Exploring the populist ‘mind’: Anxiety, fantasy, and everyday populism

Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson

Abstract
This article is focused on the appeal of far-right populist politics in the everyday and how this appeal is related to continuity and change in the global order. Contemporary societies have witnessed an upsurge of populist movements and groups set on filling a political space by appealing to a population in search of solutions to an ever-changing political and economic landscape. Here, we specifically highlight the role of ontological insecurity, fantasy narratives, and emotional governance as critical for understanding far-right populist politics. The analysis consequently attends to the centrality of gendered and racialised narratives and to how these are fuelled by feelings of pride, shame, vulnerability, and insecurity. The aim is to show how structures and emotions work in tandem to create far-right support and how these developments are similar across Western and non-Western contexts. Particular attention is paid to far-right narratives that pertain to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords
anxiety, emotional governance, fantasy narratives, far-right, gender and race, ontological security, populism

Introduction
We wanted to show these politicians that it’s us who’s in charge, not them . . . The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants . . . Murder the media . . . We don’t want Chinese bullshit . . . (Voices from the attacks on the Capitol in Washington on 6 January 2021, reported in The Japan Times, 2021)

Those who stormed the Capitol on 6 January 2021 were merely a fraction of Trump supporters ‘fueled by the words [of the former president] just minutes before and the fervor of the mob standing behind them’. They were ‘infamous white nationalists and noted [QAnon] conspiracy theorists’, ‘spread[ing] dark visions of pedophile Satanists running
the country’. They were leaders from the Proud Boys with their ‘misogynistic and anti-immigrant views’, representatives of ‘a collective called “Murder the Media”’, followers of the National Socialist Club, ‘a neo-Nazi group’, and some belonged to the Three Percenters, ‘a far-right armed group’ who wore ‘helmets and Kevlar vests adorned with the group’s symbol, a Roman numeral three’. The mob itself consisted of ‘tens of thousands of Trump’s most loyal supporters’ who were responding to ‘months of false claims’ by the former president of a rigged election (reported in The Japan Times, 2021). Many of the most fervent attackers were identified as White and males, and gendered and racialised explanations of far-right populism and extremism are crucial to understand some of the social and psychological issues involved. This is most certainly the case whether we discuss the rise of far-right populist politics in the United States, Europe, Russia, India, or Turkey – to only mention a few examples.

A few weeks earlier, nationwide protests hit Germany and many other places around the world, the United States included, against Covid-19 restrictions. In Germany, the restrictions were met with growing resistance among an increasingly radicalised group of virus sceptics, of whom some have echoed the conspiracy theories of the QAnon movement while others have allied with Germany’s far right. The so-called Querdenken 711 movement (translated as ‘thinking outside the box’) does not only consist of far-right supporters, but the German state is increasingly concerned with a large number of their sympathisers who, it argues, express ‘[e]xtremist, conspiratorial and anti-Semitic content [that] is increasingly being mixed with legitimate criticism of the state-led measures to curb the coronavirus pandemic’ (Noack, 2020). In Sweden, the far-right neo-fascist party, the Sweden Democrats, has similarly advocated that hospital patients during the pandemic should be divided in terms of how Swedish they are (Klepke, 2020; SD, 2020). This stance coheres with its promotion of policies aimed at forbidding the hijab in schools, removing pride flags from local municipality buildings, and suggestions that books in foreign languages should no longer be provided by local libraries.

The appeal of the far right is not limited to Europe and the West, however. In India, we can see how the pandemic has been used as a way for Narendra Modi, the current prime minister, to expand his power and take an intolerant view to democratic decision-making and governance. As a result of the lockdown, online vigilantism and violence against Indian Muslims have intensified, and journalists covering these issues have been targeted (Meyer, 2020). In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro has played on feelings of insecurity by promoting a strongman masculinist image, strengthening social and cultural divisions and anti-migration sentiment. His variety of far-right populism has resulted in the reversal of decades of economic development and climate adaptation and one of the largest death rates related to Covid-19 (Justino and Martorano, 2020). It is clear that forces belonging to the far right in Europe, India, Brazil, and elsewhere are successfully using the crisis of the pandemic to gain a foothold among an increasingly frustrated populace, just as the far right in the United States is using Trump’s defeat as a prime opportunity to recruit his disillusioned supporters.

In this article, we analyse the conditions that make such sentiments arise in the first place – that is, the structural and affective changes that underlie populist mobilisation and the polarisation of everyday insecurities. This means not only highlighting the centrality of emotions, but also the reproduction of structural power and power relations at both a local – individual and social – and a global level. Such an approach, in particular, pays attention to collective emotions as ‘patterns of relationships’ and ‘belonging’, and posits that these patterns are related to crises narratives and ontological (in)security that are
rooted in widespread perceptions of ominous and uncontrollable change at the global level. These dynamics, and their impact on everyday populism and the populist ‘mind’, are explored through the concepts of fantasy and emotional governance. While ‘emotional governance’ can simply refer to everyday emotionally charged utterances and statements made by politicians and other prominent figures, it can also be read in a Foucauldian sense as techniques of surveillance, control, and manipulation. We use the term in the latter sense to refer to the ways in which society governs emotions through the cultural and institutional processes of everyday life, meaning the ways in which it affords individuals with a sense of what is regarded as appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and the circumstances in which certain emotions (e.g. fear, hatred, and contempt) become acceptable (Crawford, 2014: 536). Much work on populism and anxiety has shown, for instance, how populist agents seek to project a fantasy narrative that concurrently reinforces reified notions of belonging and alters norms regarding what is deemed to be acceptable behaviour (Browning, 2018; Steele and Homolar, 2019). It, especially, highlights how such imaginary and collective ‘memorization’ is both gendered and racialised, and how it is routinely incorporated into national celebrations, memorial landscapes, and other elements of national iconographies.

The question that we address in this article is focused on how we can understand the appeal of far-right populist politics in the everyday while still acknowledging that this appeal is fundamentally related to continuity and change in the global order. This necessitates, on the one hand, a brief description of the macrostructural dynamics of globalisation, neoliberal governance, and media transformation as creating a foundation for populist politics and, on the other hand, an in-depth consideration of the insecurities and anxieties that these macrophenomena give rise to. The emphasis is hence on how these dynamics translate into an emotional governance that manifests in the form of fantasy narratives, and on how they affect individuals and groups in their everyday lives. The analysis consequently attends to the prevalence of gendered and racialised narratives and to how these are fuelled by feelings of pride, shame, vulnerability, and insecurity. The aim is to show how structures and emotions work in tandem to create far-right support and how these developments are similar across Western and non-Western contexts. Examples are provided from both contexts with particular attention paid to far-right narratives that pertain to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to account for the linkage between what we refer to as macrostructural dynamics and emotional governance as it operates in everyday settings, we start by providing an overview of how ontological insecurity is related to structural change and the psychological effects of such changes, that is, what we refer to as the roots of populism. From there, we move onto a discussion of the anxieties and crises narratives that have emerged from these structural changes and how they are related to far-right populism. Here, we point to the importance – for the far right – of fantasy narratives that project completion and ‘certainty of identity’. This is developed in the last section, which is focused on the relationship between fantasy narratives and emotional governance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the conclusion, we discuss the key dynamics and consequences of the far-right populist commitment to fantasies of self-sameness and homogeneity.

