Performance at the Edge of Apocalypse

– An ethnographic study of collective identity construction in a neo-nationalist social movement in Sweden

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Abstract

In several countries of the Global North, right-wing parties are successfully mobilizing public support, influencing political debates and introducing arguments and rhetorics that draw on xenophobia, populism and ethnocentrism, ostensibly with a purpose to amplify the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992). This thesis addresses this development by providing an ethnography, based fieldwork, of the Swedish social movement *Folkets Demonstration*, which arranges anti-government manifestations on squares most usually in Stockholm. Drawing on classical theories on performance by Victor Turner and Erving Goffman, I investigate how the demonstrations of the movement facilitate the construction of a collective identity of “the people”, which also includes exploring the world view of the demonstrators.

As I argue, through the socio-emotionality of the demonstrations, the movement conducts a cultural performance of national cohesion vis-à-vis the Swedish national community, cosmologically perceived as on the edge of an apocalypse due to immigration and the alleged cosmopolitanist agenda of the government. In addition, I argue that the demonstrations can be understood as strategically managed towards idealized performances of democracy. Hence, the demonstrations can be considered regressive-utopian performances of a national-democratic community, furthermore embedded in a polarization between “the people” and “the elite” and through which the collective identity of “the people” is constructed.

**Key words:** populism, performance, neo-nationalism, social movement, identity, democracy, emotions.
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“The foundation of the home is fellowship and feeling of togetherness. The good home doesn’t admit privilege or backwardness – neither favorites nor stepchildren. There one doesn’t look down on the other. There one doesn’t seek advantage to another’s cost. The strong do not oppress or plunder the weak. In the good home there is equality, compassion, cooperation, helpfulness. Adapted to the great people’s and citizens’ home this would mean breaking down of all the social and economic barriers that now divide citizens into the privileged and the backwards, the ruling and the dependent, the looters and the looted” – Per Albin Hansson¹ (quoted in Schall 2012:456ff).

¹ Leader of the Swedish social-democratic party 1925-1946, and prime minister 1932-1946.
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In his inauguration address at the National Mall in Washington DC, the American president Donald Trump triumphantly stated that

“today we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another, or from one party to another, but we are transferring power from Washington DC and giving it back to you, the people. For too long, a small group in our nation’s capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have born the cost.”

Trump’s statement explicitly drew on an imagined dichotomy between “the political elite” and “the ordinary people”, which is a rhetoric commonly associated with populism and currently appropriated by various right-wing politicians (Mepschen 2016; Mudde 2004). That is, Trump’s victory in the U.S. elections, and the rhetorics which facilitated it, epitomizes the contemporary political and societal developments in the Global North. In a number of (mainly) European countries, right-wing parties that combine “neo-nationalism with far-right populism” (Banks and Gingrich 2006:4) are mobilizing public support, influencing political debates and introducing arguments and rhetorics that draw on xenophobia, populism and ethnocentrism, ostensibly with a purpose to amplify the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992). This thesis addresses this development by providing an ethnography of a Swedish social movement and an analysis of the populism associated with neo-nationalism.

In Sweden, the development of neo-nationalism mainly revolves around the electoral successes of Sverigedemokraterna (“the Sweden Democrats”, henceforth SD), a social-conservative party that claims to represent “common people” (Hellström et al 2012). The party entered parliament in 2010 and became the third largest party at the elections of 2014. Despite this remarkable progress, however, SD has so far been rather isolated by the other parliamentary parties\(^2\), to which it e.g. responded by deliberately disrupting the budget negotiations of the fall of 2014, causing a constitutional crisis. In order to restore political equilibrium and isolating SD even further from political influence, six other parties then formed an informal agreement, which would ensure that the budget of any elected minority government would be sanctioned by the parliament. This agreement, however, did not even last a year before it was abandoned, after having been labeled undemocratic by politicians from all over the political spectrum and particularly from SD. So, the rise of Swedish neo-

\(^2\) As by May 2017, however, the liberal-conservative party Moderaterna has invited SD for negotiations.
nationalism can so far be described as associated with a political turmoil that has shaken the constitution of Sweden and put the concept and meaning of democracy in debate.

At the center of SD’s ideology is a reinterpretation of the concept of *Folkhemmet* (lit. “The People’s Home”), which emanates from the social-democratic vision for the Swedish welfare state of the early 20th century and now rather constitutes a “founding myth of the modern Swedish community”, implying an isomorphism of “democracy, the people and the nation” (Hellström et al 2012:195; cf. Hellström and Nilsson 2010:62). In addition to people and nation, democracy thus poses an essential ideological ingredient in Swedish neo-nationalism despite the fact that nationalism and democracy imply incompatible logics and associate with contradicting philosophical traditions (cf. discussion on Enlightenment and Romanticism by Kuper (1999)). This is demonstrated by the fact that SD politicians repeatedly claim to be “true democrats” vis-à-vis the “politically correct” establishment and “oppressive” mainstream-media, reproducing the populist dichotomy of people and elite in terms of democracy and anti-democracy. The premises of these rhetorics partly resemble those of the original vision of *Folkhemmet*, whose founding figure, Per Albin Hansson, asserted that “democracy is in the blood of the people” (Barker 2013:250). That is, democracy was depicted as a natural element of the Swedish national character and the people the biological bearers of democracy. However, whereas Hansson’s concept of democracy also revolved around socialist forms of democracy, neo-nationalist groups such as SD have mainly drawn on its national-romantic aspect for their exclusivist agenda. Embedded in the neo-nationalist vision of *Folkhemmet* is thus a self-contradicting image of the people as “ethnos, a people by blood” through “demos, the people, who are free and equal” (ibid.). That is, an ideological hybridization of ethnic and civic nationalism, and a naturalized mythological association of people, democracy and a bounded national community (cf. Schall 2012; Barker 2013).

1.2. Question and purpose of research

Besides the electoral successes of SD, the social organization of Swedish neo-nationalism manifests itself through a dynamic, interactive “network of networks” (Hannerz 1992) of i.a. vigilante groups, “alternative news sites”, podcasts, blogs and various social movements. One of these movements is *Folkets Demonstration* (lit. “The People’s Demonstration”, henceforth FD), which claims to represent the *people* and to convey the voice of the very same through *demonstrations* on public squares, most usually in Stockholm. FD was started in 2015 by two, at the time, active members in SD and has been carrying out demonstrations every second
month, usually gathering 300-600\textsuperscript{3} participants (meanwhile the members of the Facebook-group number approximately 14 000). Most demonstrators join in from different parts of the country, which indicates that FD so far is of a relatively small size.

In the neo-nationalist “network of networks”, this thesis zooms in on FD and investigates how the performance of demonstrations on public squares facilitates the construction of the, by FD self-ascribed, identity as the people. In accordance with my Turnerian theoretical approach (see chapter 3), this also includes exploring the world view of the demonstrators. My research question is informed by an interest in addressing the above-outlined social and political developments and to answer to Mepschen’s (2016:21) call for “an anthropology that turns attention to precisely those European populations construed as native”. That is, similar to Mepschen I aim to deconstruct the concept of “the people” that is referred to in political debates sometimes to such an extent that it appears naturalized. Thus, I aim to demonstrate how “the people” can be understood as an identity constructed in relation to “processes of making sense of and giving meaning to the world” (ibid.:33). In the case of FD, as argued below, the process of identity construction has to be grasped in relation to the everyday sensory experiences of the demonstrators, the populist dichotomy, and the neo-nationalist mythological reinterpretation of the notion of “people” in the vision of Folkhemmet.

1.3. Survey of the field

In the literature on the above-outlined social and political development, various concepts are pursued to denote this phenomenon and its associated groups. Scholars have referred to it as cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995; Hannerz 1999), the new right (Friedman et al 2003), the radical right (Hellström and Nilsson 2010; Hellström et al 2012; Norocel 2016) and neo-nationalism (Gingrich and Banks 2006). To denote FD, I use neo-nationalism since its basic definition, besides its stated connections with populism (see Banks and Gingrich 2006:4), to a significant extent corresponds to the focal points of my analysis.

The basic definition of neo-nationalism revolves around issues of globalization, performance and emotions. As argued by Banks and Gingrich (ibid.:3–4), the concept refers to nationalist movements in the post-1989 world that respect formal democratic rules and are mobilized as a reaction to “the current phase of globalization” (ibid.:17), which implies global migration and

\textsuperscript{3} As this is an infected question, embedded in FD’s conflictual relationship with mainstream-media (cf. Eyerman 2006:197), I emphasize that these numbers are estimations based on FD’s own calculations and my observations.
A restructuring of national economies. Another common denominator of these movements is the tendency to draw on “the social power of performance” (ibid.:6) in order to win legacy, for example by appealing to the feelings of frustration and fear of the audience whilst simultaneously making a charismatic and decent impression, which leads Gingrich (2006:43) to consider neo-nationalism a “politics of emotions”. Put briefly then, neo-nationalist groups are basically defined by their respect for formal democratic rules and strategic consolidations of performance and emotions in oppositions towards globalization, for the sake of the nation.

While the definition above depicts the tenets of neo-nationalism, anthropological research has focused on political parties, which is also confirmed by Edelman’s (2001) review of research on what he calls “right-wing and conservative movements”. One case study has been provided by Gingrich (2002), who analyzes the performances of the Austrian politician Jörg Haider, former leader of the neo-nationalist “Freedom Party”, and other scholars have analyzed performances and actions by, respectively, French “Front National” (Gaillard-Starzmann 2006), Dutch “List Pim Fortuyn” (Sunier and van Ginkel 2006) and British “British National Party” and “National Front” (Banks 2006). The research on neo-nationalism has also more recently been complemented by analyses of the political and social developments at national and regional levels (Hervik 2011; Hervik 2015). The research on neo-nationalism, thus, does not appear to have been widened to include analyses of social movements, and the same goes for populism and the identity of “the people”. Sunier and van Ginkel (2006) do mention the populist tendencies of neo-nationalist parties and Hervik (2011) analyzes “far-right populism” in Danish media discourses. In addition, Gingrich (2006:45) has contributed with the argument that “the regular guy on the street” is a construction of socio-emotional performances. However, party politics is still rather central to these approaches, which hence leave out the emic perspective of the people de facto constructed as “the people”.

In accordance with the gaps in research on neo-nationalism, collective identities of Western, majority populations appears as a less well-examined area of research compared to non-European peoples, who have been subject to significant anthropological research and debate (see Zenker 2011). A brief analysis is however provided by Ceuppens and Geschiere, who consider the current rise of European “autochthonous” identities as the flipside of globalization and observe its association with “a grass-root demand for more representative democracy” (2009:397). Similarly, Mepschen (2016) provides an ethnography of how “autochthony” is enacted in the everyday life of a Dutch neighbourhood. Mepschen’s work
relates to topics of populism, globalization and constructions of Others, i.e. revolves around the same issues brought up in my study. However, whereas he mainly explores the identity of “ordinary people” as enacted in everyday life, in polarization with cultural Others, I analyze the enactment of “the people” vis-à-vis political Others, through temporarily and spatially distinguished demonstrations. While Mepschen assumes “the people” as ethnos in the Dutch context, my study focuses on Sweden and understands “the people” as ethnos through demos.

In research on Swedish neo-nationalism, the tendency to stick to party politics pervades. The focus has been on SD and analyses have primarily been conducted within disciplines other than anthropology, most notably political science. The research on SD, accordingly, comprises discourse analyses of party ideology (Hellström and Nilsson 2010), of party rhetorics (Hellström et al 2012) and of the pursuit of Folkhemmet in party propositions (Norocel 2016). One anthropological analysis has been provided by Ramalingam (2012:2), who explores how “stigma against SD as social deviants is enacted and experienced”. Ramalingam’s study relates to mine in that she elaborates on populism and shows how the democracy is contested and incorporated into the polarization between SD and the political establishment. However, whereas Ramalingam subsumes populism in an analysis of SD and its strategies for tackling stigma, my thesis focuses on the collective identity construction of a social movement through which the populist dichotomy is revitalized, which moreover bridges anthropology of neo-nationalism with the “‘constructivist’ approach to the study of collective identities”, often pursued in research on social movements (Escobar 1992:415).

According to the definition of neo-nationalism above, performance and emotions are two essential elements consolidated in opposition to globalization. Accordingly, the “‘constructivist’ approach to the study of collective identities” (ibid.) of this thesis comprises a framework of theories and theoretical concepts on performance. More precisely, Turner’s (1969; 1987) theory of liminality and performance, and Goffman’s (1959) theory of impression management are pursued, which might appear as peculiar. However, as my research question revolves around the construction of a collective identity, a Durkheimian-inspired, ritualist-oriented approach is appropriate and so in combination with a more agency-oriented, theatrical perspective, which preserves the strategic aspect. As argued by Eyerman (2006:208), ”[w]hile tactics and strategic actions are central to all forms of collective political action, social movements move because they engage emotion”, and as research on nationalism has shown, emotions of solidarity and performance of rituals are vital for the
forging of collective identities. Handelman (2007:122) e.g. argues in his analysis of the modern nation state that “[r]itual generates effervescence, itself crucial to the strengthening of group boundaries and to the forming of group solidarity through the arousal and cathection of emotion.” A similar argument was proposed by Anderson (1991), who argued for the ability of ceremonial and quotidian rituals to generate solidarity and construct imagined communities. By including the perspectives of Turner and Goffman in a constructivist approach to a collective identity, understood as a reaction to the “current phase of globalization” (Banks and Gingrich 2006:17), this thesis connects anthropology of neo-nationalism (strategic performances of politicians and emotions of anger and anxiety) with theoretical premises of anthropology of nationalism (ritual performances and experience of solidarity) and thereby extends the current scholarly view of neo-nationalist performances.

1.4. Organization of thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters, of which the first has provided a social and political background to the thesis, presented the question and purpose of research of the very same, and provided a survey of the field of research, to which this study relates.

The second chapter outlines my field, the methods with which it was approached, the data collected, and the ethical and emotional issues encountered in its social landscape. As this chapter shows, fieldwork without sympathy was a methodological and emotional struggle.

In the third chapter, my theoretical framework, comprising the theory of liminality, including concepts of communitas and cultural performance, and the theory of impression management, and adhering to Turner’s ritualist and Goffman’s theatrical perspectives on performance, is outlined in relation to selected anthropological literature and theories on social movements.

The fourth chapter explores the fundamental basis of existence of FD in terms of the neo-nationalist cosmology. As this chapter shows, the simplistic populist distinction of people and elite embed deeper cosmological meanings and globalization, in terms of sensory experiences of global migration, is a central underlying factor for the activism of the demonstrators, who perceive their national community as on the edge of apocalypse; a twilight of the nation.

Building on the fourth chapter, the fifth chapter describes two demonstrations and analyzes them from a ritualist, socio-emotional perspective. As argued, the demonstrations can be grasped as the cultural performances of a national communitas that present a “prefigured utopia” (Juris 2008a:62) of the national community, perceived as on the edge of apocalypse.
The sixth chapter provides a theatrical analysis and analyzes how the demonstrations are performances, strategically managed according to democratic rules and principles. This also includes investigating the rhetorical, ritualist and photographic defense strategies applied by the demonstrators to curb the “performance disruptions” of counter-demonstrators.

The seventh chapter summarizes the thesis by proposing that the identity construction of FD is facilitated by a neo-nationalist performance of Folkhemmet. That is, while demonstrating against the political establishment, the demonstrators conduct a cultural performance of national cohesion and idealized performances of democracy, through which their identity as “the people” is enacted. In addition, the chapter reflects on the role of democracy in the neo-nationalist societal vision and reflects on ethnographic representation of neo-nationalism.

