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### Abstract

The construction of radical right populist resistance around metaphors of masculinity at the beginning of the 21st century is a little researched area. This article accounts for the discursive redefinitions of Swedishness enabled by conceptual metaphors in order to accommodate centrally located heterosexist masculinities at the intersection of gender, class, and 'race', as heralded by the main Swedish radical right populist party, the Sweden Democrats (SD). The analysis of articles published by the SD leader in *SD-Kuriren*, the party's main media outlet, focuses on a well defined timeframe in the recent history of radical right populism in Sweden, from Swedish Lutheran Church elections in 2005, through Swedish Parliamentary elections in 2006, up to the church elections in 2009 and the subsequent Parliamentary elections the following year. The staunchly restrictive definition of the family – examined from the point of view of the Lakoffian 'nation is a family' conceptual metaphor – appears as the heteronormative domain of the Swedish male, and bans the existence of family narratives that include ethnically diverse or sexually different Others. I maintain that in the Swedish case, the nation metaphor accommodates for the contesting 'conservative son' who attempts to replace the mismanaging father of the national family.

### Key words

Radical right populist masculinities, Swedish purity, conceptual metaphors, heteronormative family

# Constructing radical right populist resistance: metaphors of heterosexist masculinities and the family question in Sweden

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When discussing populism and its radical right manifestations in Sweden, most scholarship has generally dismissed the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, henceforth SD) as an unsuccessful exception in the European context because it had previously gained less than the 4% threshold for election in the Swedish Parliament (Rydgren 2003, Widfeldt 2000). However, the 2005 election to party leadership of Jimmie Åkesson marked the party's departure from its extreme-right roots and earlier overt Nazi sympathies in its effort to achieve parliamentary representation (Mattsson 2009, Rydgren 2006). Moreover, in the 2010 elections SD was voted into the Swedish Parliament, with 5.7% of the popular support. Arguably, what the SD and other radical right populist parties have in common is an 'approach that distorts and exaggerates dormant notions of insecurity about national identity' (Norocel 2009, 242). The SD's position to the right is apparent especially with regard to social and cultural issues. Like other radical right populist parties the SD not only has a restrictive approach to immigration and citizenship but also 'a staunchly conservative or even authoritarian outlook on issues such as law and order (tougher punishment) and the family (advocating traditional gender roles and renouncing feminism)' (Rydgren 2006, 11). These parties also display a strong 'welfare chauvinism' (Mudde 2007, Rydgren 2006), blaming the increasing constraints of the welfare state, such as lower pensions, increased social costs and long queues for medical services, on the costs of immigration. Thus, the egalitarianism promoted by such parties is one that enforces uniformity and most often 'intersects with experiences of status and economic insecurity to fuel hostility towards non-majority group immigration, towards programs that support multiculturalism, [...] towards gays and lesbians' (Laycock 2005, 134). In short, racism, misogyny and homophobia underpin the ideals of national purity of radical right populism.

Consequently, I examine below how the SD's leader posits radical right populist resistance in terms of masculinity metaphors. The aim is to account for the genealogical articulations of Swedishness, which accommodate centrally located heteronormative masculinities at the intersection of gender, class, and 'race'. This is a response to appeals for a

more critical analysis of populism (Mulinari and Neergaard 2010), particularly of masculinities that sustain such discourses across Europe (Geden 2005, Norocel 2009).

The article analyses Åkesson's editorials, interviews and other interventions that were published between 2005 and 2009 in the party newspaper *SD-Kuriren* (hereafter *SD-K*). I argue that *SD-K* has been one of the very few mediums available to Åkesson to explain and defend the socio-political construct envisioned by the SD. Furthermore, the selected pieces allow for a detailed analysis of the dominant discourse that underpins radical right masculinities (Geden 2005, 399). The choice is also motivated by Åkesson's declared intention to lead a more offensive politics, and most importantly to create a new image for the SD that will eventually lead to its accession to the Swedish Parliament (Mattsson 2009, 23). In all there were 88 editorials and articles, totalling an approximately 33,400-word corpus of political language. The aforesaid timeframe accounts for the party's rise to prominence: from 2005 Swedish Lutheran Church elections<sup>1</sup> when the SD pooled some 1.7% of the vote, through the Parliamentary elections of 2006 where the SD gained 2.9% of the vote, up to the 2009 church elections, in which the SD received 2.8%, and their preparations for the 2010 Parliamentary elections. The Swedish Lutheran Church elections were of particular importance for the SD, both ideologically and strategically. Ideologically, the SD positioned itself among the Christian-conservative political actors; strategically, the SD tested its political ambitions in between the parliamentary electoral cycles (Mattson 2009, 35).