The roots of populism: Ontological insecurity and structural change

The ontological security literature is useful for understanding how ruptures and unsettling experiences can work to consolidate established routines and biographical narratives and
how they can instigate a search for security in the everyday (Ejdus, 2019; Kinnvall, 2004; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). This requires, however, a move away from Giddens’ (1991) initial focus on ontological security as a ‘security of being’ – that is, the need to establish a sense of confidence and trust in the world around us, and to generate a sense of continuity, stability, and order. Notions of being are, conversely, always in flux and a figment of our imagination. By emphasising such a ‘security of becoming’ (Kinnvall, 2018), we are made attentive to how far-right supporters are offered an imagined secure future that can relieve individuals from their present predicament (e.g. Trump’s call to ‘make America great again’) while naming those who seemingly obstruct its realisation (e.g. the establishment, immigrants, or women). It is an ontological insecurity related to fantasies of particular values and traditions that must be defended from and immunised against ‘cultural infection’. The narratives promoted by far-right leaders tend to repackage feelings of alienation, inadequacy, and disempowerment into a collective ethos – an ontological purpose that does not only result in sensations of continuity, stability, and order, but also entails and induces risk, excitement, and danger. Much ontological security literature has thus focused on the role of narratives as a linkage between self and identity, between individuals and the group, as well as between individuals/groups and the state (e.g. Della Sala, 2018; Eberle, 2019; Steele and Delehanty, 2009; Subotic, 2018).

Of particular importance has been a recognition of crises narratives as disrupting the experience of stability and order as commonly understood in the ontological security literature (see, for example, Chernobrov, 2016; Ejdus, 2018, 2019; Solomon, 2015, 2017) and as creating a need for cognitive closure – that is, a psychological need to replace discomfort and ambiguity with predictability and control – as understood in much social-psychology literature (e.g. Webster and Kruglanski, 1994; see also Homolar and Scholz, 2019). More recently, we have seen an increasing interest in the linkage between crisis, trauma, and fantasy narratives in the ontological security literature where fantasy narratives are viewed as particularly important for understanding populist appeal (Browning, 2018, 2019; Kinnvall, 2018, 2019; Steele and Homolar, 2019). In order to conceptualise how fantasy narratives have emerged as a certain form of emotional governance in populist far-right politics, it is, as maintained above, important to consider the link between structural change and ontological insecurity: that is, how a number of structural phenomena that operate on the global level have created a psychological receptiveness for far-right populist discourse and practice.

In economic terms, we can see how the consequences of free trade, deregulation, and monetarism have come to be construed as a ‘new normal’ of permanent austerity and diminished expectations at the same time as augmented inequalities, job losses, and cultural dislocations have become increasingly difficult to legitimise. This, in turn, has affected the emergence of radical and populist politicians who challenge the entire system and feed upon an economic sense of insecurity where, especially in Europe, the protection of ‘social welfare’ is often narrated as a defence against migrants who (allegedly) exploit the welfare system (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Rossi, 2017; Steele and Homolar, 2019; Wodak, 2015). The relation between far-right populist appeal and a growing sense of cultural insecurity seems to be grounded in much more than economic anxiety or distress, however.

Norris and Inglehart (2019), for instance, argue that authoritarian populism is the consequence of a long-term generational shift in values where older generations have become alienated – ‘strangers in their own land’ (Hochschild, 2018) – while younger generations have adopted ‘post-material’ values of secularism, multiculturalism, and personal freedom.
The extent to which this generational change is an accurate description of generational value differences has been questioned, however, with Schäfer (2021) arguing that Norris and Inglehart’s empirical results do not fit to the theory:

[T]he data do not support the claim that in European societies, younger and older cohorts stand on two sides of a cultural conflict in which the old defend authoritarian, and the young libertarian, values. Instead, [. . .] a majority in each group supports libertarian and allegedly authoritarian values at the same time. (Schäfer, 2021: 7)

Others, such as Wilkinson (2019), maintain that increased urbanisation has created thriving multicultural areas in which liberal values dominate, while rural areas have been ‘left behind’ and unite in social conservatism and aversion to diversity (see also Rodrik, 2019). Even when taking seriously the criticism directed against the generational argument, it is clear that social differentiation occurs not only in relation to changes in the global economy. It is equally related to contestations of who is to be part of the national narrative. Far-right parties and movements are thus consistently involved in nativist struggles of belonging that are tied to essentialising discourses on national values, historical traditions, and political institutions, recurrently expressed in terms of (gendered) Islamophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism (Agius et al., 2020; Mudde, 2019; Wodak, 2015: 31f).

To this should be added the present concern with environmental degradation and climate change in which climate activists have been especially intimidated by far-right activists (Deutsche Welle, 2020). Here, so-called post-truth politics and conspiracy theories play an important role. Climate denialists have long used fabricated arguments to discredit overwhelming scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change, and in the particular case of Covid-19 a veritable ‘misinfo-demic’ (IOM UN Migration, 2020) has accompanied and worsened the real pandemic. Several scholars have also identified a link between different forms of masculinity, sustainability, and climate change (Agius et al., 2020; Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Daggett, 2018). A changed media landscape has further enabled a constant and decentralised use of myths and imageries that essentialise and reify socio-cultural conflict (Doerr, 2017). Hence, far-right groups use social media to diminish the distance between political leaders and individuals, often by enabling a normalisation of behaviours and attitudes that would not be considered acceptable in the physical world, as online information is often non-censored and non-hierarchical (Bjola and Pamment, 2019; Helbing et al., 2019). Studies also demonstrate that social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, are particularly influential in shaping the public discourse through harsh, polarising, and gendered language and by disseminating radical and often anti-feminist views (Agius et al., 2020; Benkler et al., 2018). Through social media, far-right populists can thus prey on an already precarious sociopolitical context by deepening efforts to misinform and disinform citizens, communities, organisations, and voters.