2. The Landscape of a Social Movement

2.1. Locating the movement

Juris (2012:267) has argued that social movements simultaneously embed a “logics of networking” and a “logics of aggregation”, which refer to “the virtual and the physical, […] the online world and the square” respectively. While the role of the “logic of aggregation” for the collective identity construction of FD is to my primary interest in relation to the research question, the fact that the demonstrations are arranged only every second month posed a methodological problem as FD is physically disaggregated for long periods of time. Hence, I extended my focus towards the “logic of networking” of FD, which implied studying the performance of demonstrations both on the square and through representations of them in the online world. In addition, I conducted interviews with regular demonstrators at different places in Sweden. I thus conducting a form of “multisited ethnography” (Marcus 1995) and this section outlines the different people and field sites, to which this strategy led me.

My first encounter with FD was at a demonstration at the end of September 2016, which took place under the trees of Raoul Wallenberg Square in central Stockholm and lasted for two hours. As I considered this occasion an opportunity for a pilot observation, I lingered neither before nor after the demonstration but made a significant amount of observations that triggered my anthropological interest and facilitated the development of this project. The second demonstration that I observed took place at the end of November and lasted for one and a half hours. It was located in Stockholm on the Mynt Square, which is situated right
between the parliament building and the royal castle, close to the government quarters and the prime minister’s residence. This time, however, I arrived several hours in advance and was also invited to socialize with the participants afterwards. This opportunity was facilitated by the fact that I, by then, had established contact with two interlocutors.

As argued by Coleman and Collins (2006:12), “a field is constructed through a play of social relationships”, and one of my strategies for handling the lack of demonstrations was to ‘follow the demonstrators’ (Marcus 1995). Early on in the field, I established contact by telephone with two of the speakers of FD, who I imagined being open to my research purposes. The first, Anna, an immigrant from the former communist bloc, was interviewed in central Malmö in the middle of November. The second, Lars, was an intellectual and charming author in his early seventies, with whom I got on good terms immediately and made an interview in Stockholm the day after the demonstration. At the day of the demonstration, Lars also functioned as my gatekeeper and was the one to invite me to join the demonstrators for food and beer at a restaurant after the demonstration. By keeping to him, who earns a high social status in the movement, during the four hours at the restaurant, I was protected from the suspicious attitude of some and managed to socialize with people, passing by our table to greet him. After having deliberately chosen two interlocutors, I thus rather indulged in fieldwork by serendipity (cf. Hannerz 2006 and Hardtmann 2009).

The demonstration and the visit to the restaurant enabled contact with five more interlocutors. At the demonstration, I coincidentally encountered Eva, a former school teacher in her late forties, whom I later interviewed in her apartment in Söderköping, a small town along the south-eastern coast of Sweden. At the restaurant, I also got in touch with Thomas and Carl, the former a craftsman by profession and the latter an officer in the Swedish army, both in their early fifties. I interviewed them at different cafes in the Stockholm area, and Thomas even gave me a tour with his car throughout his current and former neighbourhoods in Sollentuna, a northern suburb. At the restaurant, I also reunited with Anna, who eagerly introduced me to one of the founders of FD, Julia, a woman in her thirties and the owner of a horse ranch in Enköping, another small Swedish town. This encounter resulted in an interview in Enköping with her and her co-founder Martin, also a thirty-something self-employee, who is engaged in SD. In addition to these people, whom I came across serendipitously, I
deliberately contacted Erik, one of the head organizers and an employee of a Swedish security company, and arranged for an interview at a café in Stockholm.4

My multisited fieldwork thus engaged with the movement by including the hometowns of several of its demonstrators. In this way it came to resemble Mepschen’s (2016) fieldwork, which however exclusively revolved around the everyday lives of his interlocutors and was conducted during a longer time. In addition, I also devoted time to examine the official webpage and the public Facebook-group of the movement, which is a field strategy that revolves around the virtual “online world”, to which Juris (2012) refers with the concept of “logic of networking”. The official webpage provided me with manifestos, letter, leaflets and visual material illustrating every conducted demonstration. All together I downloaded 478 pictures and watched 61 videos, of which 55 illustrated speeches5, which allowed me to reconstruct the performance of previous demonstrations. The Facebook page furthermore provided me with posts and comments. Finally, this material was complemented by a survey of the Swedish laws regulating public demonstrations and by police documents authorizing the two demonstrations that I attended. In the vein of Marcus, I also “followed the visual images” of the demonstrations, which led me to “alternative news sites”, Youtube and various Facebook-pages. In other words, even though FD posed my primary group of study, I also partly engaged with the neo-nationalist “network of networks” (Hannerz 1992) in general.

My fieldwork with FD implied the inclusion of various geographical as well as digital fieldsites, which together allowed me to study the demonstration from different angles. However, it also led me to grasp the world view of my interlocutors, which I discovered were of essential importance for understanding their participation in the FD, for interpreting the performance of the demonstrations and for understanding the existence of the movement itself. Despite the lack of demonstrations on the square thus, the combination of observations on the square with interviews at different locations and observations in the online-world unfolded an integral “social landscape” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:63) for me to enter.

2.2. Engaging with the social dynamics of the field

Coleman and Collins’ (2006:12) argument that “a field is constructed through a play of social relationships” implies that ethnographic fieldwork, in the end, is a matter of engaging with a

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4 During fieldwork, I thus conducted 7 interviews with 8 interlocutors and all were recorded and transcribed. The length of the recordings varied; the longest lasted for 2.5 hours while the shortest for 45 minutes.
5 Extracts from the speeches, considered relevant to my research purposes, were transcribed.
certain social dynamics, which is embedded in the usage of methods. Anthropologists studying social movements tend to sympathize with their interlocutors (Escobar 1992; Edelman 2001), which has influenced their methods towards collaboration and militancy (see Sawyer 2004 and Juris 2008a, 2008b). Juris (2008a:64) even argues that in order to grasp the dynamics of demonstrations “one has to actually live the emotions” involved. However, as put by Gingrich (2004:162), “the ‘commitment’ and ‘advocacy’ paradigm is important for some, but not all, cases of anthropological fieldwork”, and in my case I did not take a sympathetic stance vis-à-vis the political opinions of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, I aimed to understand them, which implies the necessity of a measure of empathy. Henceforth, this section elaborates on my “methodological balancing act” of sympathy and empathy, which brings me to reflect on methods, ethics, field relations and my impression management.

At the first demonstration, I deliberately took the perspective of an outsider. This implies that I kept myself to the peripheries, observing as many details, situations and speeches as possible, which I documented by taking textual and “visual fieldnotes” (Marion and Crowder 2013:28). In other words, I switched positions, listened to the speeches and tried to capture the reactions of the outside audience. Then, I passed through the crowd of counter-demonstrators and tried to observe as much as possible of the manners of the demonstrators and the police. As this was my very first encounter with FD, I inevitably took a confrontational stance and, to be self-reflexive, felt an aversion towards the demonstrators.

The fact that emotions pervade the social context of demonstrations, which may also affect the fieldworker, has been observed by Eyerman (2006) and Juris (2008a; 2008b). However, while e.g. Juris claims to have experienced feelings of solidarity, my initial emotional reaction was characterized by aversion and frustration. Gradually, however, I realized that also these emotions offered me a clue to the dynamics of the demonstration. For example, whenever the demonstrators expressed their opinions in an explicit way, I gave vent to my negative reaction by taking a photo. This reaction, I realized, can be compared to the act of taking pictures of political opponents, as I saw demonstrators do continuously (see sub-section 6.2.2). The use of visual method, thus, both produced visual fieldnotes and facilitated my understanding of my interlocutors’ emotions, paradoxically as an act of distance-taking.

6 To be precise, I took 66 pictures and recorded 9 videos.
At the second demonstration, my approach was different. I joined the demonstrators and went from participant observer to observing participant. This time, my body was immersed in the crowd, which forced me to reconsider my impression management (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:68-69) and to tackle subsequent ethical issues. First, aware of the suspicious attitude of the demonstrators towards journalists I avoided taking notes openly. Instead I gathered notes in my smartphone, which I also used for taking photographs, which is a common practice among the participants, allowing me to blend in. Second, for ethical reasons I kept a low profile throughout the demonstration. That is, I neither chanted nor partook in the singing of the national anthem. Rather, I stood at one spot, prudently observing the other participants and listening to the speeches, feeling like a deviant. Nevertheless, similar to Juris, who pursued “an embodied approach to fieldwork, using [his] body as a research tool to grasp the affective dynamics of mass actions, mobilizations, and gatherings” (2008b:209), I could utilize my body and mind to get a sense of the affective dynamics. It was rather the way I reacted to it; by taking an objective-empathetic stance, that was different.

My impression management at the second demonstration may be considered ethically problematic when it comes to the issue of “informed consent” in that few people took notice of me and no one of the fact that they were being observed. Lars and Anna were the only ones who possibly knew of my presence. On the other hand, the demonstration was public and open for anyone and I did not aim to document individual participants per se but rather to observe the demonstrators as a collectivity and to use the opportunity to socialize with potential interviewees. Nevertheless, my impression management illustrates how ethical concerns with “fieldwork without sympathy” may initiate an ambiguous scientist relationship of distance between the anthropologist and the interlocutors (cf. argument by Gingrich 2004).

Conducting interviews implied similar methodological and ethical concerns, particularly concerning rapport. Banks and Gingrich (2006:11) propose the strategy of “empathy not sympathy” when conducting fieldwork under similar conditions, and a measure of empathy was inevitably necessary for grasping my interlocutors’ point of view but implied, as indicated, a balancing act in practice. For example, I had to consider details such as to how to listen to my interlocutors’ opinions and acknowledge them without giving the impression of

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I also had a research assistant on the outside, who took photos that complemented my photos from the inside (see figure 5.4 and 5.5). I took 19 pictures and recorded 1 video whereas he took 30 pictures.
consent, which is an issue that has been identified by anthropologists in similar fields (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:72–73). This issue became particularly actual when some interlocutors expressed controversial opinions of Muslims, Romas, and people of non-European descent, one even drawing on race-biology, to which I felt obliged to respond with “acknowledgement not consent”. Similar to the observation at the second demonstration, I reacted with an attitude of objectivity, taking their words seriously but remaining sceptical.

My ambiguous feelings vis-à-vis my interlocutors also appeared mutual. Anna e.g. demanded to read my questions in advance while Erik tested me by requesting me to call him late at night to make an appointment. As agreed, I called him at midnight but did not reach to him. The next morning Erik phoned me and apologized, ensuring me that “it was good that you actually called me, it proves you are serious”. While these concerns adhere to an aversion against journalists, one man at the restaurant after the demonstration even suspected me on the grounds of being an anthropologist and explained how his friends had become “cultural-marxists” by studying anthropology, insinuating that my presence carried sinister purposes.

Aware of the occurrence of these attitudes, I applied different tactics to earn the trust of my interviewees. After Anna, I offered every interviewee the chance to read the questions in advance. I also promised everyone anonymity, which often fell short against statements such as “I stand for who I am” (nevertheless, Anna and every other named interlocutors have been given an alias in this paper, according to common ethical standards). Most commonly however, trust and rapport was reached in the course of the interviews, particularly if conducted in the home town of the interviewee. Despite the fact that all interviews had elements of formality (recording and a prepared list of questions) they tended to develop into informal conversations (see definition of interviews by Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) that exceeded the pre-determined structure. This methodological pendulum between formality and informality, which in the cases of Anna and Eva was complemented with guiding walks in urban environments, appeared to facilitate rapport and make the interlocutors relax. In addition, I revealed personal information in order to reciprocate the information provided by the interviewees. In the end, my rather less manageable characteristics as a white, young, Swedish man also appeared to earn me the confidence of my interlocutors, one interviewee incidentally stating that she rather trusted me “than some Somali”. 
2.3. An emotional endeavour

My balancing act between empathy and sympathy in the field mainly implied considerations of my impression management. However, as empathy and sympathy in the end are associated with the personal feelings of the fieldworker, doing fieldwork was also an emotional endeavour; an empathetic process. As I was gradually absorbed into my “natives’ point of view” and my empathetic understanding deepened, I experienced how their world view, notwithstanding my sceptical stance, appealed to some of my personal traits, specifically my hypochondric sense of purity and the profound suspicion of “globalization” that characterized my Pentecostalist childhood. In addition, I started to essentialize my mother tongue, my skin colour and my habits, enacting a national-ethnic identity. Gradually thus, I came to utilize and manipulate my personal traits for the sake of fostering empathy for my interlocutors.

In my case, the risk of “going native” was thus not related to “structures of demand and expectation” (Coleman 2009:131), i.e. active attempts at proselytization by my interlocutors. Rather, in retrospect, it was related to a power struggle internal to my mind and soul (cf. Foucault 1977), and facilitated by conducting “anthropology at home” (Hannerz 2006). So when Carl, my last interviewee, outlined his interpretation of globalization as a conflict between God and Satan that anticipates the apocalypse, which resembles the Pentecostalist cosmology that I am familiar with and gave me nightmares as a child, the climax of my empathy had been reached. I realized I would do rather well to consider fieldwork finished.

3. Classical Theories Revisited

As research on nationalism demonstrates, the combination of performance, ritual and emotions is of central importance for the construction of collective identities (see Anderson 1991; Handelman 2007). Notably, similar conclusions have been drawn in research on social movements (see Juris 2008a; 2008b; 2012; 2015; Eyerman 2006), which tends to draw on a “‘constructivist’ approach to the study of collective identities” (Escobar 1992:415). Eyerman e.g. considers social movements as forms “of acting in public, a political performance” (2006:193), through which “collective identity and solidarity must be forged, a process which necessarily involves marking off those inside from those outside” (ibid.:194). As indicated, both Durkheimian-ritualist and theatrical perspectives have been applied in research on social movements, and my “constructivist approach” accordingly comprises the classical theories of Turner and Goffman, which adhere to the ritualist and theatrical perspectives respectively.
However, as these theories are classical but old, this chapter aims to modify them through an evaluation that relates them to selected samples of recent literature on social movements that particularly deal with issues of performance, identity and public demonstrations.  

3.1. Cultural performance

The pursuit of Turner’s structural-functionalism in an analysis of a 21st century social movement may come across as peculiar but is nevertheless interesting. As arguments of scholars researching social movements demonstrate, Turner’s theoretical work appears particularly appropriate for understanding the construction of collective identities. Eyerman (2006:195) argues that social movements construct collective identities through the fusion of “individual identities and biographies […] into a collective characterized by feelings of group belongingness, solidarity, common purpose, and shared memory”, which resembles Turner’s definition of *communitas*. Furthermore, scholars have emphasized the tendency of demonstrations to perform “prefigured utopias” (Juris 2008a:62), “alternative meanings, values, and identities” (Juris 2015:82), “new understanding of […] social life” (Escobar 1992:396), “new identities” (Eyerman 2006:206) and “alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings” (Alvarez et al 1998:7). In other words, constructions of collective identities have been analytically associated with formations of homogenous groups and with the performance of alternative visions of society. As demonstrated below, this indicates that Turner’s theory of *liminality*, including concepts of *communitas* and *cultural performance*, is relevant for grasping how performances of social movements work to foster collective identities.  

Turner’s understanding of performance initially implied a consolidation of van Gennep’s *rites de passage* with the British structural-functionalist school. Starting with the three phases of ritual proposed by van Gennep: separation, margin and aggregation, Turner specifically elaborated on the marginal phase, *liminality*, and its function for and relation to the surrounding social context as a whole. Liminality was depicted as “a limbo of statuslessness” (Turner 1969:97) and hence a facilitator for the transition of individuals from one status in society to another. That is, a state of passage, comparable to e.g. a womb, in which individuals are simultaneously located inside and outside of society. In other words, Turner

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8 For general reviews of the previous research on social movements see Escobar (1992), Edelman (2001), Salman and Assies (2009), and Susser (2016).

9 Observe Juris’ emphasis that in research on social movements, “there has been little attention paid to the role of performance in forging alternative emotions, meanings, and identities among activists” (2015:82).
initially considered liminality as the de facto lubricator of a fixed social structure, which he furthermore defined as a “distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of positions and/or of actors which they imply” (ibid.:166ff), which is a definition that adheres directly to the British structural-functionalist view of society (cf. Radcliffe Brown 1952).

