Nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism target LGBTQ people and spaces, but they also target the homonationalist ideological representation of LGBTQ rights as a national virtue. SD have, for example, advocated against municipalities hoisting rainbow flags – arguing that only the Swedish flag should be flown. Neo-Nazis, in contrast, argue that LGBTQ people are part of a global conspiracy set out to annihilate the white nation. Both through politics (SD) and activism (neo-Nazis), oppositions towards LGBTQ people are connected to, and channelled through, opposing homonationalist representations of LGBTQ rights as signifiers of national superiority.

Notable work has been done to theorise how homonationalism has been utilised by nationalist movements, such as radical right nativist ideologists, according to whom states should be populated only by the group they consider 'native'. Mainly, this research concerns self-proclaimed nationalist projects that embrace homonationalist narratives for their Islamophobic, anti-immigration, and racist agendas (e.g. Bracke 2012; Kehl 2018). However, not all nationalist far-right actors embrace homonationalism, or they only do so superficially, opportunistically. The field of social sciences and humanities therefore still awaits a wider range of discussions of the concept of homonationalism that theorise far-right, fascist, populist, or neo-Nazi backlashes to LGBTQ rights, to which I seek to contribute with this piece.

What can homonationalism as an analytic concept do – or not do – to explain nationalist movements that oppose the ideal of the LGBTQ-inclusive nation-state? I answer this question by first defining nationalism and analysing what previous studies on homonationalism have taken nationalism to be. Then I contribute to these studies by providing a suggestion for how we can improve and continue to gain from the concept of homonationalism by viewing nationalism as a contradictory social process. Doing so, I distinguish between two contemporary ele-

ments of nationalism in Nordic European contexts: homonationalism as symbolic exploitation and nationalist anti-LGBTQ action as politics of exclusion, arguing that they are elements creating nationalist contradictions. While this article seeks to make a theoretical contribution, the argument is based on my PhD research, from which I highlight an example of how homonationalism has been reified in responses to nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism in Sweden.

The meaning of nationalism in homonationalism

According to Agnew (2013), there are two major strands of thinking about nationalism: either as "an autonomous force in history" or as "practical politics". Homonationalism as defined by Puar (2017) would fall into the former category, as she argues that homonationalism is "not something one is either inside of / included or against / outside of – rather, it is a structuring force of neoliberal subject formation" (Puar 2017, 230). By contrast, the increased power and visibility of far-right, nationalist parties and movements over the world are more commonly researched as "practical politics", all being politically "nationalist", "radical nationalist" (Teitelbaum 2017), or "nativist hyper-nationalist" (Ince 2019). Still, it would be wrong to view far-right actors and movements in Europe (and elsewhere) as being *the* nationalists, whose struggles are against post-nationalist modes of state and governance (see Koch 2023). Much like homonationalism, nationalism more generally is a widespread, foundational modern ideology and very hard, if not impossible, for people to opt out of. The latter stance being held by scholars emphasising nationalism as a "force", that can be summarised as an ideology, reproduced through communicational structures (Anderson 1983; Billig 1995). These views point towards nationalism as an ideology not only subscribed to by specific movements, such as fascists or revolutionaries, but fundamental to modern everyday life (see also Koefoed & Simonsen 2007; Skey & Antonsich 2017).

Puar (2017) on the other hand theorises the nation-state as an institution through which bio- and necropolitical language regimes are enacted, producing discourses of subjects of life and subjects of death.

Homonationalism captures how, in biopolitical projects, "discourses of sexual liberation have become integrally linked to national and global security" (Wahab 2021, 850). It is therefore a nationalist discourse functioning as a 'force' on a global scale, rather than a narrower political project traceable in particular subjects or political movements. Emphasising this subjectless critique (see also Eng & Puar 2020), homonationalism as a discourse is always produced through geographical and historical conditions, which Puar traces in social processes such as the global "war on terror", dismantled welfare states, intensifying neoliberalism, and heightened border security (Puar 2017, 28–30, 228). Despite being defined as a 'force', homonationalism is often researched as part of other political projects, such as border controls and migration policy (Hiller 2022), the neoliberal dismantling of welfare-states (Puar 2017), tourist and event industries (Puar 2002; Hubbard & Wilkinson 2015; Hartal 2019), anti-immigration racism (Kehl 2018), or the 'war on terror' (Puar 2017; Engebretsen 2021) to name a few. When homonationalism is researched in its concrete manifestations, it therefore becomes clear that it is both an autonomous force, deeply integrated in several social and political processes, and produced and reproduced in particular political projects.