In psychological terms, these structural changes are neither foremost operative on an abstract and impersonal level nor are they mutually exclusive; they rather work in tandem to create increased feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and even anger and humiliation among certain populations. A focus on the structural roots of ontological insecurity hence allows for an analysis of the perceived threats and anxieties that individuals and groups experience as traditional structures and safety networks break down in relation to a decreased role of the state, reduced welfare policies, intensified global integration, migration, alienation, and increasingly diverse and unequal societies. As Giddens (1991) has argued in
relation to people’s ability to take refuge in everyday routines in order to establish a sense of ontological security, these steps are always confronted by a constant dread that our sense of being in the world may be destabilised. This is similar to Tillich’s claim (2014: 38–51, in Browning, 2019) that existential anxieties, in terms of ruptures and crises, are often related to a constant sense of meaninglessness and emptiness in life or to feelings of guilt and shame – all of which are key features of what we, in this article, designate the populist ‘mind’. This brings us to the question of how we can understand such existential anxieties in a context of crises narratives and how this is related to far-right populism.

**Crisis, anxiety, and everyday far-right populism**

A crisis is often understood as a sudden disruption, with a beginning and an end. However, we see crisis more in terms of unknowability and prolonged uncertainty – an increased sense of ontological insecurity that shape the everyday, as the build-up and extension of a truly destabilising experience (real or imagined) (Ahmed, 2014). A consequence is that we need a proper sense of context if we are to study situations of uncertainty, anxiety, and a sense of loss (Steele, 2008). In terms of the ongoing pandemic, it can indeed be assumed to have created a widely dispersed state of uncertainty. Quarantine, closed borders, and drastic restrictions of individuals’ day-to-day lives are political responses that have fashioned a new ‘normality’ that undermines and unsettles the ordinary routines that create a sense of continuity and provide answers to questions about ‘doing, acting, and being’ (see Giddens, 1991). However, the pandemic is only the latest iteration in terms of the appeal of far-right populist movements around the world. To gain a deeper understanding of how far-right politics and sentiments emerge, we – in addition to wider socio-economic and political change – need to recognise the role of group-identification and the yearning to belong, the role of leadership and social media narratives, and emotional attachments to cultural memories and desires.

Why, in other words, do people feel attracted to far-right populist thought and behaviour, when so much of this appeal seems to hinge on extremist notions of economic and cultural nationalism and xenophobia? Here, research on social exclusion has been viewed as a recurring explanation for far-right populist appeal (Wilkinson, 2019), and researchers in social psychology have argued that we constantly need to seek out and affiliate with other people and groups (Bäck et al., 2015; Jay et al., 2019) and that we have well-developed systems for detecting and avoiding social exclusion as well as strategies for coping with rejection (Williams, 2007). However, an emphasis on social exclusion cannot help us account for how far-right populist sentiments also resonate with and find support among affluent groups who show few signs of social exclusion in a traditional sense. Neither can such a focus, in isolation, answer why certain narrative structures become more appealing than others (for an overview of this critique, see Kisić Merino et al., 2021).

Hence, more useful strands of research seem to be those directly attending to issues of migration, citizenship, gender, postcolonialism, and the emergence of the far right (see, for example, Bhambra, 2009, 2017; Mudde, 2019; Müller, 2016). This research tells us how people gain a sense of belonging through attachments to justifying ideologies, and how they experience an increase in self-esteem and status as their personal and social ties are felt to be valorised and to matter. At the same time, such attachments can also engender a sense of danger, excitement, and risk – which, in turn, are often tied to desires to engage in acts of vengeance or revenge (Kimmel, 2018). Leaders who attract far-right
supporters are thus likely to use populist narratives to instil a sense of togetherness among individuals whose interests are not necessarily concordant. By employing the power of imagination, myth, and fantasy, and by capitalising on ontological insecurity and existential anxiety in times of uncertainty, far-right leaders can reach a large subsection of society.

In the West, these narratives have served as a way to support White nationalism and racist prejudice, and it should come as no surprise that far-right populist and some centre-right parties and movements often rely on biological and cultural racism as a rhetorical source for describing their imaginary nations. Whiteness, in these narratives, is closely related to prevailing masculinity norms, which are often conceived of in terms of heteronormative values (Bhambra, 2017; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). It is clear that such Eurocentric and exclusionary narratives have ideologically exerted their hold on and affected and resonated with the subjective imagination of a large number of citizens. However, such essentialist understandings of biological and cultural racism are also found in non-Western settings, where they have often been exported and evolved in conjunction with patriarchal structures in the name of imperialism (Bhabha, 1990; Bhambra, 2009; Fanon, 1952). The importance of social media narratives for diffusing such norms of Whiteness, majoritarian rule, and masculinity cannot be overstated, especially as connected to desires, nostalgia, and imaginings of a past moral and secure order.

Here the relationship between need and desire – as outlined in Lacanian thought – seems to offer crucial insights. A need can in a sense be satisfied, while a desire cannot: ‘[d]esire is desire because of its eccentricity, because of the frustration it holds in wait’ (Burgess, 2017: 24). It is a perennially longed-for satisfaction. This frustration, Lacan (1988) argues, opens up for a politics of impossibility where desires, ambiguities, and anxieties are crucial for social life (see also Žižek, 2006; Epstein, 2011; Solomon, 2015; Stavrakakis, 1999). To overcome uncertainty, or lack in Lacan’s terminology, the subject engages in fantasies and imaginations to ‘alleviate anxiety and fend off the threat of fragmentation’ and to ‘[conceal] the traumatic split or tear within the subject’s being’ (Ruti, 2009: 97). Fantasies of past traumas and glories often become ‘real’ in the hands of far-right leaders, who convey narratives and images of humiliation and shame as well as of pride and superiority to their followers (Homolar and Löfflmann, 2021) – thus purporting to ascertain and satisfy a perpetual desire through fantasmatic (fictional) closure and wholeness. For the far right, the primordially construed nation – with its dual function of demarcating community and providing it with both foundation and purpose – stands out as the paramount vessel for fulfilling the (ever elusive) desire for (impossible) wholeness. Far-right fantasies that seek to project completion and ‘certainty of identity’ (see Rogers and Zevnik, 2017: 582) need not have any direct relation to actual events or experiences. As Malpas (1996: 314) argues in his interpretation of psychoanalytic temporality, ‘any memories that are connected to the symptom are not direct representations of events that “really happened” but images that have been retroactively constructed’.

It is in these fantasy narratives that we find a close connection between far-right appeal, emotional governance, and ontological insecurity. In the following, we discuss such fantasy narratives in relation to the current pandemic in which a crisis is used to unite a number of people not necessarily aligned in terms of common interests. Examples are provided from populist political leaders in both Western and non-Western contexts, as well as from groups converging on anti-lockdown protests across the world. In particular, we are interested in the racialised and gendered contents of these fantasy narratives and
the ways in which social media have been used to diffuse an emerging sense of crisis and insecurity, to which far-right fantasies have responded.