The relationship between liminality and society was continuously elaborated on by Turner in his theorizing of the liminal state of being. As he argued, liminality not only poses a state of statuslessness but also embeds a social dynamic of its own, reflecting the social structure by reifying its inversion and simultaneously giving expression to “its subjunctive mood […] suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities” (1969.:vii). Liminality was thus perceived as reflecting the social structure by posing its opposite, the social anti-structure, and thereby amplifying it. Drawing on Lèvi-Strauss’ structuralism, Turner illustrated this reflexive relationship through binary oppositions, including “totality versus partiality”, “homogeneity versus heterogeneity”, “equality versus inequality” and “simplicity versus complexity” (Turner 1969:106). In other words, he juxtaposed the characteristics of the social structure with those persons inhabiting the liminal phase and hence the anti-structure: the *communitas*.

The concept of communitas was pursued by Turner to denote the people inhabiting the liminal sphere. As outlined, these groups were described as homogenous, equal and simple, and Turner considered these traits as “a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society” (ibid.:97). That is, through the communitas, society is reflected, inverted and simultaneously reduced to its bare fundamental premises of existence. Furthermore, Turner divided the concept into three sub-categories: existential, normative and ideological communitas. While existential communitas refers to spontaneous formations of liminal groups, the two others denote formations that pose idealizing examples of how “men [sic.] may best live together in comradely harmony” (ibid.:134), of which ideological communitas even provide utopian visions of society.

Even though Turner initially did not theorize extensively on how e.g. ideological communitas pose utopian visions in practice, his later works indicated the importance of performance for the ability of communitas to invert and reflect societies. Developing van Gennep’s theory of ritual into a theory of social drama, comprising phases of breach, crisis, redressive action and
reintegration, Turner simultaneously outlined the concept of *cultural performance* as a ‘liminal phenomenon’ (1987:25), which implies a relationship with society that is

“reciprocal and reflexive – in the sense that the performance is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, an evaluation […] of the way society handles history.” (ibid.:22)

Turner furthermore described cultural performances as “not simple mirrors but magical mirrors of social reality” (ibid.:42), associated with a “subjunctive mood” (ibid.:101). Hence, the concept implied a step away from the view of liminality as one pole of a fixed relationship with society, which was based on the structural-functionalist and structuralist schools of thought. The concept of “cultural performance” thus indicated that communitas may reflect societies in non-determined and improvisatory ways as well as deliberately perform visions that resemble and invert societies to various degrees. As put by Schieffelin (1998:199), “performativity is located at the creative, *improvisatory* edge of practice”, and the concept “cultural performance”, as I interpret it, accordingly implies measures of liminal agency.

In the vein of Turner’s later works, the relationship between social movements and societies is neither considered completely flexible nor completely fixed by the scholars quoted in the beginning of this section. Escobar (1992:396) argues that social movements “emerge out of the crisis of modernity; they orient themselves towards the constitution of new orders, and embody a new understanding of politics and social life itself”. This implies that society is important for understanding the prevalence of social movements, but eschews the presumption of society as a bounded coherent whole. However, as observed by Asad (1973:11), structural-functionalism was developed at a time when “[t]he social anthropologist studie[d] societies as wholes”, and my pursuit of Turner’s concepts is still partly premised on a holistic perception of the surrounding society.

Instead of presuming the society as a whole *a priori* however, it is rather the cosmological, holistic, and emic understanding of society of the demonstrators themselves that is central to my understanding of the relation between their performance and the surrounding society (cf. Marcus’ discussion on “system-awareness in the everyday consciousness” (1995:111)). Hence, in order to understand the demonstrations of FD and how these facilitate the construction of the collective identity of “the people”, the world view of the demonstrators is of essential importance and is therefore elaborated upon in chapter 4 in relation to the anthropological literature and previous research of nationalism and neo-nationalism.
3.2. Impression management

Outlining his theory of liminality, Turner stated that “manifestations of communitas” are associated with danger and anarchy and “have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions” (1969:109). However, while this was based on the structural-functionalist view of society, Turner’s later work, which informs the understanding of the relationship between society and social movement of this thesis, implied that cultural performances, when understood as a “critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of” (1987:22), may also be managed by the communitas itself. As observed by Schieffelin (1998:198), performance is “fundamentally risky” and requires management, and Eyerman describes strategic performance as part of the “collective self-presentation” (2006:207), which in turn is “part of the process of collective identity formation” (ibid.:208) of social movements (cf. Juris 2008a:62,89). Accordingly, in addition to Turner’s theory of liminality, my analysis also draws on Goffman’s theatrical perspective on performance, outlined in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959).

Goffman’s theorizing of performance primarily revolved around the “expressiveness of the individual” (ibid.:14) in quotidian, microsociological situations. This related to an understanding of performance as “theatrical and contextual” (ibid.:16) and as facilitating social interaction and, thereby, social relationships. As Goffman puts it, “[a] ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (ibid.:26), and “[t]ogether the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation” (ibid.:21). These statements indicate that Goffman drew on a classificatory scheme in order to define social situations, which divided participants into performers and audiences, which in turn implies that one particular performance in a social situation can be analyzed at one time. In other words, social situations were construed as stages for the performances of individual actors and the results of an intersection of individual performances simultaneously.

The dynamics of social situations was, in other words, at the center of Goffman’s theory of performance. He furthermore described performance as a “sign activity”, distinguishing between “the expression that [the performer] gives, and the expression that he gives off” (ibid.:14) of which he primarily elaborated on the latter, the non-verbal form of communication. This form of sign activity involved “sign vehicles” comprising both fixed
and variable characteristics, e.g. “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial [sic.] characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (ibid.:34), all comprising what Goffman conceptualized as the “personal front” (ibid.) of the performer. The personal front was furthermore described as rather flexible and more or less open to impression management. Certain characteristics could, in other words, be emphasized and de-emphasized with regards to the nature and embedded expectations of the social situation. Similarly to Turner, Goffman thus related performance to the surrounding society and additionally conceptualized “idealized performances”, which refers to performances that “incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society” (ibid.:45). In other words, he considered individual performance as both fixed and manageable vis-à-vis the surrounding society, resembling Turner’s concept of performance.

Even though he mainly elaborated on performances in relation to individuals in quotidian situations, Goffman also paid significant attention to collective performances in terms of “teams” and emphasized the importance of techniques of “dramaturgical cooperation” (ibid.:90) within the team for the sake of making a coherent and credible impression. Treating the team as another microsociological unit, Goffman’s conceptualization of it also resembled that of Turner’s communitas in that the “mutual dependence created by membership in the team is likely to cut across structural or social cleavages in the establishment and thus provide a source of cohesion for the establishment. Where staff and line statuses tend to divide an organization, performance teams may tend to integrate the divisions.” (ibid.:88)

However, whereas Turner related communitas closely to surrounding societies, Goffman de-emphasized such connections and rather considered the team a closed group, embedding “an interaction [...] in which the relevant definition of the situation is maintained” (ibid.:108). In this thesis, as I have argued, my understanding of communitas implies an embedded measure of agency and a rather semi-fixed relation to the surrounding society (society as perceived by the communitas itself), which is essential for interpreting its cultural performance. Therefore, I rather understand performances of “teams” as formations of a ‘collective front’ (ibid.:34), which implies a collective performance that is both subject to techniques of impression management, or strategic “sign activity”, and interacts with the surrounding society. A team performance can, according to my modifying interpretation, be interpreted as a deliberately “idealized performance” in the same manner as an individual performance.
In relation to team performances, Goffman particularly emphasized that techniques of impression management are pursued in order to anticipate and curb “performance disruptions” (ibid.:203), which refers to individual and collective mistakes that undermine the coherence and credibility of the performance or, in my terms, undermines the collective front of the performers. Examples of these disruptions comprise e.g. “[u]nmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions and faux pas” (ibid.:205). The techniques for counteracting such mishaps were furthermore summarized under three main categories: “dramaturgical loyalty”, “dramaturgical discipline” and “dramaturgical circumspection”. As a technique of dramaturgical loyalty, for example, Goffman (ibid.:209) described how teams may

“develop high in-group solidarity […] while creating a backstage image of the audience which makes the audience sufficiently inhuman to allow the performers to cozen them with emotional and moral immunity.”

Important to note, however, is that Goffman’s perception of “performance disruption” mainly referred to mistakes committed by the performers themselves, leaving the role of the audience aside. Hence, his concept of techniques of impression management primarily relates to the defense strategies directed inwards. This focus on performers – and the view of the team as a closed unit – adheres, according to Schieffelin (1998:200), to the Euro-American ontological distinction between performer and audience, which presumes performers as active and audience as passive. Criticizing this ontology, Schieffelin argues that the relationship between performers and audiences is of importance to grasp the social dynamics, including failures, of performances. Following Schieffelin’s argument, this thesis thus extends Goffman’s concept of performance disruption to include intrusions from the audience, and so by drawing on theories of social movements and photography. My understanding of impression management thus relates both to strategies for internally preserving the collective front and for curbing external disruptions, which in turn relates to both the construction of a collective identity and the forging of its Other, both essential elements of social movements (Eyerman 2006:194).

To summarize, strategic performances are argued by Eyerman (ibid.:207) to be part of the collective self-presentation and identity construction of social movements, and a similar analytical connection between performative strategy and identity has been explicitly made by Juris (2008a:62,89). As demonstrated by the selected samples of literature on social movements, performance, identity and public demonstrations referred to in this chapter thus, “the ’constructivist’ approach to the study of collective identities” (Escobar 1992:415) generally tends to relate to theoretical perspectives that resemble both Turner’s ritualist
concepts of *liminality*, *community* and *cultural performance*, and Goffman’s theatrical concept of *impression management* (even though the ritualist perspective appears to have been more frequently applied). Drawing on the theories of Turner and Goffman, in other words, corresponds to the theoretical premises of previous research and are adequate for analyzing how the demonstrations of FD facilitate its collective identity construction.

4. A Twilight of the Nation

“For their mystical notions are eminently coherent, being interrelated by a network of logical ties, and are so ordered that they never too crudely contradict sensory experience but, instead, experience seems to justify them.”

– E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1976:150)

A powerful, epic piece of music accompanies the moving footage of a burning car, standing in a street in an urban neighborhood and lightening up the dark night before hooded people, who are then confronted by riot police. Another footage illustrates smoke rising to the sky and another the fire brigade rolling in and another a car put on fire. In an accelerating manner, footages of police vehicles, smoke rising to the sky and a burning car are followed by images of police officers, the fire brigade, hooded people and policemen helplessly watching another car put on fire. It all fades out in darkness. Suddenly, however, the logo of FD (figure 4.1) appears and then a blonde woman is shown talking to an audience on a square in the middle of the day, followed by the image of eight people in a line singing, one with a hand on his chest. Then, another blonde woman appears and the camera moves across the audience, in which someone is waving a Swedish flag. The logo of FD reappears. The audience applauds. A stagnated Swedish flag is caught by the wind and starts to feather in the white sky. The camera moves across the audience. The logo of FD appears and the music reaches climax.

These sequences comprise a video that was anonymously published on Youtube before the demonstration in November. As this chapter demonstrates, it illustrates the world view or as I term it: the *neo-nationalist cosmology* of the members of FD. As shown by Anderson (1991), imagination is an essential element for the formation of national communities and Malkki (1992) furthermore observes the tendency of nationalism to draw on metaphors of biology (race), botany (roots) and kinship (blood) to depict and delineate the national community. Hence, the “national order of things” (ibid.), presuming the nation as “a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it” (ibid.:28), is not only imagined but also ascribed status of naturalness. Furthermore, other scholars (Hylland Eriksen 2010; Khosravi 2010) have argued for considering nationalism as embedding pseudo-religious traits in that nation
states tend to be treated as secular-mythological deities. Nationalism may thus be considered “concerned with how the world works”, which is a definition of cosmoligies provided by Sanders and West (2003:6), and embedding “a figured world” (Hervik 2011:94) of essentially distinct nations. It is necessarily not only an ideology but also a world view and, in the words of Appadurai (2006:4), a “totalized cosmology of the sacred nation[s]”.

As a form of nationalism in the post-1989 world and as a reaction to the “current phase of globalization” (Banks and Gingrich 2006:17), however, neo-nationalism is specifically concerned with the preservation of the nation, which implies defending it against threats of globalization. Drawing on Appadurai, I thus refer to the pseudo-religious belief in the naturalness and sacredness of the “national order of things” that is activated by sensory experiences of global migration, as a neo-nationalist cosmology. That is, a post-1989 form of nationalist cosmology that concerns itself with migrants and furthermore construes their presence as signifying a national apocalypse; a twilight of the nation, secretly staged by higher powers, most notably the national government. This chapter outlines this cosmology by drawing on sequences from the field, preceded by an introduction to FD.

4.1. The official agenda of FD

As the main reason for founding FD, the manifesto of the movement states that

“Current and former governments have for a long time acted fraudulently by pursuing policies that both lack support from the Swedish people and do not correspond to those policies that were promised in the election campaigns. Sweden must not be ruled by a political elite that lacks interest in and respect for the will of the people. The Swedish democracy and the open, equal, secular Swedish society are threatened and under attack by powers that aims to transform it.” (Folkets Demonstration 2016b:1)\textsuperscript{10}

The official purposes of FD are furthermore to provide a platform for “sverigevänliga” (lit. Swedish-friendly) and “anti-establishment” opinions, and to protect the “the country of Sweden, its citizens, its culture and its democratic, equal and secular constitution” (ibid.). These purposes are consolidated by an overall aim to convey the “voice of the people”, which is perceived to be currently silenced and suppressed. In addition, the movement demands that

\textsuperscript{10} This quote has been translated from Swedish to English by author, which also goes for every quotation of Swedish sources throughout this thesis.
“every Swedish government respects the constitutional statute that all public power emanates from the people”, that “every government primarily protects and prioritizes Sweden and her citizens”, that “the current government resigns and announces a new national election”, and that “every future government respects [the movement’s] demands” (ibid.). The manifesto is finally summarized by a general call to “together repair the Swedish Folkhemmet” (ibid.:2).

Underlying the movement is the populist distinction between “the elite” and “the people”, enacted through a dissatisfaction with the government’s policies that apparently has been fuelled by a view of the government as paying poor attention to the will of the Swedish people, whose voice the movement claims to represent. This dissatisfaction furthermore revolves around an interpretation of the policies as anticipating a profound national transformation, if not apocalypse. However, how the “open, equal, secular Swedish society” is threatened, how the government neglects the will of “the people” and why the Folkhemmet is broken, is not outlined and the same goes for the concrete purposes of the movement. This invites for an ethnographic approach to understand the deeper meanings of existence of the movement. Henceforth, this chapter describes and analyzes four sequences from my social encounters in the field, which provide enlightenment to these matters and epitomize the world view, embedded in the plethora of reflections and opinions that I came across in the field and through the neo-nationalist “network of networks” (Hannerz 1992) that I partly engaged with.

4.2. An attack on a national symbol

It was late afternoon when Martin picked me up at the train station in Enköping, a town of approximately 20 000 inhabitants northwest of Stockholm, and drove me to a café downtown, where we were to conduct the interview. Martin is a man in his mid-thirties with short hair and glasses, exhibiting a rather ironic attitude. In the car, I told him about my project and my interest in Swedish democracy. “The democracy we don’t have you mean?” He responded with a smile and told me that he had been invited to hold a lecture at a local SD-meeting on freedom of speech, but had had to decline due to a nasty cold. At the café, Julia waited for us at one of the tables. Julia is a blonde, tall woman of similar age as Martin. She greeted me and immediately started to chit-chat about the previous demonstration, the next one planned and biases in the mainstream media concerning how native Swedes and foreigners are depicted. After some minutes we all went to order some food and returned to the table.
Julia and Martin founded FD together in the wake of a tragic incident at IKEA in Västerås in 2015, when an Eritrean asylum seeker, whose application had been declined, desperately stabbed a Swedish mother and her son to death with one of the knives for sale at the warehouse. The incident was given a considerable amount of media attention and was, on some right-extremist “alternative news sites”, even construed as a politically motivated crime.