The problematisation of radical right populism and masculinities in the Swedish context is of particular interest as Sweden is positioned as both an almost archetypal version of the welfare state and a 'progressive "acme"' in terms of its gender equality regime (Eriksson et al. 2008, 49) witnessing the active interrogation of heteronormativity and masculinities (see Eduards 2007, Johansson 2005). I argue that Åkesson's discourse constructs a particular understanding of the conceptual metaphor that postulates the nation as an extended family (Cienki 2004, 2005, Lakoff 1995, 1996). In its radical right populist interpretation the 'nation is a family' envisions a hierarchical structuring of various family members as dependants of a strong male figure, whilst left-leaning political forces generally emphasize the paternal figure as a nurturing presence at the head of the family (Norocel 2010, 708). In Åkesson's discourse the strong male figure is embodied in what I consider the 'conservative son', a metaphor that crystallizes a certain typology of political leadership that evidences the steadfast resistance to a hegemonic figure and concomitantly underlines the submission of followers to a discretionary patriarchal masculine ideal. The aforementioned metaphor is antithetically positioned to that of the 'nurturant father', whom Åkesson accuses of maladministering the national family fortune.

An examination of conceptual metaphors nevertheless raises the issue of methodological apparatus. The metaphorical clusters – the system of conceptual metaphors and their subsequent discursive articulations that depart from a common condition or image to transmit a specific experience or idea – described above are rather 'polar extremes',

which vary in time and from one individual to another, rendering them to categories with fluid boundaries (Cienki 2005, 304, Norocel 2010, 717–718). The present study is consequently restricted to monitoring the tenets of one metaphorical cluster across time, therefore fleshing out a *genealogy* of the aforesaid metaphors. Genealogy is understood here not as a quest for origins, nor a linear development, but rather as an investigation of the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory processes through which power has made truth intelligible in the past (see Foucault 1977, 2000). Hence such a genealogy unveils the shifts and the eventual repositioning that accommodate the centrality of heteronormative masculinities at work in Swedish radical right populism.

Thus, the article continues with a discussion of heteronormativity, highlighting its connections to conceptual metaphors of masculinity in radical right populism. Then, Åkesson's own interpretation of the Swedish national construct is investigated, revealing the emphasis put on traditional Christian values. Subsequently, the research material is analysed in depth, evidencing Åkesson's use of the family metaphor to depict the SD as the political incarnation of a conceptual metaphor of contesting conservative masculinity. This sheds light on the metaphorical articulations of masculinity, family and heteronormativity and the eventual changes across time. The concluding part provides an overview of the findings and suggests possible extrapolations for studying masculinities in radical right populist discourses with the aid of conceptual metaphors.

### Conceptual metaphors of masculinity and radical right populism

Most scholarship dealing with radical right populism in Europe brushes aside the gender aspect, only acknowledging the overwhelming presence of men amongst party members and leadership (see Laycock 2005, Mudde 2007, Rydgren 2006, Widfeldt 2000). The main tenets of populism – the opposition between a homogenous people and allegedly corrupted elites, and the idea of popular sovereignty entrusted to a charismatic leader – are rarely examined from a gender perspective. I opt for a gender-aware critical reading, thus acknowledging that masculinity operates as implicit shorthand for processes of explanatory and normative judgment (Carver 2004). In so doing I agree that the abstraction of a 'normal' human individual is itself a maker for exclusion and subordination of subjects that differ in terms of gender, sexuality, 'race', class, religion and other 'supposed signs of "difference" and "less than human" status' (Carver 2008, 70).