Fantasy narratives, emotional governance, and the far-right populist ‘mind’

With Richards (2018: 402), it might be argued that recent turns towards far-right populism is reflective of how ‘[o]ne type of phantasy which has very obvious effects in the political sphere is the paranoid one’. Here, fantasy should be understood as a psychoanalytical term that ‘refers to a deep template in the unconscious mind of the individual which predisposes that person to experience people, events and situations in a particular way’ (Richards, 2018: 402). Consequently, ‘[p]hantasy is not merely an escape from reality, but a constant and unavoidable accompaniment of real experiences’ (Allen, 2020: 47f). At the same time, it should be recognised that ‘phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something’ (Lacan, cited in Leeb, 2018a: 243). What this means is that fantasy as a part of far-right populist discourse is, on the one hand, appealing to a fundamental human need to attach subjectivity to narratives that provide sensations of ‘real experience’, while it, on the other hand, acts to overwrite and blind its followers to the shortcomings of viewing the world in terms of unity, homogeneity, and predictability. It would, in line with this thinking, be incorrect to maintain that far-right supporters – and especially those who embrace and promote conspiracy theories – are wedded to a view that ‘truth no longer matters’ (Richards, 2018: 403). They are, on the contrary, excessively invested in the belief that they, and they only, have access to it. However, rather than seeing this as manifesting a relation-to-self that is secure in its ‘omnipotence’, it should be conceived of as ‘a defence, against inner feelings of weakness and vulnerability’ (Richards, 2018: 403f). Or to echo Richards (2018: 404), ‘[d]elusions’, after all, ‘are always defensive structures, erected to ward off a deep anxiety’.

In protests around the world against anti-lockdown measures, we have seen how anti-vax, conspiracy theories, and QAnon have emerged together in a number of fantasy narratives and how these have gained followers across contexts. A central component of QAnon is the crowdsourcing of narratives, which provides a fluid and ever-changing ideology. In the United States, QAnon was, following the lead of former President Trump, calling the virus a hoax and amplifying fantasy narratives of 8kun (the Internet forum formally known as 8chan) on Facebook and Telegram (an encrypted instant message platform) about Asians being more susceptible to the virus and that White people were immune to it. This not only carried racial undertones but also minimised the threat of the virus (Argentino, 2020). Using narratives of freedom, these groups often converge in their anti-feminist and anti-Semitic views. A key figure of a so-called freedom group on Telegram has made claims in Australia about Jewish ‘overrepresentation . . . in the higher echelons of media [and] business’ (McGowan, 2021), with protesters at the Melbourne rallies in March 2021 claiming that the pandemic is part of a global scheme to impose a new world order. ‘A video accusing [Bill] Gates of wanting “to eliminate 15 percent of the population”’ has received almost two million views on YouTube (Deccan Chronicle, 2021). In India, a number of behavioural scientists have expressed concerns on social media platforms that the lockdown could escalate into a full-blown melancholia – that it could force men against their better nature to actually help around the house, with bloggers on a WhatsApp chat group asserting that ‘these feminists are using the Corona virus to effeminate and emasculate us’ (Dubey, 2020).
However, despite the manifest connection between deeply felt anxieties and certain sections of society, it has to be acknowledged that the function of fantasy as such, that is, its role in bringing about ‘closure on the ambiguities and complexities of the social world’ (Eberle, 2019: 252), is a general condition. Individual subjectivity is dependent on fantasies to ‘lend (an always illusory form) of consistency and meaning to [our] existence’ (Ruti, 2009: 97, 99). At the same time, such necessary fantasies can be more or less certain about the closures they provide, more or less certain about the realness of the ‘reality’ that they bring into being. The particular fantasies that come to dominate our lives – and hence the ways in which we relate to others (Allen, 2020: 47) – impact the degree to which we recognise their limitations and the extent to which we conceive of them as factual, objective, and totalising. The latter attitude and disposition reflect much far-right populist discourse and those currently heeding its call. The far-right populist view of the world is, then, one of possible mastery and orderliness – which entirely overlooks and seeks to overwrite that ‘we actually live in the impossible, that the impossible is the real’ (Sass, 2015: 422).

Such attempted mastery of narratives can be found in the emotional governance of many far-right populist leaders across the world, as strategies of denial and othering are used in relation to the pandemic. In Brazil, one of the worst affected countries, Bolsonaro has dismissed the severity of the pandemic, saying, ‘because we have a more tropical climate we’ve almost reached the end [of the outbreak], or it’s already over . . .’ and that ‘[a]fter being stabbed, I’m not going to be brought down by a little flu’ (Robertson, 2020). In the United States, a key feature of Trump’s Covid-19 policy was to blame China for the outbreak, using China as a metaphor for a ‘foreign infection’ (Gaudefroy and Lindaman, 2021) invading the body politic and threatening the nation. Here, Agius et al. (2020: 447) contend that this response to the Covid-19 pandemic is highly masculinised: that populist leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro and Boris Johnson in their fear of ‘showing vulnerability’ responded by ‘prioritizing highly masculinized views of strength’. This involved both ‘contradicting or ignoring’ the messages of public health experts, as well as ‘refusing to wear masks or practice social distancing’ (see also Meyer, 2020; Rana, 2020). It is a response that is consistent with broader patterns of far-right attitudes towards the need to preserve traditional gender roles and the family as an institution that harbours and safeguards heteronormative ideals (see Mudde, 2019). Developments in Hungary and Poland exemplify how far-right leaders seek to denounce, and even try to legislate against, activities or ideas that are perceived as threats to such traditional gender roles and conceptions of the family. More extreme versions of far-right reactions to contemporary feminist challenges to fantasies of an ideal male self are the phenomena of ‘incels’ (i.e. involuntary celibates) and ‘pick-up artists’ (i.e. open debates of politicised rape fantasies) (Nicholas and Agius, 2018).

What is particular about fantasies associated with much far-right populism is hence their positing of clear objects that either need to be reclaimed or removed in order for a cohesive sense of identity and community to be restored and properly grounded (see Eberle, 2019: 255). This does not only entail the naming of abject others (as discussed above), but a constant ‘shifting of blame’ and a persistent commitment to ‘victim-perpetrator reversal’ (Wodak, 2021: 95). The primary or actual violation is, in this line of thinking, contained in the rejection and prevention of primordial and monolithic qualities of national belonging. The real victims are thereby those who are not allowed to enjoy the sense of completeness, communion, and fraternity that they ‘deserve’. Such a definite yearning for mastery, certainty, and legibility is, however, doomed to be counter-productive, in the sense of always failing to meet and fulfil this desire. As Esposito has maintained,
the more anxious we are to arrive at ourselves, the more we are gripped and hollowed out by our own distance from ourselves, by an emptiness that follows us and goes before us until it ends up becoming one with our own movement. (Esposito, 2011: 84)

This is an apt depiction and diagnosis of what many far-right populist leaders and supporters are today, dangerously, caught up in. The far-right populist mind and its emotional governance is bound to an ever-intensifying process ‘to fill or cover the subject’s lack’ – which, however, will only result in ‘[distancing] the subject further from the possibility of accurately reading its desire’ (Ruti, 2009: 90). As a political project, it promises to be ‘capable of satisfying desire’, while what it actually does is to embrace and encircle a maxim of ‘more desire, greater desire!’ (see Fink, 1995: 90).