Julia: When the murder at IKEA happened and you found out about the circumstances… I reckon that in such a situation the politicians are needed more than ever. Both for the sake of immigration and of the Swedish people… for announcing that “we have committed a major mistake, we will see to this, it must absolutely never happen again, none should have to be stabbed in public or wherever you are”. Most of my sense of safety was brutally swept away there. If you go to one of the most Swedish of Swedish places that we got… this thing about the knives, it’s very symbolic. We have had knives at the kitchen department of IKEA for as long as we have had IKEA and I have thought many times like “we are such a civilized people! We can actually have dangerous, potential weapons just lying there since there are no…”. Of course there are idiots out there but so far nobody has died at IKEA at least. Well… it has been a symbol for freedom, civilization, liberty, safety and respect for human lives. All that just disappeared.

Kristofer: So you experienced that all those ideas just vanished like that?
Julia: Yes, they were swept away. And it also became so quiet huh [referring to the alleged silence of politicians], it proves that we have no value, us Swedish citizens. A mother and her son go to IKEA for shopping and get brutally stabbed and we just get silence.

Kristofer: So you experienced a feeling of…
Julia: Abandonment and powerlessness! A lot of terrible feelings… I just could not breathe, so I said “we have to do something!”

Significant here is how Julia interpreted the incident at IKEA not only as a criminal act, involving one perpetrator and two victims, but primarily as an attack on a Swedish national symbol, “the most Swedish of Swedish places”, which embeds cultural values of safety, civilization and freedom. That is, a symbolic attack on the foundations of the Swedish society and the Swedish people itself, which apparently is an interpretation that is tentatively related to the fact that the crime was committed by a foreigner, a cultural Other. Gingrich (2006:37) outlines the concept of “cultural pessimism” as an essential trait of neo-nationalism, which refers to “a pessimistic conviction that this country’s ‘culture’ is doomed to perish if the course of events remains the same”. Julia’s emotional response to the IKEA-incident can thus be considered a manifestation of cultural pessimism, related to policies of immigration and reception of refugees. This was confirmed by Martin.

Martin: Just like Julia means, the IKEA-murder is a proof of the failed immigration policy of ours. That people, whose asylum application is declined are not brought into custody but may run around freely in public. The IKEA-murder is a result of a failed immigration policy, of the fact that we cannot take care of these people. Many call us xenophobic but I reckon that it is not about ethnicity at all, rather about how we treat people. We have a policy and generously high rates of social assistance, which makes people wanna come here, but we can’t take care of them! We
don’t even have resources for ourselves any longer, cancer patients don’t get treatment, we don’t build new accommodations, we trick them to come here.

In addition to “cultural pessimism”, Gingrich conceptualizes “economic chauvinism”, which is “centred on feelings and attitudes that ‘this wealth is ours, and we do not want to share it with anybody’” (ibid.) and often associates with arguments similar to Martin’s, that the national wealth is already scarce as it is. In the quote above, Julia’s cultural pessimism is thus complemented by Martin’s economic chauvinism and together they form a neo-nationalist interpretation of the causes and effects of the IKEA-incident. What is furthermore significant is that the government and its policies are at the center of this interpretation and reifies the Other, whom Julia and Martin directly blame, instead of immigrants or even the IKEA-perpetrator himself. To illustrate Julia’s point concerning the silence from leading politicians, Martin also juxtaposed the reaction of the politicians to the IKEA-incident with those to an arson attack on a mosque in Eskilstuna the year before, which proved to be an accident.

Martin: Within 24 hours, every leader and politician had publicly condemned the “attack” on the mosque meanwhile when two persons, according to the murderer’s own words, were murdered on IKEA because they “looked Swedish” no one stood up. It is exactly like Julia says, no one stands up for us Swedes any longer… but we are supposed to pay for the whole “party” with taxes, and we don’t get anything for it. Youths, who move from home, are not prioritized for accomodations for example…

Julia and Martin’s emotional reaction on the IKEA-incident, which underlies FD, thus combined pessimism, economic chauvinism, fears of abandonment and anarchy with a nationally coded solidarity with the victims. This terminated in a perception of the Swedish nation, Folkhemmet, as on the edge of dissolution, and so with the government’s approval.

4.3. "Löfvén is not really our father"

As agreed, I met Anna at the central station in Malmö, the third biggest city in Sweden located in the very south. She received me with a friendly hug and found us a table where we could sit and talk. Anna is a dark-haired woman in her fifties, who immigrated to Sweden from the eastern European communist bloc in the early 1980s and has been living in Malmö ever since. Her engagement in FD has a history that goes back to 1985, when she lived in Möllevången, a neighborhood that nowadays has a large Muslim population.

Anna: That was when Möllevången Square started to get many Arabic salesmen… they were whistling at me and I was wondering “what is this? Am I a dog or what?” So, that was when things started to change. Similar things happened in dance clubs for example, they were just sitting there with some sparkling water all night and watching girls, never dancing, never asking to dance, never buying drinks. I mean I was there to dance, not to be looked at as if I was a commodity. And why were they really there? They don’t dance. So that’s what happened.
After the interview, Anna agreed to guide me to Möllevängen, which she simply described as “hell on earth” where “you never see a single Swede!” While we were slowly making our way through Malmö, passing by many fancy buildings, shops, restaurants, and chit-chatting about mundane things, Anna made several comments about Muslim women, whom she referred to as *hucklen* (lit. “kerchiefs”). “I see *hucklen* ever more often now”, she said, gazing suspiciously at some veiled women passing by. “But today I don’t see that many, it’s probably too cold for them”. When a random car passed by, which was driven by a veiled woman, Anna reacted strongly and insinuated that the driver “has no work but stays home with six kids and makes a living on social assistance!” When it comes to the Muslim population of Malmö, Hannerz (2016:89) notes that the city is frequently referred to as “one of the centers of Eurabia”; the dystopian vision of an Islamized Europe, and relates this to the fact that “perhaps half the population of Malmö is now of something other than old-style Swedish background” (ibid.:90). However, as Hannerz notes, while the inhabitants of foreign background represent many different religions, the discourse of “Eurabia” tends to dominate public narratives about Malmö, which is confirmed by Anna’s preoccupation with Muslims.

When we reached Möllevängen, Anna first showed me the apartment house, in which she previously lived and then guided me throughout the rest of the neighborhood. As we passed by apartment houses, barbershops, cafés, grocery shops and restaurants of different cuisines, Anna stated that “all of this belongs to Arabs” and made regular exclamations that “everything is getting destroyed! They destroy everything!” When we walked along the façade of a particularly fancy apartment house, she told me to look at the windows.

**Anna:** Look at them! They lack bulbs, it’s dark, some of them are covered with newspapers and it’s just disgusting. These were some of the finest apartments in the city and they are just decaying. The inhabitants make a living on social assistance and do nothing, they just destroy.

As we passed by Möllevången Square and were getting close to the end of our walk, Anna finally asked me: “When you hear this, do you think it’s right to replace people like this?”

Apparently, Anna associates the presence of Muslims in Malmö and particularly in her old neighborhood with decay and destruction. In the interview, she also criticized multiculturalism in general and stated her view that the leading politicians are to blame for the supposedly negative consequences of multiculturalist policies. Unlike Julia and Martin however, Anna draws on metaphors of kinship to depict the nature of this responsibility.
Anna: Actually, it is very simple. When I was a kid and heard the word “country”, I asked my mum “what does country mean?” Mum answered, “a country is like a family but bigger”. But Löfvén [the prime minister] is not really our father. He’s the neighbors’ father.

Kristofer: What do you mean by neighbors? Who are the neighbors?

Anna: He is simply not our father. He is the father of the neighbors.

As Malkki (1992:28) observes, nation states are often essentialized as “grand genealogical tree[s], and Gullestad has more recently noted that “[m]any people return to the ideological cluster of kinship, descent, territory and culture in an attempt to create identity and invoke stability” (2006:84). However, Anna’s usage of kinship terminology not only functions to reproduce the notion of the nation as a family, but also to ascribe guilt to the politicians for the decay of the national family that she perceives through the presence of immigrated Muslims in her former neighborhood. If the nation is a family, then the leading politicians, i.e. “the parents”, are perceived to prioritize of another “genealogical tree”, of an alien blood.

Anna: FD was indeed founded because Löfvén did not care at all about the murder of his own citizens, his own people. They are brothers to him. The Swedes are his blood brothers I reckon, and he neither cared to say anything nor to visit IKEA in order to honour his own brothers.

Accordingly, when Anna guided me throughout Malmö, she was not only showing me her city and making Islamophobic comments. She was demonstrating to me what she perceives to be the family home of the Swedish national community, Folkhemmet, and how it is being corrupted by alien intruders, who “replace” the natural family members and so with the government’s approval. As she put it herself during the interview: “Here come strangers, who mess up the Swedish culture and the Swedish values. And it’s all Stefan Löfvén’s fault.”

4.4. The national basis of collectivity

Towards the end of fieldwork, I went to Söderköping, a small town in south-eastern Sweden with 7000 inhabitants, where I met Eva, a regular speaker. She greeted me on arrival and together we walked the short distance to her apartment. Along the way, she showed me different places, to which she has a personal connection, and emphasized the school, where she was hired as a teacher for 20 years before termination eight months prior to our encounter. Eva’s engagement in FD is related to the European “refugee crisis” in 2015, when a significant amount of refugees were granted asylum in Sweden and several unaccompanied refugee children were placed in Söderköping.

Eva: Well, I put forward my opinions about the development in school. I did see how our Swedish pupils were knocked out while we had... they were replaced by... eventually we had perhaps 70-80 percent foreign-borns. Four years ago we had zero. That’s a huge...

Kristofer: It happened rapidly?
Eva: Rapidly yes! I didn’t really have anything against them, but I saw this stream and thought “my God, it won’t work!” Above all, if we receive that many we must not start discriminating our own pupils since then we will have gaps. But that’s exactly what happened. It even affected my own son. He was knocked out and I suspect it was partly due to incompetence and partly because they wanted to punish me for being too candid, expressing criticism that almost everyone agreed with. My son was isolated in school despite having done nothing.

Eva then described to me how her son, going through a personal crisis, came to struggle with the school system. For example, in high school he was forced to study subjects for which he had no interest and then to switch schools, for which Eva was made financially responsible:

Eva: Finally, he simply lost his desire for school, and they just kicked him out. I received a letter with information, I had no… he was isolated at the same time as a lot of resources were spent on the unaccompanied [refugee children]. And the attitude! My son was treated like a piece of garbage, a piece of shit, “blame yourself, you have a mum so you can…”, whereas these other pupils, who came from the outside, were treated like royalties. Like, the red carpet was rolled out for them. There were double standards. My son was kicked out from my own workplace, where I had been employed for 19 years.

In the wake of migration and reception of refugees, Eva thus personally experienced how her small hometown, particularly her long time workplace, went through rapid socio-demographic changes in a short time. Subsequently she construes the shortcomings of her son as a result of these changes through an economic-chauvinist filter. Similar to Anna, the distinction between native Swedes and cultural “Others” is thus central to Eva’s interpretation of the events and problems of her everyday social life, and she also traces these problems to the government, indicating a criticism of its multiculturalist policies:

Eva: I perceive humans as social beings, who form collectivities, for which we have to adapt ourselves. In order for this to work, we elect politicians, and when we elect politicians we expect them to represent me and my interests since they have been given this mandate. And if you perceive that “no, our elected politicians don’t care about their citizens, they don’t care about me but rather about money”, or perhaps that they prioritize the citizens of the rest of the world before us, then that is undemocratic. Then they are either greedy careerists or traitors, they are letting us down, we who gave them their mandate.

Furthermore, as indicated in the quote above, throughout the interview Eva also took a critical stance against cosmopolitanism, which she considers to be an undemocratic ideology associated with globalization and hence related to the supranational transfer of power.

Eva: When power is transferred away from us and we are to take responsibility for the whole world, then people protest and I agree there, because I do too. I want to act in a global world, and I am a part of a global world, but I want to maintain Sweden. I use to say that I consider myself a nationalist in that I want to maintain Sweden as a juridical, political and administrative body.

Holmes (2000:89) has discussed the impact of global economic and political processes on the growth of localism, regionalism and nationalism and argues that cosmopolitanism is
perceived by these ideologies as obscuring “real human values, true social distinctions, and, above all, abiding bases of collectivity”. This view relates to Eva in that she apparently dismisses cosmopolitanism and its perceived globalist aspirations in favor of the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992), which she considers the optimal way how the world should be ordered. The maintenance of Sweden, from her point of view, also implies the maintenance of safety, stability, solidarity and democracy; the preservation of Folkhemmet.

Eva: If we dismantle the nation state, which is a guarantor of order, justice and so on, and if we enter an extreme neoliberal spirit, in which everyone is a cosmopolitan and everyone makes his own fortune, then eventually we will still reach a phase when people will form groups and collectivities anyway and then we risk having conflicts between groups […] I think that the concept with a united country, where everyone feels solidarity, is a key to success. I don’t want the boundaries to be dismantled and that we’re no longer Sweden but simply part of EU or part of UN, or of the world, or the West, then it all gets too big.

Gullestad (2006:78) argues that immigrants “seem to have become a symbol for the effects of economic globalisation” (cf. Appadurai 2006) and this applies to Eva’s interpretations of everyday life. However, through her interpretation of her son’s shortcomings, immigrants also symbolize the globalist, cosmopolitan and undemocratic aspirations of the government, which is perceived to deliberately erode the Swedish nation state as the ‘abiding basis of collectivity’ (Holmes 2000:89) and open it up to the big, ungraspable world, which eventually leads to a national-apocalyptic situation of rootlessness. This, she indicates, is already under way:

Eva: I have lost my sense of trust, I have completely lost my foothold, I feel like a stranger in my own country, in my own town.

4.5. A battle between God and Satan

The last interview in the field was conducted with Carl, a Christian army officer in his early fifties, who has participated as an official at several demonstrations and is acquainted with the organizers. Carl works in Stockholm but lives in a town north of the city, so we met up at the city’s central station on a late afternoon and had a cup of coffee at an empty café nearby. Similar to the other interlocutors featured in this chapter, Carl has a deeply pessimistic perception of Sweden and joined FD because of his wish for genuine democracy:

Carl: Democracy is not something we apply in Sweden. The industries and the politicians scratch each other’s backs and, in practice, Sweden is governed by the industries and the capitalist interests. For me it’s important with democracy, that the people may influence important political decisions, for example the EU membership. I call myself a non-party democrat as I am no longer a member of any party and simply want the power transferred back to the people, just like the constitution says “all power emanates from the people”. It means that we must be able to make our voice heard, to influence policies. The politicians don’t listen to the people, they aren’t interested in the people’s opinions, they just make decisions and use the media as a tool for
indoctrination. They can do whatever they want as long as it doesn’t contradict the core values, their socialist core values that is.

Significant in Carl’s view of Swedish democracy is the dualist distinction between “‘the elite’ and ‘the people’” (Mudde 2004:544) that characterizes neo-nationalist populism. However, Carl is not only critical of the political establishment per se but also of what he perceives as the socialist “indoctrination” conducted by the government through mainstream-media, which he relates to the long Swedish political tradition of social democratic rule.

Carl: Well, media have a political agenda, you just need to open any newspaper […] it has nothing to do with news or journalism, rather it’s a matter of twisting everything according to the socialist agenda. The propaganda from the media has been going on for decades and the purpose is to stop people from thinking for themselves and rather make them do what the authorities say. That is social democracy. The whole school system is constructed like that, to raise good citizens who can become the cogs of the social democratic machinery without thinking for themselves and being critical. Just obeying and following the fuhrer, who is the social democratic party leader.

Concerning conspiracy theories, Sanders and West (2003:16) observe that they are perceived to “shed light on the hidden recesses of power, exposing its concealed logic”. This applies to Carl’s understanding of the alleged power-exercise of the Swedish political establishment. Furthermore, his populist conspiracy theory not only revolves around social democracy in Sweden but also includes cultural Marxism, which he traces back to the Frankfurt School.