In their review of scholarship on homonationalism, Winer and Bolzendahl (2021) bring forth the question of far-right politics being on the rise. Their article constitutes an example of viewing homonationalism and 'heteronationalism' as mutually exclusive political projects (none of them being connected to nationalist 'forces'). In their reasoning, research showing that "anti-LGBTQI+ and antigender-egalitarianism impulses continue to be a strong, consistent part of the right-wing political system" (Winer & Bolzendahl 2021, 7) would disprove the concomitant existence and impact of homonationalism. The fact that nationalist movements and parties (nationalism as practical politics) do not successfully, if at all, advocate LGBTQ nation-state inclusion would then disprove homonationalism's hegemonic status. Such assumptions, however, present a very narrow view on what homonationalism is, taking it to be a co-option of LGBTQ rights utilised by far-right actors and movements

(as critiqued by Puar 2017, 229). They locate nationalism only in the most extreme and overt racist projects, as if it was detached from its surrounding conditions (as critiqued by Billig 1995). Detaching nationalism from wider society and placing it only on 'extremists' further misses a core focus for research on homonationalism: seeing how "progressive and liberal discourses of LGBTQ identity […] might unwillingly use, rely upon, or reinscribe" nationalism (Puar 2017, 46).

We need to find other (better) ways to grapple with the fact that homonationalism has not entirely replaced political projects that unite racism, nationalism, and anti-LGBTQ stances. One way of doing so can be found in the work of Slootmaeckers (2019, 239), who argues that nationalism has "seemingly contradictory features" in the assumed binary of homonationalism and what he calls heteronationalism (aligned with what I call nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism). Writing against the assumption of contradiction (as in mutually exclusive elements), he goes on to argue that because both strands rely on similar discourses, they are two versions of the same power dynamic: the relation between masculinity and nationalism. Slootmaeckers convincingly suggests that homonationalism is a technique of Othering which places the 'tolerant' masculine subject in morally superior relation to the 'intolerant' masculine subject. Thus, it attributes effeminate characteristics to Others in a similar fashion as heteronationalist masculine subjects place femininity in homosexual subjects. As norms of masculinity change, nationalist expressions may change with them, a conclusion that resonates with the observation that Western masculine subjects have gone "from 'saving women' to 'saving gays'" (Bracke 2012, 237).

Contradictions in nationalism

I wish to take Slootmaeckers' observation both in a different direction and a step further, by suggesting that hetero- and homonationalism are not only seemingly contradictory – they are contradictory. By that, I do not mean contradictory as in the most common or Aristotelian logic, meaning that if we think one element exists, the other cannot simultaneously do so. Instead, I refer to contradictions in the dialectic sense,

meaning "when two seemingly opposed forces are simultaneously present within a particular situation, a process or an event" (Harvey 2014, 1). Assuming contradictory elements cannot co-exist (following Aristotelian logic) requires seeing them as separate units, divided into comprehensive parts. Accordingly, different nationalist politics can only be defined as separate, coherent units through social and political efforts, meaning there are no given pre-defined units or subjects. What often is perceived as separate units (things, people, movements, ideologies, etc.) is through a dialectic approach "internally *contradictory* by virtue of the multiple processes that constitute them" (Hart 2018, 378, emphasis in original). A contradiction is then a union of the social processes both undermining and supporting each other (ibid.). Internally related processes, here homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism, are internal to and constitutive of a nationalist contradiction.

