

A note on this paper:

This draft paper is part of my doctoral thesis project at University of Gothenburg and co-written together with a colleague of mine, Katharina Kehl. While the thesis in general looks at different public representations of the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) and different ways in which it is 'sold' to the Swedish public, this piece looks specifically at how sexuality and gender are used in making sense of and selling the SAF, and thus, armed violence. We hope to send this paper to a journal soon (potentially to *International Feminist Journal of Politics*) but would really appreciate any comments you might have before then.

Best wishes,
Sanna

'A country to fall in love in' – Gender & sexuality in Swedish defense discourses

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ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming measures adopted by armed forces have gained scholarly attention for the ways in which they contribute to enhance legitimacy for military institutions, perform national identities and order international politics. This article aims to contribute to this research by analysing how gendered and sexualized subjectivities are called upon in Swedish defense discourses. In a recent military information campaign, Sweden is performed as a “progressive” nation-state whose citizens hold values, rights and freedoms considered “extreme in the eyes of others”, thus constructed as in need of protection by the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF). This notion of Swedish ‘progressiveness’ – often represented as equality between people of all sexual orientations and gender identities – is epitomized in the campaign slogan “Sweden, a country to fall in love in” and communicated against the backdrop of a rainbow flag. This paper probes how the myth of a gender exceptional nation works within broader discursive terrains constituting a military institution undergoing large-scale transformations. We argue that constructions of a tolerant and progressive Sweden risks making invisible domestic discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, (re)produce treacherous, single narratives of distant and dangerous Others and, ultimately, enable the ongoing rearmament of the SAF.

KEYWORDS

Gender exceptionalism; Homonationalism; Identity; Military; Sexuality; The Swedish Armed Forces

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INTRODUCTION

In times of war, we are one hundred percent relevant. But when it isn't war: how do we create relevance? Are we simply supposed to support and be useful for society generally? [...] We have a problem. We wish to be relevant here and now – so we made this campaign to underline what we *really* are here for and what we *really* are doing¹.

This statement by a Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) Market Strategist refers to a military information campaign distributed widely to the Swedish public in 2016, amid large-scale transformations and rearmament of the SAF. The campaign called *Thou new, Thou free* – a slight rewrite of the title of the Swedish national anthem – describes Sweden as a “progressive” nation-state whose citizens hold values, rights and freedoms considered “extreme in the eyes of others”². This Swedish exceptionalism, which often is construed as equality between people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, is epitomized in the slogan “Sweden, a country to fall in love in” and communicated against the backdrop of a rainbow flag³.

As previous research shows, configurations of gender and sexuality are frequently mobilized in performative enactments of national identity as well as in strategies legitimizing war preparations and deployments (Parpart and Zalewski 2008; Cockburn 2010; Weber 1998, 2016; Puar 2007; Petersen 1999, 2014; Sjöberg 2015; Enloe 2000; Farris 2017; Richter-Montpetit 2014). In gendered and sexualized enactments of state identity, military institutions hold particularly important positions (cf. Basham 2013) and notions of a “gender-friendly” (Kronsell 2012, 17) and “equal opportunities military” (Bulmer 2013, 140) are increasingly called upon in national defense discourses in many places of ‘the West’. As markers of progress, they construct the national Self and simultaneously discipline external Others through (the threat of) armed violence (see also Dyvik 2014). These developments have been evident not least in Sweden where the world's first foreign policy openly labelled as feminist was adopted in 2015, performing a gender exceptional Swedish national identity in the international arena (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016).

In this article, we look at the ways in which gendered and sexualized subjectivities are called upon in Swedish defense discourses. By specifically mobilizing Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender⁴ (LGBT) subjectivities as ‘rights holders’ (Weber 2016) in different campaigns and public articulations of the SAF, Sweden is performatively enacted as progressive and simultaneously separated from a traditional (particularly Russian) Other. These dividing practices have several potentially problematic consequences. Firstly, we suggest that they render contemporary and future narratives of discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation *within* Sweden difficult, with potential implications for the visibility and speakability of lived experiences of discrimination, homo- and transphobia (see also Agathangelou 2013). Secondly, by effectively externalizing discrimination, the SAF can emerge as the guarantor of Swedish (gender) exceptionalism. This discursive