Carl: I don’t want it this way because I’m not a socialist, I don’t like socialism, I hate socialism. The social democrats have gone from being social democrats to becoming a Marxist party; what I call cultural-marxists. That’s their agenda, and they formed a government with the most cultural Marxist party in the parliament, the Green party. Their agenda has really nothing to with the climate, it’s only about New World Order, since cultural Marxism is the ideology that will be applied in the New World Order.

“New World Order” is a concept that was popularized in the U.S. in the 1990s and originally referred to “a global power regime to be characterized by collective policing of open compliance with internationally agreed on norms and rules” (ibid.:2). However, as observed by Sanders and West (ibid.:3), the concept was almost immediately appropriated by i.a. American nationalists, who construed it as an obscure “plot to undermine American sovereignty, to subordinate the will of the American people to that of an unelected transnational bureaucracy and an international elite that might dictate its own governing objectives”. Carl’s usage of the concept implies similar presumptions. He furthermore connects cultural Marxism and “New World Order” with what he calls the “globalist agenda” of the “Anglo-American bankers”, who together strive for world governance.

Carl: This has been going on since the 18th century and now they’re in their final phase. It is the UN agenda 2030 and 2012 that governs this. The Earth’s population is to be decreased by 15 billion
people and the people left behind will be a mix of different races, different cultures, who will be subordinate and obeying the elites, who will use them as slaves.

In addition, Carl, who has a Christian faith, is convinced that the people supporting the “New World Order” are “Luciferians”.

Carl:  They eat children and sacrifice children… disgusting persons. They conduct Satanist rituals, and then suddenly it’s exactly like in the Book of Revelation, it is the final battle between Satan and God that is unfolding now. And then you have to choose a side as a private person I reckon. So that’s one reason why I realized that it was time to choose side.

As argued by Harding and Stewart (2003:268), the “scanning for signs in current events, and learning to sense the coming of the End Times” is well occurring among Christians in the West. Similarly, Carl evidently assumes a teleologically grounded connection between what he perceives as the dismantling of the Swedish national state through a cosmopolitan, globalist or rather ‘cultural marxist’ agenda, reified through the mixture of “different races” and “different cultures”, and the apocalyptic prophesies of the Book of Revelation.

Important to note here is thus that whereas Carl’s engagement in FD adheres to a simplistic distinction between the people and the elite, the opposition between the two poles of the populist dichotomy embeds deeper political and cosmological meanings. For him, it is a struggle for “true” democracy, a contest between the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992) and globalization, as much as a confrontation between God and Satan; good and evil.

4.6. A twilight of the nation

The manifesto of FD claims that the Folkhemmet is broken, that the “open, equal, secular Swedish society” is threatened, and that the government neglects the will of “the people”. As demonstrated above, the dissatisfaction of the demonstrators appears to be related to sensory experiences of immigration and multiculturalism. For Julia and Martin, the murder of two Swedes at IKEA by an Eritrean asylum seeker constituted an emotional turning point for their confidence in the government’s policies and belief in national cohesion. For Anna, the visibility of Muslims in her old neighborhood signifies a policy that replaces members of the national family with alien blood. Eva construes the arrival of unaccompanied refugee children to her school as signifying the erosion of the national basis for collectivity under a globalist, cosmopolitan agenda. Carl interprets the presence of cultural and ethnical Others as part of a cultural-Marxist agenda that aims to blur essential social differences and introduce “New World Order”. In other words, they all appear to experience “ontological insecurity” (Hervik
2011:269; cf. Appadurai’s concept of “social uncertainty” (2006:5)) by interpreting the presence of migrants as signifying chaos and the absorption of the natural national community, *Folkhemmet*, into a world of blurred social boundaries. Their “cultural pessimism” and “economic chauvinism” (Gingrich 2006:37) forms the “narrative frame”, through which the members of FD “make sense of their own protests” (Eyerman 2006:198), corresponding to the dark vision of Sweden of the video, which opened this chapter.

I refer to the view of a “figured world” of nations, or pseudo-religious belief in the ontological properties of the “nation order of things”, according to which global migration signifies a national apocalypse staged through a secret political agenda of national dissolution, as a *neo-nationalist cosmology*. This chapter has outlined this cosmology by describing how some members of FD interpret everyday-life events, presuming a distinction between native Swedes and cultural Others. Significant for them is the tendency to trace their experiences to the government, whose agenda allows for immigration and is construed as (secretly) cosmopolitanist, cultural-marxist and not prioritizing “its own” citizens. The government thus constitutes a political Other of the movement, under which the cultural Other is subsumed. This resembles the triangle of far-right populism, outlined by Hervik (2011:47), which combines “For the people” with “Anti immigrants” and “Against the elite”. Associated with the latter is also the imagined equation of immigration, and disintegration of the nation, with the downfall of democracy, which appear to form a core of the alleged crisis of *Folkhemmet*, constituted by an isomorphism of nation, people and democracy according to the common mythological reinterpretation of *Folkhemmet*, prevalent among Swedish neo-nationalists.

As this chapter illustrates, the simplistic distinction between people and elite thus embeds deeper political and cosmological meanings. That is, for my interlocutors it is also a matter of distinguishing between “natural” nationalism and “artificial” cosmopolitanism, perceived as imposed without democratic transparency. As this chapter additionally has shown, while the manifesto of the movement may be considered vague, diffuse or abstract concerning the goals and purposes of the movement, the ethnographic sequences of this chapter demonstrate that the meaning of the movement is indeed related to quotidian “processes of making sense of and giving meaning to the world” (Mepschen 2016:33). The following chapters provide ethnographic descriptions and analyses, which throw further light on the meanings and symbolism of the demonstrations. As observed by Turner (1969:10), “crises in the social life of villages” are connected with “decisions to perform ritual[s]”, and the video, opening this
chapter, proposes a bright vision reified by FD itself. While this chapter has described how my interlocutors perceive the state of their “village”, the following chapters thus elaborate on their “subjunctive vision” for it, conveyed through the demonstrations on public squares.

5. A National Communitas

Whereas the previous chapter outlined the cosmological basis of existence of FD, this chapter subsequently provides ethnographic descriptions of the two demonstrations, or moments of aggregation (i.e. physical assemblies on public squares, see discussion by Juris 2012), which I observed during fieldwork and together epitomize the rigid, ritualist procedure of the demonstrations of FD. These descriptions are followed by an analysis from a ritualist, socio-emotional perspective that connects with Turner’s theory of liminality and performance, including concepts of communitas and cultural performance, and investigates how the demonstrations can be understood as performances of “prefigured utopias” (Juris 2008a:62), embedding “alternative meanings [and] values” (Juris 2015:82) and a “new understanding of […] social life” (Escobar 1992:396). That is, conveying a subjunctive and alternative, regressive vision, or a “magical mirror” (Turner 1987:42), of a coherent national community.

5.1. September 2016

I had just arrived in central Stockholm with the subway and was heading for Raoul Wallenberg Square with quick steps when I noticed the unmistakable chopping of a helicopter, circulating in the sky. As I approached the square and caught sight of half-a-dozen police horses, several vehicles and policemen carrying helmets and truncheons, I assumed that the helicopter was just another police unit, meticulously surveilling the square and its surrounding neighbourhood from above. In addition to these measures, the square itself had been delineated by iron fences and, as an extra pre-caution, the adjacent Berzelii Park had been closed and was guarded by heavily armed policemen. This protective wall of humans, animals, vehicles and iron framed a raised platform, which stood at the center of the square, surrounded by trees, wrapped by the logo of FD and ornated with a tiny wooden Swedish flag.

Within the protective wall, a crowd of several hundreds of people was gathering, comprising a mix of officials in reflective vests, senior citizens with canes, properly dressed middle-aged people, young men wearing sweaters with the logo of the vigilante group “Soldiers of Odin”, and some members from a random motorcycle club. Awaiting the start of the demonstration,
the demonstrators were socializing, others having a smoke, some taking a rest on the public benches and others gathering in front of the raised platform. Several demonstrators were also holding Swedish flags and placards, designed in black and white and conveying exclamations such as “Enough is enough”, “Are you not ashamed?”, “Resign/resign/resign”, “We demand accountability”, “We demand borders controls”, and “We demand democracy”. Some deliberately turned their placards towards the counter-demonstration, located by the iron fence at the northern part of the square. The counter-demonstrators had brought banners in red and black, and the colors of the rainbow, which conveyed various anti-racist and anti-fascist messages. A few of the counter-demonstrators were covering their faces with masks.

The counter-demonstration kept rather quite at first but erupted in whistling and booing when, a couple of minutes before the announced time of the demonstration, a group of demonstrators marched into the square. This was followed by chants such as “inga rasister på våra gator” (lit. ”no racists in our streets”), “alerta, alerta, anti-fascista”, and “den som flyr har inget val, ingen människa är illegal” (lit. “the person who seeks refuge has no choice, no human is illegal”). These rather regularized chants
were continuously accompanied by irregular exclamations, whistling, jeering and other forms of noise, to differing degrees of intensity, throughout the whole demonstration, to which the police responded by several arrests.

The start of the demonstration was preceded by Erik, who entered the rostrum to wish the demonstrators welcome, acknowledge their efforts to join the demonstration and to convey general information concerning rules of conduct for participation and issues of safety.

Erik: I don’t want to see anyone covering his/her face in here, because we are friends, we love each other and we feel safe with each other.

Then, the square was filled with the tones of a fateful, epic, tension-building track of music, resembling that of the video depicted in chapter 4, which framed a deep male voice intonating: “A home to the people… welfare… healthcare… police… national defense... a safe Sweden… the demonstration starts now”. This was followed by the opening speech of Martin, who looked back at the brief history of the movement, triumphantly listing the names of leading politicians who had resigned in the meantime, and concluded that due to the growth of the movement, the political establishment has been making attempts to mute the movement through negative media coverage and counter-demonstrators:

Martin: In November [2015], we were a thousand people, we grew, and that meant that makten[^12] had to mute us. They got a bit nervous when suddenly ordinary Swedish citizens showed up on Sergel Square and protested against the government, which has never happened in Sweden’s history, and it’s worth an applaud [the demonstrators cheer], and it’s you, it’s you!

Martin then introduced the next speaker, Anna, who attacked multiculturalism and depicted the figure of the decent, ordinary Swedish citizen as a victim of that ideology. Her speech furthermore revolved around Islam, with emphasis on its alleged isolationism, militancy and oppression of women, and finally turned to the political establishment and the government with a rhetorical request: “Stefan Löfvén, once again I’m talking to you and sincerely ask you to resign, you got blood on your hands!” to which the audience responded by cheering, applauding and rhythmically chanting “resign, resign, resign!”.

The next speech was held by Eva, who addressed the government by criticizing its feminist agenda, which she defined as “the new state religion”. To the delight of the demonstrators, laughing and cheering, she made mockery of the feminist discourse on gender and power, and

[^11]: The original Swedish word, försvar, literally means "defense" but signifies in the political discourse the defense of the nation, which is how I interpret the usage of the word in this specific context.

[^12]: Makten usually refers to authorities in general but rather signifies the political establishment in this context.
its associated aim to influence norm systems regulating dress codes, menstruation taboos, gender identities and Swedish grammar. Eva summarized her speech by conceptualizing Swedish feminism as the ideology of an elitist clique and accusing it of inflicting a conflictual relation between men and women that creates societal gaps. This was followed by her final statement: “I am a woman, I am Swedish, I am proud, and I am not a feminist!”

After Eva, Lars stepped onto the platform and started his speech by describing FD as a manifestation that emanates from the “soul of the people”, and as the “uprising from society’s middle layer”. This underlined his rhetorical depiction of the dismantling of the welfare state, with alleged negative consequences for senior citizens, youths and sick people, and subsequent accusations against the parliamentary parties for refusing to deal with the situation. These accusations particularly took the form of mockery-making of the governmental parties, the Social Democrats and the Greens, to which the demonstrators responded by once again chanting “resign, resign, resign!”.

Following Lars were two other male speakers. The first, a Danish-speaking man, focused his speech on treason and on the downfall of the nation, which was accompanied with heavy criticism of the political establishment and mainstream-media. The second speaker discussed values and emphasized how values continuously transform. This was followed by criticism of the cultural-pluralist principles of multiculturalism and the speaker’s final argument that in order to get integrated in the Swedish society, one has to assume “our values” and “our tradition”, and become part of “our history”, all for the sake of the national community and a functioning welfare state.

The final speech was delivered by a blonde middle-aged woman, who criticized the Swedish “policies of immigration”, which she described as threatening “our democratic, Western way of life” and as signifying societal destruction and the abuse of power of the government. In the same manner as Anna, she rhetorically turned directly to Stefan Löfvén and repeatedly requested his resignation, with which the demonstrators concurred by chanting “resign, resign, resign!”. Finally, the speaker stated that “no matter different opinions on things, we have put those aside since our most primary objective now is to save and normalize our country!”. After this, all speakers lined up in front of the rostrum and the Swedish national anthem resounded across the square, engaging all demonstrators in a solemn chorus, before the demonstration ended and the crowd of demonstrators disaggregated.
It was a sunny, cold day in early winter when FD re-aggregated to perform another demonstration. This time it took place on the Mynt Square, located by the old walls of the royal castle in Stockholm and adjacent to the parliament quarters, only fifty meters away from the parliamentary building itself. This location, which is a common site for political manifestations of different kinds, can therefore be described as situated at the symbolic heart of the Swedish constitution, in terms of both monarchy and democracy. In addition, many people, most notably tourists, are passing it by all day long, which contributes to the centrality of square. On the day of the demonstration, the protective measures of the police had been significantly reduced, apparently due to the fact that there was no counter-demonstration, but still comprised several vehicles, horses and a huge amount of policemen, who patrolled the square and its surroundings from the morning onwards. Similar to the previous demonstration, a protective wall of humans, horses, and vehicles encompassed the raised platform on the square and was symbolically complemented by the parliamentary quarters and the royal castle, and the constant flow of passers-by, some of whom stopped by to watch for a moment.

The demonstrators gathered within the hour from the announced time of the demonstration. Besides raised platform, wrapped by the movement’s logo, and a huge banner displaying the same, a small station of boxes with flyers and water bottles had been setup on the square. Several officials, distinguished by reflective vests with the logo of FD on the back, were moving across the square, performing different tasks. Some handed out flyers to the passers-by, others manned a trolley with stickers and water for sale and a few handed out the placards in black and white. In the meantime, the demonstrators socialized in the relaxed manner of people who greet old friends, some taking selfies with their smartphones or photographing the surroundings while others were conversing jokingly and laughingly. Similar to what I had observed at the previous demonstration, the majority of the demonstrators constituted elder people or people in their middle-ages, but there were also younger persons, most notably the activists of “Soldiers of Odin”. As indicated, most demonstrators appeared to know at least someone in the crowd, whereas some, including myself, kept themselves to themselves. Right before the start of the demonstration, the sky suddenly turned cloudy and an icy rain relentlessly started to fall down on the crowd, of whom few had brought umbrellas. Surprised by the sudden change in weather, some demonstrators ironically remarked that “mother nature wants us to go home!”, which caused some vapid laughter.
In accordance with the procedure of the previous demonstration, the start was signaled by the tension-building musical track that framed the intonations of the male voice: “a home to the people… welfare… healthcare… police… national defense… a safe Sweden… the demonstration starts now”, and preceded Martin’s opening speech. This time, he defined FD as Sweden’s new popular movement that aims to “take back our old dear Sweden, which has been corrupted by our leaders”, which was met with applause, cheering and affirmative exclamations from the demonstrators. Right after the opening speech, one minute of silence was performed under the auspices of a priest, who motivated the conduct of the silent minute by drawing on a binary opposition between totalitarianism and human rights, related to FD.