Importantly, such a take on gender imposes a male identity on people with a male body. Gender thus presented as an immutable biological essence is cognate to physicality, identity, and authority. I acknowledge, nonetheless, that masculinity can be performed – the ongoing project of constantly redefining and breaking the boundaries of identity – by both men and women. Hence scholars researched men and masculinities, but also 'female masculinities' or 'masculinities without men' (see Butler 1999, Halberstam 1998,

Noble 2003). Nonetheless, the aforesaid masculine ‘normalcy’ of men is underpinned by notions of heterosexuality, physical and mental prowess, and courage and displayed leadership skills (Jackson 2006, 114–115). However, heterosexuality is not unproblematic, a consequence of it not being monolithic. Normative heterosexuality creates a hierarchical distinction between heterosexual and homosexual men; it also erects discrete hierarchies among heterosexuals (Carver 2004, Connell 2005), and thus elaborates ‘hegemonic and subordinate forms of heterosexuality’ (Seidman 2005, 40). In other words, there are various ways to portray good citizenship among heterosexuals, and what is conspicuously valorized as the norm is underpinned by traditional gender arrangements and lifelong monogamous relationships (Seidman 2005, 59–60). This serves as foundation for asymmetrical power relations between men and women and among men themselves, which is reflected into the social construction of various masculinities (Collinson and Hearn 2005, Nordberg 2001). From this point of view, the staunchly restrictive definition of family as an exclusive domain of the Swedish male has developed across time to proscribe the existence of family narratives including ethnically diverse or sexually different Others.

A means most fertile for naturalizing such claims of masculine superiority is through the metaphors employed to give substance to radical right populist discourses. Metaphors are understood here as more than mere rhetorical ornaments and able to transgress the domain of language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Importantly, metaphors appear to be more effectively used in politics by representatives of extremist parties, simplifying complicated policy proposals into familiar concepts (Norocel 2010, 707, Vertessen and De Landtsheer 2008, 274–275). In this context, the ‘nation is a family’ metaphor is widely employed across societies, though its content is open to interpretation because of the fluid definition of ‘family’. It structures society along biological and hierarchical lines, with the parent as head of state and decision-maker; the parent knows best and other family members must obey ‘his’ judgment and state matters are to be taken care of in a similar fashion; the family structuring is specific and exclusive, providing a common purpose (Honohan 2008, Lakoff 1995, Norocel 2010).

### The Swedish *Folkhem* – the ‘nation is a family’ based on traditional Christian values

In Sweden this metaphor was further anchored within the national boundaries. In other words it was invested with a specific location, thus the *Folkhem* – ‘the home of the Swedish people’. It implied that women were to assume their roles of caregivers and mothers of the national home; men were to set aside political interests and class divisions, defend women; and together to build the Swedish nation (Eduards 2007, 41–42). In Åkesson’s discourses the ‘nation is a family’ invested with conservative attributes, and the structuring concept of *Folkhem* is reclaimed from the political establishment. Preparing for the

2005 Lutheran Church of Sweden elections, Åkesson exploited the recent moves to more clearly decouple the secularized Swedish state from the church. The ‘church of our fathers’, as he called it, was an anchoring point in these ‘tumultuous insecure times’. He decried the attempts of ‘socialists and liberals’, thus both the Swedish Social Democrats (*Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti*, S) in opposition and the governing bourgeois alliance of parties, to transform it ‘beyond recognition’ and turn Christian Lutheranism into something as ‘foreign’ as Islam or Scientology. These actions were assimilated to an act of aggression against the very core of the Swedish nation:

I am obviously deeply concerned that the church of our fathers suddenly becomes a religious community among all others and now it can be equated with Islam or Scientologists. In these tumultuous and insecure times, we need a fixed point in life to fall back on. Here the Swedish Church has an important role to play. [It] is about taking back the church from the socialists and liberals, who are transforming it beyond recognition. (Åkesson. Nu ska vi upp till bevis, *SD-K* 2005 64, 2)<sup>2</sup>