The role of desire in fantasy narratives around Covid-19 can be illustrated through a number of illiberal responses to the pandemic, such as President Duterte’s ‘shoot to kill’ order in the Philippines for anyone violating the Covid-19 quarantine, and the emergency powers bill introduced by Prime Minister Orbán in Hungary with few limits in scope and duration. Crackdown on the media or other government opponents also illustrates how crises narratives of the pandemic are proving useful for closing down the public sphere while also imposing restrictions in regard to the body politic, such as the Polish government’s restrictions of abortion and sex education. Similarly, the Turkish populist government under President Erdogan has with its targeted lockdown used the pandemic to continue conflicts with the media, dissenters, and opposition politicians. Perhaps the harshest lockdown occurred in India, when Prime Minister Modi, in March 2020, with only 4 hours’ notice restricted all travel, leaving India’s numerous internal migrant workers trapped in urban areas without any easy way to return to their home villages (Meyer, 2020). This can be contrasted with a number of far-right populist leaders who are currently not in power, for example, Le Pen in France, Åkesson in Sweden, and Wilders in the Netherlands, who have all blamed their governments for not taking the virus seriously enough, working the crisis into their political messaging in which the virus has been framed as another foreign intruder from which establishment politicians have failed to keep people safe. All of these examples testify to how attempts to provide closure when it comes to essentialised group distinctions foremost results in what Appadurai (2006) has referred to as a ‘fear of small numbers’. That is, the emotional governance of far-right populism is principally oriented towards naming groups and individuals to be feared, rather than towards an acceptance of anxiety as an insurmountable and necessary feature of subject-formation.

If we turn our attention to the connections between far-right leaders and their followers, Leeb (2018b: 63) argues that a core aspect of this bond is found in people’s failure to ‘live up to their ego ideal’, and especially to the ‘internalized standards of liberal capitalist society, that is economic success’. According to Leeb (2018b: 63), this means that we should not regard those who express support for far-right leaders to be ‘[identifying] with them’ – instead, what they have done is to ‘[introject] the leader into themselves, which means that they have replaced their ego ideal with the leader’. This reasoning – which implies that we should attribute a fundamental loss of self to followers and supporters of the far right – is reminiscent of how Marcuse (1956: 16), in Eros and Civilization, wrote that ‘the unfree individual introjects his masters and their commands into his own mental apparatus’. The introjection that Leeb associates with far-right populism is hence not only a product of individual failures to meet expectations on the job market or relating to economic success and well-being. It is a consequence of a wider alienation – both as an intrinsic condition of subjectivity (Fink, 1995: 52) and as a ubiquitous dynamic of late
capitalism (Harvey, 2018: 140). The lasting legacies of empire and colonialism, in parallel, create a system of misrecognition that repeatedly acts as a trigger of neurosis, characterised by racism and epistemic, psychological, and physical types of oppression (Fuss, 1994).

In India, for instance, we find how the imbrication of Hindu nationalist imaginings and Brahminical conceptions of caste hierarchies and their continued relevance and salience result in a corresponding reification of ‘tradition’ in relation to gender roles, occupations, and ideas of purity and pollution. Hindu nationalism – by clearly identifying and projecting unwanted traits of the self onto the (internal or external) other – has been and continues to be successful in its attempts to build majoritarian religious nationalism (Adeney, 2015). Despite evident signs of increased intolerance towards minorities and clearly diminished possibilities to conceive of political community in an inclusive sense, the Modi-led government, at present, provides a cohesive narrative to a masculine state that is able to assert itself both internally and externally. This was particularly noticeable at the time of the initial outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the Muslim group Tablighi Jamaat was blamed for having introduced the virus into the Indian body politic, making all Muslims appear as potential carriers of the virus and therefore shunned and ostracised (Apoorvanand, 2020).

We might, in light of the above, describe the far-right populist mind as entirely ‘overrun by the desire of the big Other’ (see Ruti, 2015: 129), which makes it imperative to attend to ‘the ways in which emotions partake in relations of power, sometimes to the point where individuals can become emotionally attached to regimes of power that disadvantage or even hurt them’ (D’Aoust, 2014: 271). This does not merely signal introjection and a loss of self that originate in the behaviour of far-right leaders. The emotional attachment, to the contrary, largely stems from how ‘[p]eople acting in concert develop shared repertoires of emotion’ (Ross, 2014: 1). Such mutual emotions principally develop through ‘lived social interactions’ (Ross, 2014: 8) that take place in everyday settings. What we see in the case of far-right populism is how emotions of anger, humiliation, and resentment are both ‘intimate, private, and subjectively vivid [and] transsubjective properties of the social world’ (see Ross, 2014: 21f). Identification or subjectivity is in this sense not foremost a private and cognisant matter – it is embedded in wider circulations of emotions, and it is collectively felt and experienced. The question ‘what brings people to the extreme right?’ is consequently in need of an answer that takes more than ‘ideals, beliefs’, ‘discontent’, and ‘the inability to say no’ into account (cf. Linden and Klandermans, 2007: 200).

This can be exemplified with the QAnon movement’s change in narratives as the pandemic evolved. In the first post on the topic of Covid-19, Q (the person thought to have created the QAnon movement) pushed a conspiracy theory with racial undertones about the virus being a Chinese bioweapon, with its release being a joint venture between China and the Democrats to stop Trump from being re-elected. This was soon followed by right-wing media figures spreading an ‘empty hospital’ conspiracy, downplaying the pandemic and its death toll, launching the #FilmYourHospital hashtag (Argentino, 2020), and picked up in protests around the world. Claims that ‘the flu vaccine’ makes you more susceptible to the Covid-19 virus and that ‘wearing face masks activates your own virus’ mirrored protests organised through Facebook and Instagram, which used banners such as ‘vaccine experiment’, ‘the media is the virus’, ‘doctors are lying to us’, often combined with critical accounts of immigration (Orange, 2021). What united the protests was a collective experience of resentment and anger directed at particular others, especially the establishment.
A key facet of emotional governance, as noted earlier, is how it affords individuals with a sense of what is regarded as appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and under what circumstances emotions of ‘fear, hatred, and contempt toward outsiders’ are deemed acceptable (Crawford, 2014: 536). While it is true that ‘popular emotions’ are to some extent ‘a fiction’ – as they are always marked by ambivalence and an attempt to reduce a ‘messier reality’ into distinct emotive states (Hall and Ross, 2019: 1358; Koschut, 2019: 163; Ross, 2014: 56) – their emotional governance is today, as in the examples above, increasingly framed by a conception of politics as tied to socio-cultural rather than socio-economic issues. In other words, the ‘master frame’ or cleavage in much contemporary debate on state responsibilities, citizenship, and political community consists of a ‘combination of ethno-nationalism and anti-political establishment populism’ (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2019: 597). Within this, there are two core modalities of emotional governance. First, that which Wodak (2021) designates ‘the right-wing populist perpetuum mobile’, through which polyvalent messages are communicated and deliberate racist provocations become marked by ambiguity. Second, there is a sustained effort, on the part of ‘populist actors’, to connect perceived ‘failures in an attempt to homogenise a disparate set of phenomena as symptoms of a wider crisis’ (Moffitt, 2016: 122). Both modalities contribute to the projection and dissemination of an ‘impending doom [which] presents society at a precipice, which if stepped over, cannot be reversed’ (Moffitt, 2016: 123). This is what make far-right portrayals of political community as ultimately grounded in national belonging distinctive and unique.