move seemingly rationalizes the ongoing (re)territorialisation and rearmament of the SAF – a policy turn in which ‘Russia’ repeatedly is called upon as the main threat towards the borders of ‘Sweden’ (Swedish Ministry of Defence 2015). We therefore argue that the gendered and sexualized articulations of the SAF probed in this paper work to stabilize treacherous single narratives of distant and dangerous Others, thus making possible the ongoing transformations of the SAF. By inquiring how the SAF is ascribed meaning through the myth of a progressive Sweden⁵, this article contributes to ongoing critical debates about Swedish gender exceptionalism (cf. Keskinen, Tuori and Mulinari 2009; Martinsson, Griffin and Nygren 2016; Towns 2002) but also to efforts of ‘queering’ international relations and security scholarship (cf. Weber 2016; Puar 2007; Wool 2015). It adds important insights to broader discussions about how gender and sexuality are mobilized to make possible the preparation for (and deployment of) armed violence, to perform the sovereign state and to order international politics.

In the following section, we outline our understanding of the mutually reproductive relationship of national identity and security (Campbell 1998; Stern 2006), particularly focusing on the ongoing debates about the workings of gendered and sexualized subjectivities within (in)security and defense discourses (Weber 1998, 2016; Sjöberg 2015; Petersen 1999, 2014) and the (re)production of ‘femonationalism’ (Farris 2017) and ‘homonationalism’ (Puar 2007). We then provide brief notes on methodology and situate our analysis within recent developments in Swedish defense policy. Finally, we offer our reading of the campaign *Thou new, Thou free* as well as other articulations of the SAF relating to gender and sexuality. Our analysis is conducted in three steps: We analyse how Sweden is performed in gendered and sexualized defense discourses, how Sweden is distinguished from distant and dangerous Other(s) and what is made (im)possible and rendered (in)visible by these dividing practices.

GENDER, SEXUALITY AND NATIONAL (IN)SECURITY

Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity has frequently been employed to demonstrate how sovereign states are “performatively constituted” (Campbell 1998, 10; see also Weber 1998; Martinsson et al 2016). In contrary to dominant IR conceptualizations, sovereignty is here not understood as a status attributed to a pre-discursive unit called “the state”, which itself needs no prior analytical interrogation (Weber 1998, 92). Instead, states and sovereignty are (like sex and gender) negotiated and ascribed meaning in discourse (ibid.; Campbell 1998) and therefore “always in the process of being constituted” (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999, 1).

In this article, we are interested in how Sweden (and the SAF as an institution of the state) is performed in national (in)security and defense discourses (Campbell 1998). Drawing on Stern (2006), we suggest that such discourses provide particularly interesting spaces in which to study how military and security measures are made

possible, because of their attempts to stabilize and fixate meaning for (national) subjects (Butler 1990; Weber 1998; Stern 2006). The illusion of a stable subject of security – in our case Sweden – is enacted through a range of “discursive moves” (Stern 2006, 193-194) where the subject is ascribed a particular identity and performed in ways which make it appear recognizable and stable across time and space. These boundaries are continuously sustained by discursive articulations and practises which distinguish the Self from distant and dangerous Others (ibid.; Campbell 1998). Such dividing practices also separate good from evil, normal from perverse and rational from irrational; ultimately making possible potentially violent practices meant to sustain such hierarchies (Stern 2006; see also Foucault 1984). As will be further demonstrated below, adapting a ‘feminist’ (Enloe 2014) and ‘queer intellectual curiosity’ (Weber 2016, 19) in our analysis enables us to investigate the central position held by sexuality and gender in discourses of (in)security, ordering and governing both domestic and international politics (ibid.; Sjoberg 2015; Petersen 1999, 2014).