This may be a surprising attitude, bearing in mind that Sweden ranks high among the most secularized societies (Rydgren 2006). Concomitantly, comparing Islam to an arguably controversial sect, Åkesson elaborated a hierarchy of religious worthiness crowned by Swedish Lutheranism, symbolically anchoring the ‘nation is a family’ in a long Christian tradition. However, he continued to use Christianity as a means to counter the alleged danger posited by Islam. Barely a year later Åkesson further warned of the dangers of introducing non-Christian holidays, arguing that:

The Christian tradition is an inalienable part of the Swedish culture and identity and those who intend to live here permanently may simply accept it. That every ethnic and religious group must have their own work-free holidays falls on its own absurdity and I see no reason why the Muslims should be treated differently. [...] We demand that the holidays associated with religious ceremonies must be limited to traditional, Christian ceremonies. (Åkesson. SD tar strid mot islamiserade lov dagar, *SD-K* 2006 70, 10)

In this context, Åkesson presented himself and the SD as defenders of Swedishness, conflated to the protection of Christianity against other religions, mainly Islam, and hence assumed a position of hegemonic masculinity ‘constituted as reason, order, and control’ (Peterson 1999, 40) denying intelligibility to accommodation policies towards religious minorities in Sweden on the grounds that such a move ‘falls on its own absurdity’. This assumed ability to discern truth from fallacy was further enforced by his position on Swedish abortion policy. Rather than demanding a total ban, Åkesson concentrated on



the relative number of such medical procedures arguing that a lack of control would send ‘wrong signals’ and even ‘stimulate an increase in the numbers of Swedish abortions’ (Åkesson. *Sd vill stoppa abortturismen*, *SD-K* 2007 72, 12). He subsequently focused on Swedish women’s bodies, depicting immigrant Others as sexual predators raping Swedish women (Åkesson. *Sd kräver åtgärder mot svenskfientlighet*, *SD-K* 2008 78, 8, *Tala klarspråk om våldtäkterna!*, *SD-K* 2009 81, 9). His preoccupation with controlling women’s bodies and their ‘duty’ to reproduce only the Swedish nation assigned women and womanliness to a mandatory heteronormative sexuality and domesticity (Jackson 2006, 114, Mulinari and Neergaard 2010, 56–57), thus containing them to a position of mere objects of masculine heterosexual competition and reward as wives and mothers of their offspring. In here, I argue, the reference to ‘naturalness’ and even women’s ‘duty’ to reproduce the Swedish family sets the stage for the national exclusionary project.

Indeed, Åkesson painstakingly delimited the boundaries of the national family, in the sense that he assigned only Swedish people with the task of procreation. The heteronormative ideal of Swedes (re)producing Swedishness was thus highly prized, in opposition to the immigrant Other, conflated to Islam and undesirable high reproduction rates. This becomes apparent in Åkesson’s first debate article published in 2009 by *Aftonbladet* – a widely read leftist tabloid – that was later reproduced in *SD-K*:

Thus far, we have nevertheless to admit that Islam has affected Swedish society far more so than the Swedish society has influenced Islam. Mass immigration from Muslim countries, together with the relatively high birth rates in the Muslim community, suggests that this trend will continue unless a change in policy takes place. (Åkesson. *Etablissemangen blundar för farorna med islamiseringen*, *SD-K* 2009 84, 3)

The masculine Others were thus depicted as backward and unable to break free from a dated morality, centred on Sharia law that they brought from ‘Africa and the Middle East’ and which they wanted to force upon native Swedes. If the reproductive Swedish family was the ideal contrasted to the image of a threatening, numerous and overly fertile, hence a heterosexual Muslim Other, homosexuality was avoided completely. The SD’s homophobic attitude is nonetheless well documented by previous research (Mattsson 2009, Mulinari and Neergaard 2010). Although Åkesson’s contributions in *SD-K* underlined the exclusivity of the heterosexual Swedish family, I argue that this may be read as an implicit condemnation of sexualities that do not fit into the normative spectrum. Considering all the above, Åkesson’s usage of the conceptual metaphor entailed that the ‘nation is a family’ based on traditional values: Christianity, ethnical purity and heteronormativity.