It is thus necessary in any understanding of homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism to understand them as relational through competing masculinity ideals (Slootmaeckers 2019), or through "plural logics of and/or", recognising how homonationalism is geographically and historically situated (Kehl 2020). To complement these works, I suggest drawing inspiration from dialectic studies of nationalism and racism, through which we can understand nationalism as a contradiction – a social process which contains elements that are mutually supporting while also mutually undermining each other (Ollman 2003, 84–85). Homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics are aspects of the same social process: nationalism. They constantly struggle against each other but do so with a shared aim (be it conscious or not): the legitimacy of a nation-state whose population is racially and/or 'culturally' homogeneous. In the following sections, the two elements of the nationalist contradiction are theorised as two modes of controlling national sexuality and gendered norms – either through exploitation (homonationalism) or through exclusion (nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics).

Since homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism both are racialising projects (defining either the foreign Other

as perversely homophobic or the sexual/gendered Other as challenging white reproductivity), there are many gains from borrowing concepts from wider anti-racist writings when describing events. To understand the Swedish context, the contradiction synthesised by homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ-ism can be brought to light by drawing upon Mulinari and Neergaard's critical work. Their theorising resembles Hart's writing on nationalism (2020a, 2020b, 2021), where she argues that neoliberal hegemonies can shift from liberal to populist articulations – both consistent with nationalisms – and the work of Hennessy (2017), who identifies a struggle over gender and sexuality norms between bourgeois patriarchy and postmodern patriarchy. Mulinari and Neergaard (2017) distinguish between exploitative and exclusionary racism. Exploitative racism is, according to them, foundational to national capital and political regimes, as migration politics produce a racialised, exploitable labour force for capitalist production (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017, 92). Migrants are considered, and made, useful for the nation-state by being employed in low-wage sectors and sectors suffering from a shortage of workers. Exclusionary racism differs from this stance, as it instead frames migrants and racialised citizens as threats, or a burden, needing to be excluded (deported) rather than exploited as labour. Both exploitation and exclusion are racist and nationalist, but they are two racist, nationalist politics in hegemonic struggle with each other – contradictions within the process of racial state capitalism and its ideology of nationalism. They are both tied to the nation-state and thus draw upon and reproduce institutional nationalism, as they are about exploitation within the nation-state borders versus keeping the nation-state ethnically and racially homogeneous.

Homonationalism as exploitation

The definitions of sexual and gendered Others (such as LGBTQ people) differ from those of racialised Others, as the former can be – and often are ignorantly assumed to be – white, while the racialised Other often just as ignorantly is assumed to be straight (Puar 2017). Nonetheless, I find the distinction between exploitative and exclusionary Othering

useful for understanding homonationalism as a fetishisation of LGBTQ spaces (all space marked by LGBTQ activity, however temporary) and exploitation of the labour gone into producing them. LGBTQ people produce spaces for themselves and for various political projects, of which some demand nation-state inclusion while others are critical of it. Time, as well as social labour, is invested in these space-making projects, which result in parties, meeting places, hook-ups, relationships, places for consumption (including shops, bars, and restaurants), culture commodities, or small- and large-scale events, such as Pride festivals. Importantly, Hennessy (2017, 111) also points to how LGBTQ identities and spaces by or for middle- to upper classes have been made possible and shaped through capital and the exploitation of the "lives and labour of invisible Others", meaning a racialised global working class.

At the same time, LGBTQ social production of spaces has also in itself been appropriated by capital, which commodifies LGBTQ identity expressed and shaped through LGBTQ spaces. Under neoliberal capital regimes the body, and especially so the LGBTQ body, has thus become a commodity fetish in Marxian terms, meaning an object seen not for its real capacities or the processes leading to its creation. When the LGBTQ body, or a space created by LGBTQ activity, is represented as a symbol of the nation, the city, or a corporation, it has "nothing to do with the sensory or sensuous, certainly nothing whatever to do with anything as concrete as physical contact, and everything to do with value, that its meaning lies in its operation within a system of formal exchange" (Floyd 2009, 201). LGBTQ spaces and bodies are thus fetishised, seen only for the value they bring to a state, place, or economic sector, which obscures the concrete, sensory or sensuous (or political) experiences of LGBTQ people themselves. When operating within the nation-state system of formal exchange, they bring 'value' to nation-states in competition with each other (Ammaturo & Slootmaeckers 2020), which has implications for global economic transactions (Laskar 2014; Rao 2020). The symbolic value LGBTQ spaces bring to nation-states can only appear through assumed international competition, which is why LGBTQ rights and liveability through homonationalist

discourse are imagined as being decided primarily, if not only, by state borders, marking the boundaries between nation-states as comparable spatial units (Rao 2020).