The risk at present is that the emotional and often violent content of far-right populism is undergoing normalisation and that the passions that it spawns gradually fades as ‘overtly emotional language is replaced with the language of justification, beliefs, and reasons’ (Crawford, 2014: 546). We see evidence of this both in the rhetoric of far-right actors and in the emerging acceptance of their ideas among, in particular, centre-right parties and voters. These are trends that are not confined to specific national contexts (Abrahamsen et al., 2020). Emotions in a globalised world neither have clear boundaries or limits, nor do they reside in or attach themselves to a particular object or sign – they, might thereby, be said to slide across signs and between bodies. Or as Ahmed asserts,

[...]his sliding becomes stuck only temporarily, in the very attachment of a sign to a body, whereby a sign sticks to a body by constituting it as the object of fear, a constitution taken on by the body, encircling it with a fear that becomes its own. (Ahmed, 2004: 127)

In far-right discourse, bodies are both racialised and gendered, and the fantasy of ‘the ordinary’ (conventional masculinity norms, Whiteness, traditional values, etc.) – and the existential crisis that it is allegedly facing – is brought to life. In the far-right weaving of fantasy, ordinary persons are projected ‘as the real victim[s]’ (Ahmed, 2004: 118) – both of macrostructural change and the resultant ‘loss of self’ – and they are interpellated as such.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the far-right appeal in the context of fantasy and emotional governance pays attention to three interrelated phenomena. One is the underlying racial and gendered dynamics at play. Whether we discuss far-right appeal in the Global North or the Global South, we find evidence of misogyny and institutionalised racism ingrained into and constitutive of
such fantasies and emotional governance. Not only is the longing for closure, fulfilment, and a ‘return’ to normalcy inflicted with fantasies about specific ‘others’, but they are equally related to global power relations of neoliberal reform, transformation of political space, and nostalgic narratives of another global, national, or gendered order. As McCourt (2016: 481) observes, ‘agency is not [. . .] an inherent feature of individuals but an effect of the differential distribution of power, knowledge, and recognition in social topographies’. Hence, even while paying attention to subjectivity as it pertains to individuality and a sense of self, this is never separable from the naming of master signifiers, such as the nation, and the emplacement of subjectivity within a symbolic order that is always-already marked by political asymmetries and hierarchies (Lacan, 2000). Or as Fanon (1952) remarks in relation to the legacy of colonial power structures, characterised by racism and by epistemic, psychological, and physical types of oppression, postcolonial desires – such as those of the far-right – continue to be ultimately grounded in the inequalities present in the wider social structures. The appeal of the far-right is thus, as we have argued throughout the article, intimately linked to a circulation of affect that is reflective of and furthers institutionalised and normalised inequalities of everyday power structures.

Second, we can see how fear, hatred, and contempt for others are not only abjective projections inherent in populist discourse, but how such projections dig deep into fantasised pasts by depicting the present as a decisive stage in an unfolding crisis and a future in ruins. It is an ontological insecurity spawned by notions of economic, social, and cultural deprivation and a sensed lack of political influence. As such, it both shapes emotions and is shaped by wider relations of power; it underpins acts to actively define what is regarded as permissible and inappropriate behaviour, while it revolves around a fundamental loss that, in the case of the far right, propels nativist and authoritarian spectacles. The fantasy space created is one of failed identity, which in particular is sustained by disappointments, anger, frustration, and anxiety. Hence, while the emotional governance of far-right populist discourse might be able to momentarily overwrite and blind its followers to the shortcomings of viewing the world in terms of unity, homogeneity, and predictability, it always remains a fleeting and evasive enactment of self-sameness and totality. It would, however, be faulty to take comfort in this, since this is exactly what impels and undergirds the more violent and desperate expressions of far-right populism.

Third, we need to recognise how far-right fantasies are circulated through social media and how this circulation normalises behaviours and attitudes that previously would not have been considered acceptable beyond digital settings. Misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories flourish in situations of societal distress produced by the kind of political transformations that are analysed in this article. That is, a disposition towards conspiracy theorising is conjoined with feelings of alienation, powerlessness, hostility, and being disadvantaged, but it is also closely connected to a (real or imagined) loss of power in relation to other ‘less deserving’ societal groups. The fantasmatic object that Lacan (2000) writes of – the imagination of superior or inferior others – and the promise to keep it in check and correct it are what allow far-right populist leaders to envisage absolute authority in relation to their followers and for their followers to commit to fantasies of themselves and social and cultural others as distinct yet homogeneous wholes.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Ted Svensson’s work on this article was funded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), grant no. 2016-02256.
Notes

1. The term ‘far-right’ is used to refer to people, groups, movements, parties, and politics on the far right of the political spectrum. Alternative terms used in the literature are ‘extreme right’, ‘radical right’, ‘neo-nationalism’, and ‘nationalist populism’, among others.

2. Although a focus on similarities may run the risk of overly unifying a range of contextual differences and nuances in terms of far-right ideology and the reasons behind its appeal, it is concurrently a necessary emphasis if we wish to explore and scrutinise the many commonalities and shared traits that exist across global, national, and local settings.

3. This section is intentionally brief as much globalisation literature has dealt with such structural change and its consequences at length during the last 20 years or so (see, for example, Bauman, 2001; Dicken, 2015; Edkins and Zahfuss, 2019; Kinnvall and Neshbitt-Larking, 2011; Scholte, 2000).

4. In the psychoanalytical literature, phantasy is often used to refer to instinctual, unconscious drives, while fantasy is viewed more as an imagined reality that anyone can create. Here, we use the term fantasy to refer to both of these, thus including elements of the deeper unconscious phantasies.