At the same time, Åkesson’s anti-establishment attitude articulated a metaphor of masculine resistance, decrying the failings of the ‘nurturant father’, and actively challeng-

ing the latter's position as head of the national family. The 'socialist and liberal' establishment he accused of damaging Sweden's Christian fibre was also held responsible for the permissive policies on abortion and, even more so, too lax legislation with regard to non-European, especially Muslim, immigration into the country. To that end, Åkesson opposed the construction of a contesting conservative masculine metaphor, a shorthand for the SD and its leader.

### Conservative masculinity contesting the nurturant parent

The 'nurturant father' conceptual metaphor has been theorized and researched in connection to its diametrical opposition – the 'strict father' – firstly in the United States (Cienki 2004, 2005, Lakoff 1995, 1996), and more recently in Europe as well (Norocel 2010). These two antagonistic metaphorical clusters rely on the overarching 'nation is a family' conceptual metaphor, but present competing interpretations to the national construct. The metaphor of nurturing parenthood is underpinned by ideas of horizontal family relations (both women and men participate equally in childrearing), and care of dependants, who are protected from external dangers and guided in creating positive relationships to others, and community-building efforts, identifying means to develop their full potential, and finding joy in life (Cienki 2005, 282, Lakoff 1995, 197–198). Researchers claimed that the 'nurturant father' is inherently specific to a political worldview based on the principles of inclusion, distribution, and gender equality; by extrapolation, such a metaphor can arguably be attributed to the S and the red-green leftist coalition in Sweden. Consequently, Åkesson criticized those parties portraying a pathology of the 'nurturant father' and he accused the establishment of hedonism and overprotection (Lakoff 1995, 205). In this context, hedonism is to be understood as the excessive cultivation of happiness as a scope in itself. Overprotection refers to the allegedly unjustifiable protection of groups that neither deserve it, nor have a moral base to claim the parent's protection. Furthermore, Åkesson used the family metaphor to present Swedish radical right populism as the embodiment of a conceptual metaphor of contesting conservative masculinity. The latter was extended over the years along three directions. First, it was used to construct the image of a 'normal' party among others – thus countering the constant accusations of racism and the SD's undesirable Nazi past. Second, it shrouded welfare chauvinism in conservative clothing, reclaiming the legitimacy to represent Christian conservatism from the Swedish Christian Democrats (*Kristdemokraterna*, KD), and the *Folkhem* from the S and 'give it back' to the people. Third, it embodied a steadfast, truthful ideal of masculinity.

In order to present the SD as a noteworthy contender to the 'nurturant father', Åkesson continually emphasized that the SD has reached 'maturity', thus leaving behind a period of alleged adolescent confusion and turbulence – perhaps with reference to its previous Nazi sympathies, and becoming 'a true challenger party' (Åkesson. Ett fantastiskt ut-

gångsläge, *SD-K* 2006 68, 2). In other words, the SD was depicted as a ‘normal’ party, a reliable and acceptable alternative to the ‘other’ parties (Åkesson. Kurvan pekar fortfarande rätt. Sverigedemokraterna på väg mot riksdagen, *SD-K* 2007 72, 1). Indeed, political normalcy proved to be a very sensitive issue for Åkesson, since for quite some time the SD has been successfully isolated behind a *cordon sanitaire* erected by mainstream parties and media (Mulinari and Neergaard 2010, 57–59, Rydgren 2006, 106–108). If in 2005 the SD was virtually sealed off from other parties, in the following years Åkesson has been actively justifying the SD’s existence and defending its normalization attempts by claiming that it represents a long-needed pro-Swedish presence in the national parliament, hence indicating the absence of a political force willing to defend Swedishness (Åkesson. Därför en kampanj om invandringspolitiken!, *SD-K* 2007 74, 1). He concomitantly pointed out, however, that such a stance need not be equated to outright racism, but a sign of a concerned ‘normal’ citizenry:

The SD is a party of and for ordinary people. We want [...] to bring life into the Swedish popular movement for democracy and challenge the political elite’s monopoly position. [...] The SD is a real party, with a holistic solution for Sweden and the Swedes’ well-being. (Åkesson. Bra plankträff borgar för långt hopp, *SD-K* 2005 66, 2)

Another means to consolidate the SD’s claim to normalcy was Åkesson’s emphasis on Christian conservatism as the party’s core value. For instance, in 2009 Åkesson dismissed the KD’s attempts ‘to present themselves as the representatives of conservative values and talk about themselves as “real people”’ as empty rhetoric. In a populist manner, the KD’s leader Göran Hägglund was accused of being a member of the political establishment who unrightfully claimed to be ‘the interpreter of the people’s will’ whereas average Swedes ‘often think as we [the SD] do’. Åkesson charged the KD with moral neglect and betrayal of conservatism: a party that fails to acknowledge the Turkish genocide of Armenians during the First World War ‘is not worth people’s trust!’ (Åkesson. Livliga debatter och uppmärksammade tal, *SD-K* 2009 84, 10). In so doing, Åkesson depicted the SD as the sole ‘normal’ and ‘true’ conservative political force, investing it with the masculine attributes of trustworthiness and righteousness. To further emphasize the distance between rhetoric and reality, in the same piece Åkesson accused the KD of failing to protest together with the SD at a ‘photo exhibition in southern Sweden, which among other things depicted a woman having sex with a horse’ (Åkesson. Livliga debatter och uppmärksammade tal, *SD-K* 2009 84, 10). This criticism emphasized the ‘unnaturalness’ of such depiction, which was part of an exhibition by a lesbian artist that challenged artistic boundaries and sexual taboos. In one move, Åkesson proclaimed the SD’s *de facto* normalcy and noted the KD’s inability to rise to their conservative ideals. Revealing the patriarchally

masculine preoccupation with issues of maintaining purity, keeping humans and non-humans apart, and controlling women's bodies (Carver 2008, Norocel 2009), Åkesson presented the SD as the sole political force that dared to rise against perceived moral decay and to protest against what he considered to be a case of zoophilism. In this light, Åkesson elaborated a metaphor of staunchly conservative masculinity; a metaphor that reinforced the boundaries of male heteronormative normalcy, rejected the questioning of aesthetic constraints, and proclaimed itself as the sole embodiment of masculine conservative righteousness.

However, Åkesson regarded the S as his party's main political adversary. Indeed, the whole metaphorical cluster structured around the conservative man gains conceptual clarity in the case of Åkesson's critique of the S – and its leadership – which was depicted as a lenient and mismanaging 'nurturant father'. It can be argued that the conservatism he conveyed on the SD was a mere disguise for the party's welfare chauvinism. Åkesson demanded vehemently that the S should 'give us back Sweden!' The SD was thus proclaimed to be 'a party for and by ordinary Swedes' and its main political endeavours were made explicit: 'to restore law and order, to safeguard the Swedish welfare model, to restore the society to the community and to allow Sweden to become Sweden again' (Åkesson. Sverige är värt att bevara, *SD-K* 2009 Kampanj, 3).

With the change in the S leadership in 2007, Åkesson criticized the party for what he regarded as the betrayal of social-democratic ideals. If former leader Göran Persson, according to Åkesson, projected 'a false image of traditionalism, rusticity, and nostalgia for the welfare state', the truth was lying bare with the election of Mona Sahlin as his successor. Åkesson warned that the S was now on a path of 'cultural radicalism', 'multi-culturalism', and 'social atomizing' as a result of her election. Sahlin was sharply criticized for her tolerance, which was interpreted by Åkesson as an 'extreme stance on immigration and on integration issues'. Her attempts to question the hegemony of Swedish culture and place it in a multicultural context were labelled 'contempt for the Swedish cultural heritage'. In other words, multi-culturalism, feminism, and post-modern humanism were portrayed as sources of corruption and dissolution of morality, violating the good versus evil simplistic binary (Lakoff 1995, 190, 1996, 170–171). Thus, Åkesson implicitly developed the masculine metaphorical cluster by proscribing such allegedly feminine characteristics as weakness, softness, inclusiveness and passivity (Carver 2008, 71). The immediate effect forecast by Åkesson was an 'exodus' of the S electorate to the SD (Jimmie Åkesson välkomnar Mona Sahlin, *SD-K* 2007 72, 12).