Priest: Unfortunately, some apply the worst taunts of the Swedish language on us, words of hatred. Why do you do this? We are democrats, we believe in human rights, we want to see to humans and we think of those, who’ve become victims of totalitarianism in different forms, anti-democratic powers. As we all know, the 20th century is full of examples. Because of that, we shall perform one minute of silence and send our thoughts to all of these victims of totalitarianism and anti-democracy.

For one minute, the whole demonstration solemnly fell into complete silence, after which Martin re-entered the rostrum and announced the next speaker, a man, who has been featured on Swedish television as an expert on social relationships. The speech, which allegedly drew on the speaker’s own professional experiences, attacked the political establishment, journalists and celebrities and accused them for lying and deliberately keeping up mendacious and fraudulent appearances. His speech ended with an exhortation vis-a-vis the demonstrators to “acknowledge each other, emphasize the positive, hug each other! […] For what we need to improve this country is a lot of love, respect, equality and democracy!”
The next speaker was Eva, who discussed the fundamental principles of what she perceives as a “fresh and healthy” democracy and used the idea of “the social contract” as a starting point for a rhetorical depiction of a utopian vision of a perfectly coherent society:

**Eva:** In a fresh and healthy democracy, the social contract between citizens and leaders is maintained, there you trust each other and know that both parts do their best to fulfill the contract. In a fresh and healthy democracy, the political leaders prioritize their *own* citizens [applauds from the demonstrators]. There you also value the efforts of those who’ve struggled and worked all their lives. There you reward those who want to contribute without cheating, parasitizing and behaving fraudulently [...] In a healthy democracy, people feel confident and believe in their own abilities and power to change their lives. In a healthy democracy, you do not take in more people than the country can take care of and give a decent life [applauds from the demonstrators], there you do not distinguish between groups but reward those who behave well and follow common rules of law.

Eva’s speech reached crescendo when she juxtaposed her vision with what she perceives to be the real condition of the legacy of the social contract in Sweden: “It’s our politicians who are responsible for maintaining the social contract so that people feel confident. If they cannot fulfil their duties than its time to replace them!” which triggered the demonstrators’ cheering.

The next speech was delivered by Lars, who started by exclaiming “Folkets Demonstration! The manifestation of the people! We are ordinary persons! Emanating from the soul of the Swedish people!” and then made a comparison, permeated by nostalgia, between FD and the activism of historical popular movements against environmental destruction.

**Lars:** We, who stand here today are the same people who protested back then against the planned exploitations of the Swedish cultural landscape of international capital [...] When I behold *Folkets Demonstration*, I see the same people as forty years ago, which stood up for preserving Österlen [a small region in southern Sweden]. The only difference is that *Folkets Demonstration* now stands up for Sweden as a whole! [Applauds from the demonstrators]

Similar to the first speaker, Lars emphasized the role of love for the coherence of the Swedish society, stressing its importance for the activism that aims to preserve it:

**Lars:** When the people demonstrated for their Österlen, they did so because they loved the landscape in which they grew up. When we demonstrate today, our energy emanates from the same good feeling. The one who feels love gets energy in time.

For the final speech, the priest who conducted the minute of silence, returned to the rostrum to discuss how Christian values of goodness piety, and the metaphor of “the good Samaritan”, which according to him refers to intracultural solidarity, have been misused for legitimizing the reception of refugees in Sweden. He then devoted his speech to criticizing
cosmopolitanism and the blurring of national borders, drawing on the biblical story of “the tower of Babel”:

Priest: This is really a story of the national state. Because he, who has given the people different languages, who wants humanity to comprise languages and has given humanity different countries to exist in, he has laid the foundations of the nation state. That’s where the seed was planted and now there have been thousands of years. We have been cultivated, we have received rules of law that have grown, we have received different traditions of law and we should preserve this, it’s a gift and there is nothing bad with nation states.

After the priest had finished his speech by saying “god bless you all”, all the speakers lined up before the demonstrators and, in accordance with the procedure of the previous demonstration, the demonstration was solemnly finished off with the national anthem.

5.3. A mix of emotions

As demonstrated above, pervading the demonstrations of FD is a mix of emotions. First, emotions of anger and frustration can be clearly perceived, which resembles the findings of previous research on neo-nationalist performances (see Gingrich 2006) and demonstrates the palpable influence of the neo-nationalist cosmology outlined in the previous chapter. In addition to the introductory musical track, which adds an epic, apocalyptic aura to the demonstrations, critical and ironic speeches against immigration, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and feminism are mixed with condemnations of the dismantling of the welfare state, which all together revolve around the perceived disintegration of the national community and its consequences. Put briefly, the demonstrations are conducted through the national-apocalyptic “narrative frame” (Eyerman 2006:198) discussed in the previous chapter.

The main objects of this criticism are the political establishment and the government, which are accused of hypocrisy, fraud, anti-democracy and irresponsibility, and hence pose the imagined Others, against which the demonstrators direct their emotions. That is, emotions triggered by everyday sensory experiences of an imminent national apocalypse, and expressed through laughs and the regularized chanting of “resign”. The demonstration may thus be grasped as a “performance of opposition” (Eyerman 2006) and simultaneously as a ritual, through which the populist dichotomy of the elite and the people is enacted, as leading politicians are imaginatively addressed by “the people”, claimed by the demonstrators to be reified by themselves. This was indicated by Eva:

Eva: The one I address in my speeches… I directly address the political leaders, I don’t address the people, who are listening. And several times I’ve addressed “Mr Prime Minister” even though it
may appear silly. But I do it in order to say “I’m talking to you now” and those who listen to me at the demonstration, whose voice I represent… they are the demonstrators. So, I don’t talk to them but rather for them, vis-à-vis the authorities.

However, as argued by Eyerman (2006), whereas social movements commonly arrange demonstrations as “performances of opposition”, the process of moving against an Other implies the triggering of affinity and solidarity within the movement. This is confirmed by the ethnographic findings of Juris (2008a; 2008b) and can be related to the tendency of social gatherings to generate a collective spirit, identified by Durkheim (2012 [1895]). Indeed, emotional experiences of solidarity were emphasized by my interlocutors when describing their experiences of the demonstrations. Martin, for example, described his experiences of solidarity as equally important as, if not superior to, frustration and anger:

Martin:  Before, Julia used to hold the opening speech but now, since we’ve switched roles, I do. The first time I did it was in September and when I stepped onto that… the reception I got… I almost started to cry, I had to hold my tongue for a second, otherwise I would have stood there weeping. There was such a friendliness! People were cheering and I just stood there […] Our goal is not only to give expression to our dissatisfaction with the government of this country, but also to provide a forum for likeminded people and to meet others and feel that you’re not alone.

Similar experiences were described by Thomas, a regular demonstrator:

Thomas:  What I get from it? Different things. I get to meet nice people, whom I probably never would have got acquainted with in daily life.
Kristofer:  Uuh no.
Thomas:  I think that it’s nice to meet ordinary people with the same thoughts as I have. I have learnt a lot from them. At the demonstration I can also express the opinions that I stand up for and express why I stand up for them.

Embedded in the demonstration is thus an emotional paradox in that feelings of both love and hatred are experienced and expressed by the demonstrators. When it comes to emotions involved in performances, Beeman (2007) distinguishes between encouraging and aroused emotions, of which the former refers to emotions “involved to encourage engagement” and the latter to emotions “aroused during the course of performance” (ibid.:290). Beeman’s argument thus proposes a structure of emotions that is summarized as “double emotional involvement” (ibid., original italics). Applied to FD, the demonstrations may be interpreted as ‘political performances’ (Eyerman 2006:193), which are generated by anger and frustration with the agenda of the political establishment and generative of “affective solidarity” (Juris 2008a: 2008b). The demonstrations of FD may, in other words, be considered temporarily and
spatially distinguished socio-emotional contexts, through which contradicting emotions mix that unite the demonstrators and intensify their sense of unity.\(^\text{13}\)

5.4. A national communitas

Whereas the demonstrations are arguably generated by frustration and generative of solidarity, several of my interlocutors also emphasized love and solidarity as the driving emotional factors behind their activism. Carl, for example, simply stated that “it is love for your country” that constitutes the common denominator of the demonstrators. This also resembles Lars’ above-quoted statement in his speech in November, which advocated love for one’s cultural landscape as the “good feeling”, from which the energy of FD emanates. During our interview, Lars elaborated on this statement and associated his feelings for Sweden with his emotional experiences at the demonstrations by analogy with religiousity.

Lars: To me, nationalism is a personal feeling, it’s a completely private feeling and that is when I, as a human being, see the nature, the Swedish nature. Then I experience a feeling of joy and warmth. To come to a place in Sweden, where I’ve been before gives me a feeling of freedom. It’s the same good feeling as when your mother invites you for Sunday dinner and has made the table with my stuff huh, and there you sit on your usual seat. So, it gives me a warm feeling and I could compare that, to make it understandable, with the faith of Christians in God… or Jesus, I don’t get that.

Kristofer: It’s rather both actually.

Lars: Uhuh, and that’s a personal relationship. The church itself, it’s not for… I mean, there you gather, each and everyone with his or her own personal relation, which is a private business. You gather in church not to make manifestations, to demonstrate it outwards, but rather to feel strengthened in yourself. I consider nationalism as relating to the same emotions.

Kristofer: So you mean that at the demonstrations…

Lars: Yeah, you could compare that to a Sunday service somehow. Everyone has his or her own private feeling based on what we think of this country, those traditions that we grew up with and our memories and so forth, it’s a personal relationship with the nation. And we come together.

According to Lars, the demonstrations imply moments of aggregation of individuals, whose common denominator is love and affinity for Sweden. That is, a form of secular, pseudo-religious Sunday service in worship of “the sacred nation” (Appadurai 2006:4). In other words, he describes the fusion of “individual identities and biographies […] into a collective characterized by feelings of group belongingness, solidarity, common purpose and a shared memory” (Eyerman 2006:195), which, together with the temporal and spatial distinction of the demonstrations from everyday social life, resembles the formation of a liminal group, a communitas. As Turner (1969:106) argued, a communitas is distinguished and rather alienated from its surrounding society by being totalist, homogenous, equal and simple, while

\(^\text{13}\) Compare with Eyerman’s (2006:194) argument that the actual “movement” of social movements includes “engaging emotions”.\(^\text{13}\)
simultaneously giving “recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society” (ibid.:97). In relation to a neo-nationalist–cosmological framework, this human bond may be considered the emotional attachment to one’s national community imagined as a natural independent entity, distinguished and alienated from others (cf. Anderson 1991). That is, a pseudo-religious, emotional engagement in the national community, which generates an intra-national solidarity that cuts across social distinctions such as gender, age and class, ‘without which there could be no national community’.

Accordingly, the frustration that arguably generates the demonstrations of FD rather constitutes the flipside of love and solidarity with the national community. This is also indicated by the manifesto of FD:

“We who sympathize with Folkets Demonstration come from different political sides and we have different opinions on particular issues. What unites us is that we protect Sweden” (Folkets Demonstration 2016b:1),

which is a statement that is elaborated upon by another, claiming that

“Folkets Demonstration welcomes everyone. No matter if you are a liberal conservative, Social Democrat, Sweden Democrat or something else. No matter if you have your origins in or out of Sweden, no matter which religion you belong or if you are an atheist, and of course no matter what colour of the skin you happened to have.” (ibid.:2)

However, whereas solidarity constitutes one common denominator of the demonstrators and thus a driving factor of the demonstration, several of my interlocutors tended to equate their solidarity with the national community with their experiences of “affective solidarity” (Juris 2008a; 2008b) at the demonstrations. In Beeman’s terms (2007:290), the boundary between emotions, generating and generated by the performance of demonstrations, appear to be blurred in the minds of some demonstrators, which was for example indicated by Eva:

Eva: Yes, I do believe there is an openness and atmosphere of tolerance there… the search for some national identity and cultural community, where you don’t have to think exactly in the same way but you want to go in the same direction. We stand up for Sweden, for Swedish citizens and I also believe that it makes… more and more with immigrant backgrounds join Folkets Demonstration too.

Similarly, Thomas equated his sense of solidarity with the other demonstrators with his solidarity with “the people” on a national scale:

Thomas: The people is big… I mean, the people is huge and without the people there is nothing […] the people is all of us. That’s why it is to fun to meet others. I mean, that’s so far as you can get from the conditions of my childhood. Even though we have different ways of talking, we still have freakin’ fun, don’t we?
As indicated by these accounts, different and diverse individuals intersect at the demonstrations not only for protesting against the political establishment but also for joining a forum, where national coherency, solidarity and collective spirit is *de facto* experienced. The demonstration, in other words, reifies a “microcosm of the nation” (Mepschen 2016:43) that is facilitated by the emotional arousal of affective solidarity, which is also indicated by Lars:

Lars: [Folkets Demonstration] is actually about going back to the original Swedish and popular values, and that is, goodness, love, care for each other, friendliness, you do your duty and you do things in the right order, all these things which you… as ordinary people say huh.

While mobilized around solidarity with the national community and frustration with the condition of the same, the demonstrators of FD may be considered performing and experiencing a national “prefigured utopia” (Juris 2008a:62). In other words, in the alleged absence of a national community of cohesion, signified by cultural Others, the aggregation of demonstrators poses a “magical mirror” (Turner 1987:42) of it through the collective spirit and affective solidarity generated at the demonstrations. The demonstrations may thus be considered both “performances of opposition” (Eyerman 2006) and formations of a *national communitas* that embed a performance of how “men [sic.] may best live together in comradely harmony” (Turner 1969:134). That is, a *cultural performance* of national cohesion in accordance with the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992), symbolically amplified through the reinvigoration of national solidarity and “original Swedish and popular values”.

### 6. A Performance of Democracy

Whereas the previous chapter analyzed the demonstration from a ritualist perspective, this chapter applies the theatrical perspective of Goffman and analyzes the demonstrations as collective performances, which implies treating the communitas as a team. As Turner argued, “manifestations of communitas […] have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions” (1969:109), which also can be associated with his argument that a cultural performance “is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of” (1987:22), implying a measure of performative strategy and management. Considering the demonstrations as cultural performances of national cohesion thus indicates the simultaneous pursuit of techniques of impression management, which this chapter sets out to investigate.
6.1. A collective front

As illustrated in section 5.1, the start of the demonstration in September 2016 was preceded by a brief introduction by Erik, who outlined the rules for participation, which mainly comprised a prohibition against face masks, legitimized by reference to the alleged atmosphere of solidarity, love and decency. Face masks on public events, such as demonstrations, is an issue subject to regulation by the Swedish law in that wearing them requires permission from the police authorities. Hence, Erik’s instructions not only reflect the aims of FD but also the national laws and, according to himself, “democratic rules”:

Erik: When I say “no masks”, it is to emphasize that “these are the rules”, that we stand up for the democratic rules […] We are ordinary, hard-working people, young and old, people who’re like “no, now it’s enough”, and the nice thing is that we always advocate following the democratic rules: applying for permission, engaging in dialogue [with the police], behaving well and so on. But we receive criticism for that. We receive criticism from the left, from the right… for just wanting to be democrats.

Erik’s account can be compared with the manifesto, which states that one of the main purposes of the movement is to protect “the country of Sweden, her citizens, her culture and her democratic, equal and secular constitution” (Folkets Demonstration 2016b:1), and the official webpage, which outlines the formal values of the movement in terms of “democracy, transparency, humanism, welfare and rule of law” (Folkets Demonstration 2016c). Obedience to the formal rules for conducting demonstrations through applying for permission, behaving well and prohibiting unauthorized face masks, thus appears as one strategy, through which these democracy-protecting statements are conveyed through the demonstrations of the movement, and through which “original Swedish and popular values” of goodness, solidarity and “doing things in the right order” simultaneously are strategically imposed and performed.

Besides prohibitions of masks, however, the demonstrations are also managed through techniques not specifically rooted in the law, particularly through the regulation of placards. The most common placards at the demonstrations are, as illustrated above, those in black and white, which for several demonstrations constituted the only officially allowed placards.