References

Abrahamsen R, Drolet J-F, Gheciu A, et al. (2020) Confronting the international political sociology of the new right. International Political Sociology 14(1): 94–107.

Adeney K (2015) A move to majoritarian nationalism? Challenges of representation in South Asia. Representation 51(1): 7–21.

Agius C, Bergman Rosamond A and Kinnvall C (2020) Populism, ontological insecurity and gendered nationalism: Masculinity, climate denial and Covid-19. Politics, Religion and Ideology 21(4): 432–450.

Ahmed S (2004) Affective economies. Social Text 79 22(2): 117–139.

Ahmed S (2014) The Cultural Politics of Emotion, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Allen A (2020) Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis. New York: Columbia University Press.

Anshelm J and Hultman M (2014) A green fatwa? Climate change as a threat to the masculinity of industrial modernity. NORMA: International Journal of Masculinity Studies 9(2): 84–96.

Apoorvanand (2020) How the coronavirus outbreak in India was blamed on Muslims. Aljazeera, 18 April. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/4/18/how-the-coronavirus-outbreak-in-india-was-blamed-on-muslims (accessed 5 June 2021).

Appadurai A (2006) Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Argentino M-A (2020) QAnon conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic are a public health threat. The Conversation, 8 April. Available at: https://theconversation.com/qanon-conspiracy-theories-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-are-a-public-health-threat-135515 (accessed 15 May 2021).

Bäck EA, Bäck H and Knapton HM (2015) Group belongingness and collective action: Effects of need to belong and rejection sensitivity on willingness to participate in protest activities. Scandinavian Journal of Psychology 56(5): 537–544.

Browning CS (2018) Brexit, existential anxiety and ontological (in)security. European Security 27(3): 336–355.

Browning CS (2019) Brexit populism and fantasies of fulfilment. Cambridge Review of International Affairs 32(3): 3222–3244.
Burgess PJ (2017) For want of not: Lacan’s conception of anxiety. In: Eklundh E, Zevnik A and Guittet E-P (eds) Politics of Anxiety. London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 17–36.

Chernobrov D (2016) Ontological security and public (mis)recognition of international crises: Uncertainty, political imagining, and the self. Political Psychology 37(5): 581–596.

Crawford NC (2014) Institutionalizing passion in world politics: Fear and empathy. International Theory 6(3): 535–557.

Daggett C (2018) Petro-masculinity: Fossil fuels and authoritarian desire. Millennium 47(1): 25–44.

D’Aoust A-M (2014) Ties that bind? Engaging emotions, governmentality and neoliberalism: Introduction to the special issue. Global Society 28(3): 267–276.

Deccan Chronicle (2021) Conspiracy theories thriving online accuse Bill Gates of starting the virus outbreak, 18 May. Available at: https://www.deccanchronicle.com/technology/in-other-news/180520/conspiracy-theories-thriving-online-accuse-bill-gates-of-starting-the.html (accessed 15 August 2021).

Della Sala V (2018) Narrating Europe: The EU’s ontological security dilemma. European Security 27(3): 266–279.

Deutsche Welle (2020) What impact is hate speech having on climate activism around the world. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/what-impact-is-hate-speech-having-on-climate-activism-around-the-world/a-55420930 (accessed 4 February 2022).

Dicken P (2015) Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy, 7th edn. London: SAGE Publishing.

Doerr N (2017) Bridging language barriers, bonding against immigrants: A visual case study of transnational network publics created by far-right activists in Europe. Discourse & Society 28(1): 3–23.

Dubey J (2020) Mens ‘lockdown’ anxiety about creeping feminism could trigger a painful tsunami of reform. Available at: https://feminisminindia.com/2020/03/25/mens-lockdown-anxiety-creeping-feminism-trigger-reform/ (accessed 30 August 2021).

Eberle J (2019) Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression: Fantasy as a factor in international politics. Journal of International Relations and Development 22(1): 243–268.

Edkins J and Zehfuss M (eds) (2019) Global Politics: A New Introduction, 3rd edn. London: Routledge.

Ejdus F (2018) Critical situations, fundamental questions and ontological insecurity in world politics. Journal of International Relations and Development 21(4): 883–908.

Ejdus F (2019) Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia’s Anxiety Over Kosovo’s Secession. London: Palgrave.

Elgenius C and Rydgren J (2019) Frames of Nostalgia and belonging: The resurgence of ethno-nationalism in Sweden. European Societies 21(4): 583–602.

Epstein C (2011) Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics. European Journal of International Relations 17(2): 327–350.

Esposito R (2011) Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life. Cambridge: Polity.

Fink B (1995) The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fuss D (1994) Interior colonies: Frantz Fanon and the politics of identification. Diacritics 24(2–3): 20–42.

Gaudefroy V and Lindaman D (2021) Donald Trump’s ‘Chinese virus’: The politics of ‘naming’. The Conversation. Available at: https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796 (accessed 10 July 2021).

Giddens A (1991) Modernity and Self-identity. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hall TH and Ross AAG (2019) Rethinking affective experience and popular emotion: World War I and the construction of group emotion in international relations. Political Psychology 40(6): 1357–1372.

Harvey D (2018) Universal alienation. Journal for Cultural Research 22(2): 137–150.

Helbing D, Frey BS, Gigerenzer G, et al. (2019) Will democracy survive big data and artificial intelligence? In: Helbing D (ed.) Towards Digital Enlightenment: Essays on the Dark and Light Sides of the Digital Revolution. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 73–98.

Hochschild AR (2018) Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right. New York: The New Press.

Homolar A and Löfflmann G (2021) Populism and the affective politics of humiliation narratives. Global Studies Quarterly 1(1): 1–11.

Homolar A and Scholz R (2019) The power of Trump-speak: Populist crisis narratives and ontological security. Cambridge Review of International Affairs 32(3): 344–364.

IOM UN Migration (2020) Covid-19 analytical snapshot #19: Misinformation on migration and migrants, 20 April. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_19_-_misinformation.pdf (accessed 10 May 2021).
Jay S, Batruch A, Jetten J, et al. (2019) Economic inequality and the rise of far-right populism: A social psychological analysis. Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology 29(5): 418–428.

Justino P and Martorano B (2020) Populism in Brazil: How liberalization and austerity led to the rise of Lula and Bolsonaro. The Conversation, 30 September. Available at: https://theconversation.com/populism-in-brazil-how-liberalisation-and-austerity-led-to-the-rise-of-lula-and-bolsonaro-146780 (accessed 10 May 2021).

Kimmel M (2018) Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get into – And Out of – Violent Extremism. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Kinnvall C (2004) Globalization and religious nationalism: The search for ontological security. Political Psychology 25(4): 741–767.