The following year Åkesson tried, however, to dismiss the strategies designed by the S to counter his attacks. Åkesson accused the S of wrongfully labelling the SD as 'anti-working class, misogynistic, anti-cultural and anti-trade-union – to name a few. Substantive arguments, however, are absent.' (Åkesson. Sossarnas nya strategi mot Sverigedemokraterna!, *SD-K* 2008 75, 2) He did not elaborate upon his party's innocence but

rather left the burden of evidence to the S. It is noteworthy that Åkesson's definition of the working class only made reference to workers in the largely unionized, traditionally male-dominated metal and paper industries (Åkesson. *Nöjd, oavsett vilket*, *SD-K* 2008 75, 4). He thus emphasized a stereotypical masculine view of the working class, omitting the diversity of people with such a background – Swedish women in lowly paid positions, and immigrant women and men constrained by precarious temporary contracts. However, a year later Åkesson claimed that the SD was 'the only real threat to a pure left-wing government in 2010' (Åkesson. *Sverigedemokraternas kommunkonferens*, *SD-K* 2009 80, 1–5). In this context, the SD and implicitly the metaphor of masculinity Åkesson assigned to it were generally defined in a negative way, through what the S apparently failed to be, and as such positioning the parties according to a masculine versus feminine heteronormative binary. The metaphoric cluster defining the SD embodied masculine traditionalism, underpinned by staunch criticism of multi-culturalism and cultural relativism, longing for 'social cohesion' understood in terms of supremacy of Swedish patriarchal norms, and reliance on a strict enforcement of law and order. Such masculine attributes are arguably specific to other radical right populist parties as well (Geden 2005, Norocel 2009). In this light, the ability to criticize the political establishment, in other words 'to stand up to evil' was invested by Åkesson with the masculine attributes of strength, conceptualized as 'moral fibre' or as 'a backbone to resist evil' (Lakoff 1995, 184–185) thus involving an aspect of physicality that required a masculine overcoming of fear and resistance to hardships. Such references to masculine steadfastness were further emphasized by Åkesson's declared favourite quote. Taken from the motion picture *Rocky Balboa*, it makes direct reference to masculine resoluteness and commitment to overcome obstacles while striving for victory:

But it ain't how hard you hit; it's about how hard you can get hit, and keep moving forward. How much you can take, and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done. (Rocky Balboa)

The upright and morally conservative masculinity metaphor was further developed by Åkesson when referring to the alleged process of purification of the party's rank and file. According to him, while the other parties 'allow themselves to be represented by fiddlers, violent criminals and extremists' he and the SD can 'beat us on the chest and claim that our sanitation works. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We are better than the others, also in this respect!' (Åkesson. *Sverigedemokraterna firade 20 år*, *SD-K* 2008 75, 10). This aspect was later enforced by Åkesson's commitment to 'sharpened policies against crime' and to an active role on issues of security and safety (*Lördagen: känsloladdat tal av Jimmie Åkesson*, *SD-K* 2008 77, 8–9). Researchers of men and masculinities have argued that such an attitude constructs a hierarchy centred on a civilized masculinity protecting the

submissive dependants from an unruly, barbarian hence inferior competing masculine Other (Carver 2008, 79). In this light, lawlessness and barbarity were depicted as quintessential attributes of masculine Otherness, while native Swedes, and the SD by extension, embodied masculine civility. Furthermore, in 2009 Åkesson decried the solidification of two opposing blocks in Swedish politics, arguing that this would hinder the implementation of original policies, which in turn would lead to an increasing number of disenfranchised citizens. However, he maintained that in the 2010 parliamentary elections the SD's role as potential kingmaker would allow it for more dynamism and ability to alter the mainstream political agenda (Åkesson. MP väljer Stalin, *SD-K* 2009 80, 4). Yet again, the SD was depicted with the masculine ability to discern and pursue innovative paths, and such attributes as dynamism and courage to oppose what Åkesson argued to be a worsening of the Swedish political climate.