Martin: Early on, we decided…
Julia: … no insults, we don’t accept any “Röfvén”¹⁴ or any Islamo… no such rubbish, we will never let ourselves be pulled down to that level, never!
Kristofer: Uuhh, no.
Martin: It has to be relevant, show what you think, but no insults, no. So from the beginning we decided to produce our own placards, with our own money.

¹⁴ A word play with the prime minister’s name Löfvén, which is mixed with “röv” equivalent to eng. “ass”.

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Kristofer: You mean those in black and white?
Martin: Yes, those which we have printed our own messages on. These were the only allowed placards because unfortunately some... what do they say? “Röfvén” and such silly... you can think whatever you want at the kitchen table at home, perhaps that someone’s completely stupid, but you don’t have to print it out on a placard.

Julia: No!
Martin: Because then you don’t act like a grown-up, so we decided that we’ll only allow our own placards, so that we don’t risk having someone standing somewhere with... But people wished to bring their own placard, so we eased the rules.

So, according to the current rules, any placard brought by the demonstrators themselves has to be controlled before the start of the demonstrations, which is the task of the officials to do. If the placard is approved, it is marked by a small sticker, whose shape differs from time to time. Disapproved are placards that convey insults of any kind as well as those displaying “political symbols”, which include party logos, swastikas, hammer-and-sickles and other symbols representing anti-democratic ideologies and political organizations in general.

Martin: So the placard is controlled by an official and if the officials... if there is any hesitation concerning its message then they discuss it or come to us, and we approve or disapprove it.
Julia: And it works out fine, they understand. We have rejected some placards sometimes. It’s been okay with them when we’ve explained our reasons. This is supposed to be fair, there shouldn’t be like any bullshit around here, and that’s the reason why I think this nice atmosphere arises, since we engage our hearts in it.

Discussing team performances, Goffman described different techniques and strategies, which aim to ensure that the team members ‘maintain the line’ (1959:95), and through which a collective and coherent impression is managed. Whereas “dramaturgical cooperation” (ibid.:90) referred to the deliberate and voluntary efforts of every team member for the sake of the common performance, Goffman also elaborated on the pursuit of more coercive and calculating strategies, e.g. “force or bargaining power” (ibid.), which resembles the regulations of placards at the demonstrations of FD. In other words, the strict obedience to the rules for public demonstrations and the regulation of placards appear to simultaneously constitute techniques for fostering an impression of democracy-protection and for generating, in Julia’s words, the “nice atmosphere” of, as I interpret her, cross-cutting national solidarity.

Besides coercive techniques, voluntary techniques of dramaturgical cooperation are also pursued during the demonstrations, for example by individual speakers. During her speeches, Eva is very careful with avoiding concrete political issues, which in general might appear offensive to some demonstrators and thereby cause division within the movement.

Eva: Well, I’ve been holding pretty ideological speeches I reckon. I never go into concrete political questions, I have not been concrete but have rather... as if I would write a text with general
arguments about overall things. And I think that’s a way to avoid it, and I also avoid concrete party-political issues.

Similarly, Lars manages his impression as a speaker carefully and avoids propagating against certain people, most notably cultural and ethnical Others.

Lars: I never turn my criticism downwards, never towards individuals, if they’re not journalists of course but then I turn upwards right? [laughs] Yes, one should not pin-point certain groups. I think that persecutions… I’m a friend of Israel, simply because the Jewish people has been persecuted. And there is no way that I would ever somehow join the gang of bullies, no matter how tempting it would be to patronize others and feel clever and fine [uncomprehendable] and I have been pushing for making all this democratic, very democratic…

Eva and Lars, in other words, both actively work for fulfilling the impression of the demonstrations as democratic by managing their individual performances according to values of universal equality and inclusion, which are tenets commonly associated with democracy (Barker 2013; Paley 2002). This is not least indicated by Lars’ statement that he has been “pushing for making all this democratic” by avoiding agitation against “certain groups”.

As these accounts illustrate, coercive and voluntary techniques are combined to foster the impression of the demonstrators as “just wanting to be democrats”, which mirrors the formal values of the movement. Face masks, anti-democratic symbols and speech contents that might appear offensive to both ethnic and cultural Others and to individual demonstrators, are proscribed whereas obedience to “democratic” rules for public demonstrations are advocated. This can be compared with Eyerman’s observation, referring to the history of public demonstrations, that demonstrations function as “both an expression and an extension of democratic principles” (2006:197). However, important to note is that in the case of FD, “expression and extension of democratic principles” is generated through a strategic impression management of coercive and voluntary techniques. In addition, both of these types of techniques are regulative of political opinions in general, for example concerning symbols on the placards and content of speeches, which reflects the manifesto stating that

“we who sympathize with Folkets Demonstration come from different political sides and we have different opinions on particular issues. What unites us is that we protect Sweden” (Folkets Demonstration 2016b:1),

and, subsequently, that

“Folkets Demonstration does not take stance in concrete political issues and thereby enables the unity of supporters of different political parties for the primary aim” (ibid.).
Accordingly, the pursuit of techniques, applied to manage the demonstrations, apparently aims to foster a democratic ‘collective front’, or “collective self-representation” (Eyerman 2006:207; cf. Juris 2008a:62,89), and simultaneously to enable the intersection of different and diverse individuals of different political opinions into the national communitas. The “nice atmosphere” that Julia describes is thus not solely aroused through the collectivity of demonstrators, which is both generated by and generative of national solidarity, but also strategically performed and managed. In other words, the national communitas and its embedded cultural performances is “hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions” (Turner 1969:109), which include obedience to the formal rules for demonstrations, considerations of content in the speeches, prohibition against masks and regulation of placards. National solidarity and the “original Swedish and popular values”, are thus not only reinvigorated through the collective spirit of national-solidary demonstrators but also through the strategic management of a democratic ‘collective front’ (Goffman 1959:34).

6.2. Performance disruptions

As Goffman argued, the primary purpose with techniques of impression management, in relation to collective performances, is to foster a coherent and credible impression to the audience, which implies anticipating and curbing “performance disruptions” (ibid.:203). However, adhering to the Euro-American ontological distinction between performer and audience (Schieffelin 1998:200), Goffman’s perception of performance disruption mainly referred to mistakes committed by the performers themselves, deemphasizing, if not omitting, the role of the audience for the eventual shortcomings of the performance. As depicted in the previous chapter, the demonstrations of FD have been subject to major disruptions and so from specific parts of the audience: the counter-demonstrators. Extending Goffman’s concept of “performance disruption” by drawing on theories of social movements and photography, this section elaborates on these disruptions and the defense strategies pursued to curb them.

6.2.1. “They are simply brainwashed”

The counter-demonstrations have been arranged against several of the demonstrations of FD and at one of the two demonstrations that I observed during fieldwork. The counter-demonstrations usually comprise the display of different banners, conveying various anti-racist and anti-fascist slogans, and rhythmic chants. This is also accompanied by spontaneous exclamations, whistling, booing and other forms of noise to differing degrees of intensity. Apparently, the aim of FD to perform a “pre-figured utopia” (Juris 2008a:62) of cross-cutting
national solidarity and to foster a democratic ‘collective front’ (Goffman 1959:34) is not acknowledged by certain sections of the audience, who rather appear to consider the movement as embedding anti-democratic tendencies and an ulterior purpose to impose an thoroughly exclusivist, Fascist and Racist social order.

The appearance of counter-demonstrators is perceived differently by the demonstrators, but a common explanation of their presence is that they are part of a greater plot to oppress and mute the movement. Martin expressed his belief in such a plot at the demonstration in September, and Lars expressed similar notions during our interview when he associated the counter-demonstrators with the iron fences of the police and negative media-coverage:

Lars: So, the fourth time, and that was my third speech, then they [the police] changed the location and pushed us together on Norrmalm Square, which is smaller. At one o’clock they sealed off the square completely, so that demonstrators arriving five minutes past couldn’t come in because of the police, and it was really riot-ish. And far away, suddenly, appeared two or three hundred shouting leftists, “var rädda, var rädda, fascister, fascister!”15 and such. I tried to look them in the eyes, it was… I have never seen… but it was like what I could have expected. To look into these peoples’… they had empty gazes! Those were the most stupid and inferior of the political left that they had gathered, and they stood there and chanted.

Lars also connected the counter-demonstrators and iron fences with Mona Sahlin, a former Social democratic party leader, who wrote a deeply critical article about FD, which accused the movement for being anti-democratic and violent and was published the day after the specific demonstration, referred to by Lars.

Lars: So my view is that she and some specifically elected from Aftonbladet and Expressen16 probably had a physical meeting where they discussed together “what shall we do? Well, we seal off, send a stupid leftist group, and there are many of those, a stupid political left which has lost focus, and put them there to chant. Iron fences, blocks and a lot of things and then we write guilt by association, all the time.”

Considering the counter-demonstrators as representing, if not more or less equal with, the political establishment was also expressed by Thomas:

Thomas: I think they [the political establishment] are pretty afraid actually… otherwise they would not send out these ground forces, which I reckon they have. They have done absolutely nothing to stop AFA17 for example, or all of these counter-demonstrators. Instead, they have fuelled them.

Thomas furthermore explained the appearance of counter-demonstrators by drawing on their personalities and upbringing, insinuating their indoctrination towards global communism:

15 This is a modified form of the chant alerta anti-fascista, which has been ascribed a meaning in Swedish of “be afraid, be afraid, Fascists, Fascists!” which probably is based on a misinterpretation.
16 Major Swedish newspapers.
17 Anti-Fascist Action: a militant, leftist network.
Thomas: To start with, I think they are uneducated, ignorant, they’ve never cared to learn anything from the opposite perspective, they just see everything from their own, and only get inputs from those who agree. They can never discuss anything but just shout, which is because they are uneducated and don’t want to learn from the opposite perspective. Ignorance, ignorance of history, ignorance of society today. I think that they believe that there is some utopian world, they believe that communists, anarchists, islamists and LGBTQ-persons can live together, but there is none. That is only in hell… What they reckon is the key is communism, but communism would be their death. They are simply brainwashed. They are products of the school system and the telly… they have become a violent tool for using violence against something, which they don’t have to use violence against.

Similar to Thomas, Eva considers the counter-demonstrators as brainwashed, but she also considers them as signifying the alleged disintegration of the Swedish society:

Eva: When it comes to how I think of them… they believe that I demonstrate against refugees, they don’t understand that they are the ones that I demonstrate against. My main opponents are not immigrants but I rather consider the groups among the counter-demonstrators as the biggest threats to Sweden for the moment because they are like bunch of brainwashed herrings, dead herrings, who just stand there and shout against some dangerous and unidentified ghost. So for me, their presence is the symptom of a broken Sweden.

Eyerman (2006) argues that for social movements, an Other is of essential importance for the collective identity-making and, fundamentally, for the mere activism of the movement. In his words, “[w]ho we are defines and distinguishes who we are not, at the same as it identifies what we are against. This Other must also be forged, providing a force to move against” (ibid.:194). Apparently, even though the political establishment, particularly the government, poses the Other, against which FD officially moves, the counter-demonstrators are construed as a localized form of this Other at the demonstrations. This is indicated by the fact that several demonstrators interpret their presence as signifying higher powers, either individual high-ranked politicians, media, the government, or all of them together. In other words, the counter-demonstrators are not perceived solely as political opponents but as embodying and reifying the, as perceived, anti-democratic agenda of the cosmopolitanist government. The plausibility of this conclusion is indicated both by Thomas’s view that the counter-demonstrators are brainwashed into communism and constitute a “violent tool”, and by Eva’s imaginary equation of them with the perceived social disintegration of Sweden.

As Eyerman emphasizes, an Other is necessary for distinguishing what a movement is and is not. As shown above, whereas the demonstrations of FD are simultaneously managed according to democratic rules and principles, several demonstrators consider the counter-demonstrators as violent, which indicate the function of the counter-demonstration as the opposite pole to the demonstration, allegedly consisting of persons “just wanting to be
democrats”. Eva, for example, draws on what she considers the written and unwritten norms and rules of democracy to distinguish the counter-demonstrators from herself and FD.

Eva: I am a strict follower of… I believe in the rule of law. Hadn’t Folkets Demonstration followed the laws I would never have wanted to be associated… and that’s why I really dislike the counter-demonstrations because it’s anarchy. Civil disobedience might sometimes be good for protesting, but not in this way. The norms of democracy implies following our jointly established laws. But the norms of democracy are for me also implicit, unwritten rules, which we normally not even think of. It’s not enough with law.

Kristofer: No, and what are they? These implicit, unwritten rules?

Eva: That you don’t stand and shout insults, like they shouted to me that I’m filthy, pointing at me. You don’t behave like that, you just don’t do that. At some speech in March [2016] I was so angry, because they were standing there. It provokes you that someone… it’s so unworthy! Was I their mother, I would grab them by the ear and ground them. That’s how I feel: “behave!”.

They are completely norm… the norms have been dissolved!

Kristofer: Uhuh, yes.

Eva: They [the norms] are no more… that really upsets me because I really don’t like it. I said something about it in my speeches too, about liberal upbringings. It didn’t work out well and now some of them have grown up. Some of them are at my age and behave in a way, which almost makes me, if I may be honest, think that they should be hospitalized.

As indicated by Eva’s view, to FD the counter-demonstrators signify the dismantling of democratic norm, on which the coherency of the society is based, while constituting the anti-democratic Others to the demonstrators. At the demonstrations, this binary opposition of democracy and anti-democracy is actively played out by FD in order to defend its ‘collective front’ (Goffman 1959:34) or “collective self-representation” (Eyerman 2006:207; cf. Juris 2008a:62,89). At the demonstration in September for example, several speakers commented and addressed the counter-demonstrations, insinuating their illiteracy, stupidity and disrespect for democratic rules, in fact even de-humanizing them (cf. Goffman 1959:209). Lars started his speech by stating: “I can see that mob over there, which threatens us. But the freedom of speech is not only a right protected by law, it is also a folklig gemenskap¹⁸ and then you show respect to each other!” Similar rhetorical defense strategies were pursued at the demonstration in November, against which no counter-demonstration was arranged. Nevertheless, introducing the one minute of silence, the priest appealed to them: “Apparently, no shouting people are here today, but if there is someone who intends to disturb this one minute of silence, I ask you to participate with us in solidarity instead”. Another speaker described the counter-demonstrators as “empty-minded zombies” and initiated a chant of “no more violence in our streets”; imitating and appropriating the anti-racist chant “no racists in our streets”.

¹⁸ Folklig gemenskap is a term that refers to the idea of national-popular community, characterized by solidarity, affinity and respect.
To summarize thus, drawing on notions and rhetorics of democracy, inclusivity and anti-violence through speeches and minor rituals, e.g. appropriation of chants or “one minute of silence” for victims of anti-democracy, appear to be the main performative strategies pursued by FD in order to construct an image of the disruptors as “anti-democratic” Others and to defend, and perhaps even amplify, its own democratic ‘collective front’ simultaneously.

6.2.2. Photographic power

The demonstrators also counteract the counter-demonstrators through cameras. At the demonstration in September, several demonstrators moved up close to the counter-demonstrators in order to film or take pictures of them, using cameras and smartphones. One camera was even put on a tripod, filming the counter-demonstrators throughout the whole demonstration (see figure 6.1). This can be connected with Eyerman’s (2006:194) argument that “[w]hile social movements may create an “us” and “them”, they do so as a form of symbolic interaction”. After all, the role of photography as a symbolic mediator of interactive social relationships, and as a technique for constructing Others, has been well-known even to anthropological research itself, which commonly pursued photography of cultural Others in its earlier, colonialist stages (Marion and Crowder 2013:42–44; Morphy and Banks 1997:7).