Kinnvall C (2018) Ontological insecurities and postcolonial imaginaries: The emotional appeal of populism. Humanity and Society 42(4): 1–21.

Kinnvall C (2019) Populism, ontological insecurity and Hindutva: Modi and the masculinization of Indian Politics. Cambridge Review of International Affairs 32(3): 283–302.

Kinnvall C and Nesbitt-Larking P (2011) The Political Psychology of Globalization: Muslims in the West. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kisić Merino P, Capelos T and Kinnvall C (2021) Getting inside ‘the head’ of the far right: Political context and socio-psychological responses. In: Ashe SD, Busher J, Macklin G, et al. (eds) Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice. London: Routledge, pp.74–91.

Klepke M (2020) Bevare oss för den dagen då SD ska rädda oss från pandemin. Arbetet, 19 March. Available at: https://arbetet.se/2020/03/19/bevara-oss-for-den-dagen-da-sd-ska-radda-oss-ur-en-pandemi/ (accessed 5 June 2021).

Koschut S (2019) Can the bereaved speak? Emotional governance and the contested meanings of grief after the Berlin terror attack. Journal of International Political Theory 15(2): 148–166.

Lacan J (1988) The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II. The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1934-1935. New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (2000) The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses. Edited by J.A. Miller. Kent: W. Norton.

Leeb C (2018a) Mystified consciousness: Rethinking the rise of the far right with Marx and Lacan. Open Cultural Studies 2(1): 236–248.

Leeb C (2018b) Mass hypnozes: The rise of the far right from an Adornian and Freudian perspective. Berlin Journal of Critical Theory 2(3): 59–81.

Linden A and Klandermans B (2007) Revolutionaries, wanderers, converts, and compliants: Life histories of extreme right activists. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 36(2): 184–201.

McCourt DM (2016) Practice theory and relationalism as the new constructivism. International Studies Quarterly 60(3): 475–485.

McGowan M (2021) Where ‘freedom’ meets the far right: The hate messages infiltrating Australian anti-lockdown protests, 25 March. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/26/where-freedom-meets-the-far-right-the-hate-messages-infiltrating-australian-anti-lockdown-protests (accessed 10 May 2021).

Malpas S (1996) ‘History balancing the scales’: Time and trauma in psychoanalysis. Time & Society 5(3): 301–317.

Marcuse H (1956) Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Meyer B (2020) Pandemic populism: An analysis of populist leaders’ responses to Covid 19. Global Challenges, 17 August. Accessed at: https://institute.global/policy/pandemic-populism-analysis-populist-leaders-responses-covid19 (accessed 19 January 2021).

Mitzen J (2006) Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma. European Journal of International Relations 12(3): 341–370.

Moffitt B (2016) The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Mudde C (2019) The Far Right Today. Cambridge: Polity.

Müller J-W (2016) What Is Populism? Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nicholas L and Agius C (2018) The Persistence of Global Masculinism: Discourse, Gender and Neo-colonial Re-articulations of Violence. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Noack R (2020) Group at ‘epicenter’ of German coronavirus protests placed under state surveillance as Covid-19 deaths mount. The Washington Post, 9 December. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/12/09/germany-coronavirus-protests-radicalization-surveillance/ (accessed 25 January 2021).
Norris P and Inglehart R (2019) Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Orange R (2021) Why Sweden had an anti-lockdown protest without having a lockdown. The Local, 8 March. Available at: https://www.thelocal.se/20210308/explainer-why-sweden-had-an-anti-lockdown-protest-without-having-a-lockdown/ (accessed 15 August 2021).

Rana S (2020) COVID-19’s gendered fault lines and their implications for international law. ANU College of Law, 24 June. Available at: https://law.anu.edu.au/research/essay/covid-19-and-international-law/covid-19%E2%80%99s-gendered-fault-lines-and-their-implications (accessed 10 May 2021).

Richards B (2018) Psychological underpinnings of post-truth politics. International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics 14(3): 401–406.

Robertson C (2020) Coronavirus: Nine times Jair Bolsonaro dismissed the severity of COVID-19, Sky News, 7 July 2020. Available at: https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-nine-times-jair-bolsonaro-dismissed-the-severity-of-covid-19-12023297 (accessed 5 June 2021).

Rodrik D (2019) Many forms of populism. VoxEU, 29 October. Available at: https://voxeu.org/article/many-forms-populism

Rogers JB and Zevnik A (2017) The symptoms of the political unconscious: Introduction to the special issue. Political Psychology 38(4): 581–589.

Ross AAG (2014) Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Rossi N (2017) The politics of anxiety and the rise of far-right parties in Europe. In: Eklundh E, Zevnik A and Guittet E-P (eds) Politics of Anxiety. London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp.123–140.

Ruti M (2009) A World of Fragile Things: Psychoanalysis and the Art of Living. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Ruti M (2015) Between Levinas and Lacan: Self, Other, Ethics. New York: Bloomsbury.

Sass LA (2015) Lacan: The mind of the modernist. Continental Philosophy Review 48(4): 409–443.

Schäfer A (2021) Cultural backlash? How (not) to explain the rise of authoritarian populism. British Journal of Political Science. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123421000363.

Scholte JA (2000) Globalization: A Critical Introduction. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

SD (2020) Vård för Utlänningar. Available at: https://sd.se/our-politics/vard-for-utlanningar/ (accessed 4 February 2022).

Seshadri-Crooks K (2000) Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race. New York: Routledge.

Solomon T (2015) The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Solomon T (2017) Rethinking productive power through emotion. International Studies Review 19(3): 481–508.

Stavrakakis Y (1999) Lacan and the Political. London: Routledge.

Steele BJ (2008) Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR State. London: Routledge.

Steele BJ and Delehanty WK (2009) Engaging the narrative in ontological (in)security theory. Cambridge Review of International Affairs 22(3): 523–540.

Subotic J (2018) Political memory, ontological security, and holocaust remembrance in post-communist Europe. European Security 27(3): 296–313.

The Japan Times (2021) These are the rioters who stormed the capitol, 9 January. Available at: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/01/09/world/politics-diplomacy-world/washington-capitol-rioters/ (accessed 5 June 2021).

Webster DM and Kruglanski AW (1994) Individual differences in need for cognitive closure. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 67(6): 1049–1062.

Wilkinson W (2019) The density divide: Urbanization, polarization, and populist backlash. Niskanen Center Research Paper. Available at: https://www.niskanencenter.org/the-density-divide-urbanization-polarization-and-populist-backlash/ (accessed 5 June 2021).

Williams KD (2007) Ostracism. Annual Review of Psychology 58: 425–452.

Wodak R (2015) The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean. London: SAGE Publishing.

Wodak R (2021) The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-right Discourse, 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publishing.

Žižek S (2006) The Parallax View. London: MIT Press.