### Conclusion: Masculine resistance and radical right populism – (re)defining the heteronormative Swedishness

Åkesson's claims that his party has reached 'maturity', his demarcation from the 'aged' political establishment, and his emphasis on political dynamism indicate, in my interpretation, the elaboration of a metaphorical cluster centred on an ideal of masculinity underpinned by active political participation, youthfulness, and preoccupation with an idealized past, in other words that of the 'conservative son'. In so doing, it departs significantly from the metaphorical cluster of the 'strict father' employed by other European radical right populist parties. This may be interpreted as a strategic choice, as the metaphorical cluster employed by the S has been dominating the Swedish political scene for almost a century. In this context, Åkesson constructed the SD's opposition to the S in terms of opposition to a party entrenched in power positions and allegedly estranged from the common people; the SD was thus invested with the attributes of a youthful, dynamic masculinity. Nonetheless, Åkesson also posited the SD in contrast to the KD, portraying his party as the sole truthful representative of conservative values. In short, in Åkesson's discourse the SD embodies a rebellious, steadfast and heteronormative masculinity, a contender to the sterile political monopoly of the 'socialist and liberal' establishment. In this case, it evidenced the radical right populist potential to be the challenging alternative in the 2010 elections – the 'conservative son' – and not the consecrated option – the 'strict father'.

Perhaps the 'conservative son' metaphor is shown at work most tellingly in Åkesson's articulation of the 2010 election campaign aimed 'to preserve' Sweden and Swedishness (Åkesson. Sverige är värt att bevara, *SD-K* 2009 Kampanj: 3). First, the centrality of the heteronormative family structuring was emphasized. Åkesson argued that the SD would 'guard' children's rights 'to a mother and a father', preserve the marriage institution in its heterosexual conservative form, and secure people a 'dignified old age'. The centrality of

the patriarchal family was further strengthened through Åkesson's appeals to welfare chauvinism apparent in the demand for 'Swedish jobs to Swedish workers', stressing a claimed working class support. These policy areas indicate the SD's commitment to pursue an active role in relation to the 'nation is a family' portrayed as the exclusionary heteronormative field for perpetuating the 'gendered division of labour and male appropriation of women's productive and reproductive capacities' (Jackson 2006, 105). Subsequently, Åkesson promised a 'crackdown in crime' so that to 'greatly strengthen sanctions for serious and repeated crimes and deport all foreigners who commit crimes of this nature' to their supposed homelands. Finally, 'a responsible immigration policy' translated in demands for assimilation of immigrants into the national body and renunciation to multicultural policies. The metaphorical cluster of the 'conservative son' was thus employed to portray the SD in masculine terms, such as steadfast, protective, energetic and robust, in short, a challenger in the 2010 parliamentary elections.

In conclusion, the present article highlighted the consecutive attempts to (re-)define Swedishness made by the SD leader Jimmie Åkesson so that to accommodate a centrally located heterosexual masculinity embodied by the 'conservative son' conceptual metaphor. The staunchly restrictive definition of the family, portrayed as the restrictively heteronormative domain of the Swedish male, was projected on the nation-state to crystallize the 'nation is a family' conceptual metaphor, which proscribed the existence of family narratives including sexually different or ethnically different Others. Perhaps the analysis of radical right narratives of purity that underline a masculine resistance with the help of conceptual metaphors might gain clarity and depth if the analysis is extended to other national contexts, as well as researching their impact on the international arena.

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## Notes

- 1 The Swedish Lutheran Church, to which some 74% of the Swedish population nominally belongs to, was the official state church of Sweden until 1 January 2000. As a reminiscence of its former status, elections are held every four years for all the decision taking structures within the church, at parish, diocese and national level. The electoral system is similar to the one used in parliamentary elections. Candidates represent established political parties, or various non-partisan groups. Church members have the right to vote (must be 16 years or older) and be elected in these structures (18 or older). (cf. <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/>) (07/10/2010).
- 2 The translations from Swedish are the author's if not stated otherwise.



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