On the local and regional levels, the 'value' LGBTQ bodies and spaces bring to cities and regions is even more explicitly economic, as city governments acting in line with urban entrepreneurial rationales (seeking to attract capital, wealthy citizens, and tourists) contribute to the commodification of queer urban spaces (see Bell & Binnie 2004; Hubbard & Wilkinson 2015; Hartal 2019). Concrete LGBTQ spaces and people become replaced by abstract symbolic ideas of themselves, as they are witnessed and confirmed by authorities, replacing lived realities with their representations. The image of LGBTQ people supplants the LGBTQ people themselves whose bodies may be transformed both to "a sign of the commodity and indeed into a commodity per se" (Lefebvre 1991, 310). In his writing on the fragmentation of bodies and of space, Lefebvre critiqued what he saw as a modification of eros in neocapitalism, which he meant has become dethatched from the body and instead attached to commercialised spaces. Instead of being found and reciprocated in actual people, sexual elements are attached to places. Individual body parts represent commodities in marketing, while pleasure (widely defined) is confined to places designed for that purpose.

Spaces created by and for LGBTQ people (be it the private shared home, the club, or a protest march) are appropriated for what value they bring a place, such as the nation-state. In the neoliberal nation-state form, it is common practice for both nation-states and local levels of government (regions and cities) to act in accordance with capitalist rationales of competition, in which 'place branding' has played a part to ensure capital investment (as preached by Florida 2005, and critiqued by Harvey 1989). As such, homonationalism is a way of viewing geographical nodes as entities with their own identities, such as either LGBTQ-embracing or homophobic – that is, either as exploiting LGBTQ spaces for the meaning they ascribe to a place or excluding LGBTQ spaces by refusing them legitimacy. Through homonationalist narrations of places as 'LGBTQ friendly' (in comparison to those that are not), LGBTQ

people and spaces are abstracted for what value they bring to places such as the nation. How these spaces are created and used by people is obscured behind the value they add to the places they describe. As the spaces produced by LGBTQ people are appropriated in not only corporate, but also city or nation marketing, the labour and time that has gone into creating them is made invisible, and the LGBTQ space becomes a fetish identified only for what value it adds to places: the homonationalist image and imaginary of nations as 'LGBTQ friendly'.

These processes of exploitation are in Foucauldian, biopolitical terms conceptualised as techniques of surveillance, which discipline and normalise queer bodies through the nation (Puar 2017, 50). Puar argues that the nation-state has the (biopolitical) power to define LGBTQ identity as aligned with state interests. To remain worthy of protection, LGBTQ people are then disciplined to align with nation-state ideals. While certainly related to the concept of biopolitics, the view of homonationalism as a form of exploitation highlights the functioning of global capital and interstate systems, rather than the geopolitical discourses of specific states. This focus aligns with, for example, Rao's (2020) reconceptualisation of homonationalism as homocapitalism, or Chitty's (2020) writing on sexual hegemony, according to which the normalisation of queerness through nation-states is strongly tied to queer activity being beneficial to economic productivity. Furthermore, viewing homonationalism as a form of exploitation enables us to better understand homonationalism's dialectic relation to nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism.

While LGBTQ and queer spaces are enjoyed by their creators and participators, they are also symbolically used by corporations and neoliberal political institutions such as cities or states, which use LGBTQ symbolism, people, and spaces to describe themselves as valuable. This exploitation is far more diffuse and abstract than capital's direct exploitation of workers and cannot be collapsed into meaning the exact same thing, but nonetheless, the relations between LGBTQ spaces and capital or states can be conceived of as exploitative, when the former is utilised for profit by the latter, through both marketing and branding.

Nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics of exclusion

As important revisions of the concept of homonationalism have shown, the exploitative use of LGBTQ spaces and people is also an exclusion of Others, such as people who are poor, racialised as non-white, disabled, homeless, migrants, or foreign (Haritaworn 2015; Hiller 2022; Hubbard & Wilkinson 2015; Meyer 2020; Sabsay 2012). Exploitative homonationalism is indeed inherently exclusionary, not least as it can be drawn upon in exclusionary racist projects, where migrants are represented as threatening, patriarchal and homophobic Others (Bracke 2012; Farris 2017; Puar 2017; Kehl 2018). While homonationalism is founded on exploiting some LGBTQ people, spaces, and activities, it is also founded on excluding others, whose identities, spaces, and activities are not as subjectable to creating value. These others, especially so migrants and racial minorities, are then instead subjected to increased surveillance or exclusion from homonormative LGBTQ spaces (Bell & Binnie 2004; Haritaworn 2015; Rosenberg 2017), or from the homonationalist state (Puar 2017; Kehl 2018).

Yet, like exploitative racism, exploitative homonationalism is simultaneously challenged by a contradicting exclusionary counterpart (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017, 93). I term this counterpart nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism of exclusion, which captures a wide range of 'heteronationalist' projects and discourses. In these, LGBTQ people are not exploited for their symbolic value but instead constructed as Others who ought to be expulsed from national belonging to different degrees (ranging from assimilation or withdrawal from the public sphere to outright murder and extermination). The reasoning behind advocating exclusion instead of exploitation consists of perceiving LGBTQ people as a threat to the heteronormative order with its internal hierarchy. In the ideal family, male authority is assumed and reproduced but would risk being undermined if the 'naturalness' of family units was questioned. Therefore, homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism, and transgenderism need to be erased, as they all provide potential alternatives and thus potentially question the natural hierarchies between men and women, enacted through family units (Hill Collins 1998, 65).

By extension, LGBTQ people threatening heteronormativity is equalised to them threatening the biological reproduction of a 'racially pure' nation. In nationalist politics of exclusion, it is common to articulate the threat of migrants as a threat of 'the great replacement' of white populations by non-white populations. Thus, white families and white women's bodies are central for the racial reproduction of nationhood, to which LGBTQ people are, alongside migrants and non-white citizens, considered threats (Siddiqui 2021). Instead of valuing national whiteness as a moral virtue, manifested by accepting LGBTQ people, nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics value white heteronormativity as a higher moral virtue. This leads to a different symbolic role for LGBTQ people and spaces, which should not be exploited, but instead ought to be erased from public spaces and the nation.

Struggles between LGBTQ exploitation and exclusion

Examples of nationalist anti-LGBTQ resistance to homonationalist exploitation can be found in contemporary nationalist movements that openly resist sexual and gender rights. In the Nordic countries, and specifically in Sweden, the most prominent public nationalist anti-LGBTQ activists have come in the form of neo-Nazis, and the most powerful Swedish nationalist anti-LGBTQ politicians are the Sweden Democrats, who since the 2022 election have had much influence in the government. The neo-Nazi milieu has a long history of anti-LGBTQ violence, connected to an antisemitic ideological project (Lööw 2015). In more recent years (from around 2016 and onward), neo-Nazi groups have conducted several public campaigns directed against Pride festivals and other LGBTQ spaces (Peterson, Wahlström & Wennerhag 2018; Linander & Sandberg 2020). SD, however, have instead expressed their nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics through local and state government policy debates and decisions, as well as by publicly objecting to everything from rainbow flags to drag events (Lennartsson 2022). The fact that the most noticeable calls for excluding LGBTQ people from national belonging come from racist and neo-Nazi nationalist movements and parties should, however, not be taken as a sign that homo-

and transphobia are only far-right projects. Doing so wrongfully assumes that homo- and transphobia come only from these specific people and organisations (Dahl 2005; Meyer 2020).