As the anthropological pursuit of photography furthermore indicates, photography as a symbolic practice not only facilitates interaction with and construction of Others, but also the creation and reproduction of power relationships between subjects and objects. Taking pictures of counter-demonstrators can, accordingly, be interpreted as symbolic attempts to objectify and take control over disrupting elements or, as counter-demonstrators are perceived as embodying the government and signifying the anti-democratic disintegration of the national community, to counteract the agenda of the government. This interpretation corresponds to Frosh’s view of photography as a performance of power, which he relates to symbolic forms of violence by reference to associated “hunting terms such as ‘loading’,

Figure 6.1 Photographic power-exercise

Photo by author
‘aiming’ and ‘shooting’” (2001:47). The camera as an object is, in other words, ascribed a status of a symbolic weapon. In the case of FD, photography can therefore be considered a defense strategy that embeds what Juris calls “performative violence”, referring to “symbolic confrontation[s] based on […] the representation of antagonistic relationships” (2005:415). Photography, in other words, allows for the demonstrators to symbolically make manifest “us” and “them”, and to exercise power over and aggression towards “them” in a way that does not undermine but defends and moreover preserves their democratic ‘collective front’.

Whereas the act of taking pictures in itself may be considered a performative defense strategy, the pictures taken are also of essential importance, not least for the construction of “them”. While some pictures are published on Facebook by individual demonstrators, most of them appear on the official webpage. From the demonstration in September, for example, pictures illustrating the counter-demonstrators were published together with pictures of demonstrators and in fact comprised the absolute majority of all published pictures.

Martin: Sometimes, the photographers have taken many pictures, of which maybe four illustrate our demonstration. On the other hand, I think it’s good to illustrate them so that any spectator can see… the video-clips speak for themselves and actually show who, according to my opinion, the true enemies of democracy are, since they want to stop us.

Julia: It’s not that complicated, because if you watch the pictures it’s enough with four pictures of Folkets Demonstration to make you feel warm and well at ease. If you watch one hundred percent of the pictures of the leftist, you feel more worried and worried for each and every picture, because you can see that there’s no friendliness there but rather clenched fists and open mouths and body languages, which give me the creeps.

As a defense strategy against disruptions, Goffman (1959:209) described how teams may create “a backstage image of the audience, which makes the audience sufficiently inhuman to allow the performers to cozen them with emotional and moral immunity”. As demonstrated by figures 6.2-6.5, which have been published through the digital network underlying the demonstrations (see discussion on “logic of networking” and “logic of aggregation” in chapter 2), the pictures appear to function as images through which the counter-demonstrators are constructed as the emotional (aggressive) and moral (anti-democratic) Others vis-à-vis the demonstrators, portrayed as peaceful, friendly and decent, fulfilling democratic norms and rules. As Ruby (1982:125) argued, “the camera creates a photographic realism reflecting the culturally constructed reality of the picture-taker”. In the case of FD, the pictures function to protect its democratic ‘collective front’ by displaying its reinvigoration of “original Swedish and popular values”, folklig gemenskap and democratic norms and principles. This is furthermore premised on the juxtaposing of the demonstrators of FD with the “violent”, “anti-
democratic” counter-demonstrators, who are constructed as the Others to the demonstrators. In addition to rhetorical, ritualist and symbolic defense strategies applied “on stage” thus, photographic power is exercised “backstage” to represent “antagonistic relationships” (Juris 2005:415) and to make visually manifest what FD is, and is not (cf. Frosh 2001:45).

6.3. A performance of democracy

During our interview, outlining his view of the demonstrations, Erik emphasized that he does not always agree with the content of the speeches but added that collective agreement on specific issues, on the other hand, is not the main purpose with the demonstrations.

Erik: We are a mouthpiece, a mouthpiece through which people can vent their frustration in an ordered way. We might be saying some controversial stuff but you have to remember that it’s not us, as FD, who express those but the speakers, and there are many speakers whom I don’t agree with. But I agree with the principle that they may speak.
The importance of a space for free speech was also indicated by Eva:

Eva: I imagine it like a speaker’s corner, that people can step forward and speak their real opinions of anything they like and which they think is of interest of the people in a wider sense.

Considering these statements in relation to the techniques of impression management discussed above, the movement appears to aim to perform an ideal democratic and inclusivist platform, where the principle of freedom of speech is more important than the spoken words themselves, where freedom of speech is promoted through the pursuit of different rules, norms and principles, and where every demonstrator behaves well and, paraphrasing Erik, “just wants to be a democrat”. The aim with the strategic fostering of the democratic ‘collective front’, in other words, appears to be to convey an idealized performance “[that incorporates and exemplifies]” precisely those democratic values, which are perceived to be “the officially accredited values of society” (Goffman 1959:45) by the demonstrators. That is, a strategically managed manifestation and expression of a normative understanding of democracy vis-à-vis the alleged imminent downfall of democracy, indirectly signified by cultural Others, directly signified by counter-demonstrators and primarily pertaining to both the dissolution of norms of behavior and of principles for handling social collectivities.

Hence, considering the emic perspective of the FD demonstrators in addition to their official purpose to protect “the country of Sweden, its citizens, its culture and its democratic, equal and secular constitution” (Folkets Demonstration 2016b:1), the demonstrations can be analyzed as both strategic, idealized performances of democracy and the formations of a national communitas, embedding a cultural performance of national cohesion. Furthermore, as shown in this chapter, the performance of what is perceived by my interlocutors as democratic rules, norms, values and principles, is closely associated and even hybridized with the performance of cross-cutting national solidarity and reinvigoration of “original Swedish and popular values”. This is, for example, indicated by Martin and Julia’s comments on the selection of pictures published on the homepage, by Lars’ statement at the demonstration of September 2016, which equated freedom of speech with folklig gemenskap, by Julia’s reflections on the regulation of placards, and by Erik’s introduction speech in September 2016. Considering the movement’s call to “to repair the Swedish Folkhemmet” (ibid.:2), this actualizes the mythological association between people, nation and democracy, embedded in the neo-nationalist reinterpretation of Folkhemmet (see chapter 1), to which I therefore return in the next chapter, concluding my analysis of the demonstrations of FD.
7. Concluding Discussion

7.1. A neo-nationalist performance of Folkhemmet

Discussing the upsurge of Western nationalism and far-right populism in the post-1989 Denmark, Hervik (2011:28) observes that

“[w]hen the nation-state is in a crisis, agents of the nation-state, or self-staged agents acting on behalf of the state, react with new nationalistic appeals: The “People” make ownership claims to the territory where they are living and act to exclude any who are not considered part of this people”.

This thesis provides an ethnography of some of these agents, organized in a social movement that claims to represent “the people” and to protect the Swedish nation state. The aim has been to investigate how the performance of demonstrations on public squares facilitates the construction of the, by FD self-ascribed, identity as the people. In accordance with my Turnerian approach, this has also included exploring the world view of the demonstrators.

According to my suggestion, and as shown throughout the ethnography, the collective identity of FD is enacted simultaneously through the socio-emotionality and the strategic performativity of the demonstrations. As argued, from the emic perspective of my interlocutors, the demonstrations can be analyzed as both the formations of a national communitas, embedding cultural performances of national cohesion, and idealized democratic performances. In other words, the demonstrations are perceived as reinvigorating national solidarity and “original Swedish and popular values” in conjunction with the strategic performance of a democratic ‘collective front’, reproducing democratic values, norms, principles and rules, and facilitating a self-understanding of the demonstrators as democrats.

The demonstrations can thus be interpreted as performances of a “pre-figured utopia” (Juris 2008a:62) of a national-democratic community, which reproduces the neo-nationalist, mythological reinterpretation of the original social-democratic vision of Folkhemmet, presuming the isomorphism of “democracy, the people and the nation” (Hellström and Nilsson 2010:62; Hellström et al 2012:195). The call to “together repair the Swedish Folkhemmet” (Folkets Demonstration 2016b:2), which follows from the “ontological insecurity” (Hervik 2011:269; cf. Appadurai 2006:5) pervading the neo-nationalist cosmology
of the demonstrators, is thus realized through a “subjunctive” (Turner 1969:vii; 1987:101), socio-emotional and strategic performance of folklig gemenskap. That is, a performance that conveys the bright societal vision also conveyed by the video in chapter 4, and is premised on and pervaded by the myth of Folkhemmet and its elements (see Hellström et al 2012:195).

Turner argued that performances are reflexive in that by performing, humans reveal themselves to themselves (1987:81). In addition, recent literature on social movements and public demonstrations provides arguments and examples of how performances of societal visions are connected with the construction of collective identity (Juris 2008a; 2008b; 2015; Eyerman 2006; Escobar 1992; cf. Alvarez et al 1998). Similarly, I argue that the performance of what can be interpreted as a neo-nationalist performance of Folkhemmet, based on a mythological reinterpretation of the original vision, can be considered as facilitating a self-understanding of the demonstrators as “the people”. As observed by Schall (2012) and Barker (2013), the original vision of Folkhemmet premised the people as the natural bearers of democracy, i.e. ethnos through demos, which, as emphasized by Schall (2012:456), was associated both with the image of the Swedish nation state as “‘the good home’ […] of familial harmony and solidarity” and with the prescribed national character of “a good democratic citizen” (ibid.:462). By performing the demonstrations, the demonstrators can be considered engaged in a ritual process of fulfillment of their reinterpretation of the Swedish national character. That is, performing and constructing an identity as “the people”, the demos; a mythological-imaginary point of intersection between nation and democracy, and a collective identity that symbolically reinvigorates the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992) and the national community, cosmologically construed as an ontologically and naturally distinct entity on the edge of apocalypse.

As demonstrated in the ethnography above, however, the counter-demonstrators also play a significant role in the performances of the movement. As indicated by my interlocutors’ accounts, they are construed both as embodying a nationally disintegrating agenda of the government and as posing localized forms of the political, anti-democratic Other – the government and the political establishment – against whom FD moves. Furthermore, as analyzed, through various defense strategies an image of the counter-demonstrators as violent,

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19 This conclusion can be compared with Schieffelin’s observation that “through performance, meanings are formulated in a social rather than cognitive space, and the participants are engaged with the symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality” (1985:707).
stupid and anti-democratic is reproduced rhetorically and visually. Briefly put, the counter-demonstrators are not only construed as symbolizing the political establishment but also constructed as the antithesis to the identity of the “good democratic citizen”, i.e. posing the Other, the anti-demos, against whom the demonstrators move and mirror themselves.

Accordingly, as I argued in chapter 5, the demonstrations must not only be understood as cultural vis-a-vis the perceived condition of the national community but also ‘performances of opposition’ (Eyerman 2006), which implies the forging of a political Other who “[provides] a force to move against” (ibid.:194). As argued, in addition to the official purpose of the movement to protest against the policies of the government, the movement confronts its opponents by reproducing the image of themselves as a collectivity of national solidarity and democracy. Therefore, the demonstrations, considered performances of a national-democratic “prefigured utopia” (Juris 2008a:62) and embedding “alternative meanings, values, and identities” (Juris 2015:82), may be understood as performances of opposition, embedded in the imagined relationship between the political elite and the ordinary people (cf. Mepschen 2016; Mudde 2004). This implies that the neo-nationalist performance of Folkhemmet not only enacts the collective identity of “the people” but must also be understood as a product of identity construction vis-à-vis an elite, imagined as cosmopolitanist, anti-democratic and signified by cultural Others and counter-demonstrators; the anti-demos. In other words, the performances of FD must be understood as part and parcel of a populist polarization between people and elite as both the facilitator and product of the construction of “the people”.

7.2. A neo-nationalist concept of democracy

“Indeed, it is precisely the unsettling potential of this kind of politics to join, fuse, merge, and synthesize what might appear to be incompatible elements that is at the heart of its distinctive power” – D. R. Holmes (2000:13)

As has been argued, the reinvigoration of national solidarity and “original Swedish and popular values” is perceived by the demonstrators of FD as closely connected with the reinvigoration and reproduction of democratic values, which together form the pillars of their collective identity. As stated in chapter 6, this actualizes the association between nationalism and democracy but also, I argue, raises questions about the role of democracy, commonly associated with universalism and inclusivity (Barker 2013; Paley 2002) and philosophically contradicting of the romanticism of nationalism (Kuper 1999), in the neo-nationalist vision.
Imaginary hybridizations of nationality, identity and democracy have been observed by several scholars. Stolcke (1995:3) notes that the British national character tends to be figured as connected with democracy, whereas Ceuppens and Geschiere (2009:388) assert that even the ancient Athenians considered themselves naturally oriented towards democracy. In Sweden, this tendency partly has its equivalence in the ideology of Folkhemmet. However, in the case of FD, the relationship between blood and democracy, prescribed in the original vision of Folkhemmet, is understated, which corresponds to the general tendency of neo-nationalism in the post-1989 world to rely on ideological notions of culture rather than race and blood (Stolcke 1995; Banks and Gingrich 2006; Hervik 2011). Nevertheless, their performances indicate an imagined connection between democracy and a national community.

Paley (2002:485) observes that “social movements have often created programs and practices that call themselves democracy movements while intentionally posing alternatives to standard definitions of the term”, which can be compared to the observation of Alvarez et al that social movements provide “alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings” (1998:7, my italics). In the case of FD, my conclusion is that the emic association between the management of a democratic ‘collective front’ and the reinvigoration of national solidarity indicates that the demonstrations work to reconfigure the concept of democracy towards culturalism and exclusivism. The performances of FD, I suggest, embed a vision of democracy that above all equates it with “Swedishness” and a bounded national community, but also with a set of rules for fostering folklig gemenskap and disciplining national-social subjects (Foucault 1977). As put in section 6.3, the striving for idealized performances of democracy appears to pertain to norms of behavior and principles for handling social collectivities. The neo-nationalist concept of democracy of FD thus implies a culturalist and exclusivist understanding that premises “national belonging” on “political subjectivity” (Barker 2013:240) and extend the nationalist aspect of democracy, embedded in the original vision of Folkhemmet (see Schall 2012; Barker 2013), into a new essentialist guise in the 21st century.

7.3. Afterthought: Writing Neo-nationalism

As discussed in chapter 2, during fieldwork I tended to perform the role of objective-empathetic scientist, which initiated a subject-object relationship, resembling that between the anthropologist and the interlocutor at the earlier, colonial eras of anthropological research. Throughout this thesis, this relationship may be considered amplified by my representation of
FD as a pseudo-religious group of “natives”, driven by a myth and spinning a ‘web of signifiers’. To readers familiar with the history of anthropology, this approach may come across as peculiar, old-fashioned and reinvigorating of the ethnocentric core premises of anthropological knowledge-production disclosed in the wake of the “writing culture”- debate.

When it comes to anthropology of neo-nationalism however, both Banks and Gingrich (2006) and Gingrich (2004) emphasize the need for strategies of maintaining social distance to one’s interlocutors, not least for the sake of one’s “moral hygiene” (Banks and Gingrich 2006:7). Whereas the former suggest “empathy not sympathy” as a methodological guideline, the latter advocates the assumption of a profoundly sceptical attitude “quite similar to that which many postmodern authors in anthropology once criticized as an unacceptable approach” (Gingrich 2004:161). In other words, the controversial opinions of many neo-nationalists appear to have initiated a reconsideration of the relation between the anthropologist and the (neo-nationalist) interlocutor. However, whereas the debate so far has focused on practical and ethical issues in the field, the question of ethnographic representation has so far been left rather unaddressed.

As argued and demonstrated by several scholars (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Keesing 1989; Thomas 1991; Nader 2011), exoticism and defamiliarization constituted core premises of anthropological knowledge-production and ethnographic representation before the “post-modern turn”. Accordingly, in correspondence with Gingrich’s call for a sceptical attitude beyond post-modernism, my analysis of FD has relied on a rather defamiliarizing approach for the sake of maintaining the social distance to my interlocutors and understanding the logics behind their controversial views. After all, Rabinow’s (1986:241) contribution to the “writing culture”- debate did include a call to “anthropologize the West” and to “show how exotic its constitution of reality has been”, which can be compared to Mepschen’s recent call for “an anthropology that turns attention to precisely those European populations construed as native” (2016:21). In other words, Rabinow and Mepschen appear to call for the turn of a defamiliarizing gaze towards the Western civilization in order to illuminate its cosmological and imaginary premises, of which neo-nationalism, as I have tried to show, is one indicator.
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