Both SD and neo-Nazis have in different ways circulated hyperbolic examples of how local and state government institutions have contributed economically or symbolically to vouch for LGBTQ rights and visibility. To provide examples of how governmental institutions draw on LGBTQ symbolism, both neo-Nazis and SD point to events which could be defined as homonationalist, without using that term, and of course for reactionary rather than critical or radical reasons. They complain that LGBTQ spaces and symbolism have increasingly become embraced by local and national political institutions and large corporations, which they use as 'evidence' of the nation having been feminised and thus needing revitalisation, either through revolution (according to neo-Nazis) or more moderate but nonetheless severe intervention (SD). NRM has published mockery of Swedish military Pride campaigns (see Strand & Kehl 2019 for an analysis of said campaigns) and of police officers walking in the Stockholm Pride parade. State authorities using Pride for PR purposes are from a queer critical viewpoint indicative of exploitative homonationalism, as they are used in narratives of state legitimisation and national superiority (Russell 2018; Strand & Kehl 2019). When the same authorities are slandered by NRM, they are instead represented as signs of the nation's decay (Lagerman 2023). The neo-Nazis object to the representation of state authorities as 'feminine' in their embracing of LGBTQ symbolism, but do not critique state authority functions, such as enacting state-sanctioned violence (a stark contrast to queer critique). SD, on the other hand, have been occupied with outcries about LGBTQ spaces being supported or even allowed through local governmental means, objecting to the very actions used to signal homonationalism.

These movements, one neo-Nazi and the other far-right parliamentary, are of course not without their own tensions internally and between them, in which LGBTQ spaces also are used discursively and at times intensely discussed. At a speech held at a large NRM march in Ludvika

in 2019, a speaker, for example, stated that: "For the Sweden Democrats, it's enough to just dance around a Midsummer pole, or march in a Pride Parade to be considered Swedish" (from a recording published on NRM's webpage after the march). Neo-Nazis and far-right politicians are organisationally and politically different, but both draw upon and speak to exploitative homonationalist discourse to gain increased support and legitimacy for their exclusionary nationalist projects. They even make use of homonationalism directly by providing heteronormative political alternatives to it. By critiquing governmental or corporate use of LGBTQ symbolism, they resentfully frame LGBTQ people as powerful actors who gain an unfair, positive share of the diminishing welfare state, in contrast to 'the people'.

Because nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism act in direct reaction to homonationalist discourse, they ought to be viewed as undermining homonationalist projects. They undermine homonationalism as their actions question having LGBTQ people as symbolic contributors to the nation. At the same time, these activities in their current manifestations are crucial for homonationalism to thrive, because homonationalism requires homophobic actions: without homophobia, no nation can be defined as LGBTQ friendly. Because nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism contradict homonationalism, it could be expected to be repressed or ignored. But what has happened in the Swedish case is that these actions instead have gained centre stage in much political debate. When they do, they are consistently framed as threats to not only LGBTQ people, but also the nation.

An example of how homonationalism is produced in reaction to nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism can be found in the article by "the LGBTQ movement", cited in the introduction. The article and many of the other news media publications I have analysed point to how homonationalist discourse is not so much undermined as it is reinforced in response to nationalist anti-LGBTQ movements. In the debate article, threats from neo-Nazis are conflated with those from "religious fundamentalists" and "left-wing extremists" – none of which are portrayed through examples of actual events or attacks:

> […] we are proud over how far Sweden has come. We [LGBTQ people] have the right to celebrate our festival and neither right-wing extremists, left-wing extremists nor fundamentalists with roots in any religion shall hinder us.
>
> […] The Nazi hatred of homosexuals is easy to condone and unite around. But the threat and hatred against the LGBTQ world is to the same extent coming from religious fundamentalists. Here, too, the public Sweden must stand united behind us. (Hedlund et al. 2017, author's translation)

The debate article demands that Sweden defends LGBTQ-rights, stating that "the freedom we LGBTQ people have achieved has to be defended by all democratic forces", specifying these to be governmental organisations in Sweden. The demand draws on exploitative homonationalism to argue for why Swedish authorities need to defend LGBTQ rights. For Sweden to keep being a country to be proud of, it needs to defend LGBTQ people. Here, homonationalism is used as a discursive mean for the authors to make their point. Because it is written in direct response to neo-Nazi attacks against Pride festivals, it serves as an example of how the homonationalist discourse have been re-articulated through reactions to nationalist anti-LGBTQ activism. The Swedish nation is emphasised as an LGBTQ-friendly nation, but one that risks being destroyed. The authors also turn to the nation-state as the main protector of LGBTQ people, requesting it to prove it lives up to ideals of protection.

The fact that both nationalist anti-LGBTQ activists and those they attack (and their allies) claim to speak on behalf of the Swedish nation-state is to be seen as a consequence and re-enactment of the robustness of the nation form. The opposing claims assert that the nation-state is and ought to be a "culturally singular territorially bounded community that, in turn, is represented as an instantiation of a universal political and cultural form" (Goswami 2002, 785). The nation-state as a political and cultural form is globally universal, and thus the institution

through which events (LGBTQ rights) are assumed to be bounded and solved. The Swedish nation-state is, however, both universal in its form and particular in international comparison, something to be "proud" or "ashamed" of. Such identification with the nation, and claims to be speaking on its behalf, assume that within the national community, universality reigns. When this idealised universality within the nation is disrupted, in this case by the visibility and rights of LGBTQ people increasing (per nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism) or decreasing (per homonationalism), state repression of dissidents is the requested solution. Homonationalism is therefore not structurally challenging or challenged by nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism, because both processes are uncritically consequential to the contemporary global system of nation-states. What is at stake in the struggle is the symbolic role given to sexual Others, who can be exploited or excluded, but not the legitimacy of the nation-state through which they are provided or denied institutional and discursive inclusion.

Conclusion

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote that the nation's "unquestioned boundaries could only be strengthened by the apparent fierceness of the battles fought in its name and on its ground" (Sedgwick 1992, 236). This is precisely what seems to be the case in Swedish reactions to far-right and neo-Nazi anti-LGBTQ politics and activism that frame them as threats to the LGBTQ-friendly nation. Homonationalism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism make up two elements of a nationalist contradiction. While they undermine each other through oppositional political projects and statements, they at the same time feed into and reinforce the legitimacy of state authorities and ideas of national homogeneity, albeit with different ideals of whether LGBTQ people symbolically contribute to or counteract the nation's status.

Throughout this article, I have outlined some wider scholarly arguments about what nationalism is and how it can be studied. These sets of works guide our understanding towards the dialectic of homonational-

ism and nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism by tracing their relations and overlaps, rather than assuming the latter to be an anomaly of the former. When focusing on the conflicted and sometimes messy meanings of nationalism, there are many hitherto unexplored insights to be gained from researching how LGBTQ rights symbolically function in politics of both exploitation and exclusion in our global capitalist inter-state system. While queer studies gain much from considering wider fields of scholarship on nationalism, our contemporary moment of fascist anti-LGBTQ politics, activism, and debate could benefit greatly from nationalism studies drawing more on scholarship on homonationalism and nation-state articulations of gender and sexuality.

A nationalist anti-LGBTQ resurgence ought not to be assumed to be evidence of homonationalism in decline, or worse, as questioning if homonationalism even exists in certain contexts. Nationalist anti-LGBTQ politics and activism are not discrete actions with determined outcomes, such as dismantling or replacing homonationalist politics and ideology, which is why they need to be researched in context. We therefore need to find ways of understanding how contradicting nationalist projects (or affects, or discourses) are shaped in dialectic relations, if we want to find ways of countering them academically and politically. Homonationalism as an analytic category may continue to greatly benefit this aim, as it reminds us that nationalism is produced through historical and geographical processes and as such constantly changing and subjected to struggles over its meaning. However, the continued utility of the concept of homonationalism requires researching how nationalist anti-LGBTQ projects play out in relation to homonationalist (and other) articulations. The issue of far right and neo-Nazi gender and sexual politics is far broader than merely a choice of partaking in or objecting to homonationalism (or evidencing homonationalism's spread and durability). This breadth therefore needs to be found not only within the movements themselves, but also in their interactions with other actors, movements, and institutions.

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