Gender, Sexuality and the ‘New Normal’

Examining how ‘the homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ figure in policy discourses, Weber (2016) sheds light on how the ever-shifting line between ‘normal’ and ‘perverse’ subjectivities contributes to (re)produce gendered and sexualized orders of international and domestic politics. Reading former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s “gay rights are human rights”-speech from 2011, she argues that ‘the homosexual’ – previously called upon to separate ‘perverse’ from ‘normal’ sexualities within ‘the West’ – now seemingly figures as a ‘normal’ ‘LGBT rights holder’ and/or a ‘gay patriot’ in US foreign policy discourses. The ‘perversion/otherness’ previously accorded to homosexuality is thus transferred onto societies within which LGBT are not *yet* accepted as subjects with “the rights to have rights” (ibid., 121-142). The developmental temporality reproduced in this discourse is familiar; ‘homosexuality’ has long been called upon as a marker of backwardness and underdevelopment in order to legitimize the protection and expansion of ‘the progressive West’ and thus the violent, disciplinary practices directed towards colonized Others (Puar 2007; Richter-Montpetit 2014; Rahman 2014). Similarly, another body of literature underlines how LGBT rights and subjectivities have become “entangled with New Cold War sentiments” (Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay 2014) and discourses distinguishing a ‘progressive’ ‘Western’ from a ‘traditional’ ‘Eastern Europe’, including (and sometimes especially) Russia (see also Wilkinsson 2014; Kulpa 2014). Baker (2017) demonstrates how LGBT rights both are mobilized and rejected in relation to “mega events” such as the Eurovision Song Contest and the Olympic Games, specifically underlining how Sweden’s role as host of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2013 clearly served to link its national identity to the “narrative of LGBT-inclusive Europe” (Baker 2017, 107). Duggan (2002) famously suggests that the ‘LGBT rights holder’ and the discourse of LGBT inclusivity signify a new normality – a homonormativity – in which ‘the homosexual’ is included as long as s/he is performed as a ‘productive’

part of a 'Western' neoliberal society (see also Weber 2016, 105; Martinsson et al 2016, 61).

In addition to presenting itself as 'LGBT inclusive', Martinsson et al (2016) demonstrate how gender equality is called upon as a 'national trait' in a wide range of Swedish policy discourses, thus constructing a 'gender conscious' citizen identity (see also Kronsell 2012; Towns 2002). This homogenous identity risks making invisible and depoliticizing gender-based discrimination in Swedish society and contributes to problematic expectations about the future; either by rendering gender equality a matter of organizational effectiveness or a temporal end-stage that, if not already here, will surely soon be reached (Nygren, Fahlgren and Johansson 2016, 54-59). In line with Weber (2016) and Baker (2017), Martinsson et al (2016) suggest that the discourse of Swedish gender exceptionalism is easily appropriated by a form of cultural racism that makes possible a hierarchical ordering of nation-states and cultures according to a Swedish/Western definition of progress and modernity (see also Butler 2008). Performing gender equality and LGBT inclusivity as part of "the Swedish core" can thus be understood as also performing whiteness (Martinsson et al 2016, 213-214; see also Hübinette & Lundström 2015).

The 'LGBT rights holder' (Weber 2016) and the 'gender conscious citizen' (Martinsson et al 2016) are examples of gendered and sexualized subjectivities which not only govern citizens of Sweden and 'the West', but also contribute to order the international arena according to how well states "treat their homosexuals" (Weber 2016, 9; Puar 2010) and/or "women" (Farris 2017). Equality between people of all sexual orientations and gender identities herein becomes something that every 'normal' and 'rational' state agrees with and strives to facilitate. When appropriated into nationalist discourses, this transformed normativity has been referred to as 'homonationalism' (Puar 2007) or 'femonationalism' (Farris 2017). Yet, while feminist and queer scholars agree on the importance of studying the work done by gendered and sexualized subjectivities when appropriated into policy and (in)security discourses, some also warn against the employment of binary and/or readings of any performative enactment (Weber 2016; Rossdale 2015; Brown 2006; Bulmer 2013; Baker 2017). Certain sexualized and gendered subjectivities are undoubtedly mobilized in discourse as *both* perverse *and* normal, governing politics and ordering bodies in multiple and contradictory ways. In addition, focusing on concepts such as 'homonationalism' risks giving the impression that "there exists a non-complicit, 'authentically queer' performance of LGBT identity [...] 'outside' of heteronormativity" and further that the line distinguishing hetero- from homonormativity is stable and easily drawn (Bulmer 2013, 148). This in turn, illustrates the importance of contextual analyses of what certain homonationalist practises render (im)possible (Rossdale 2015) as well as a curiosity towards disorder (Weber 2016).

Having accounted for our understanding of how sovereign states are performed in gendered and sexualized (in)security discourses, we will now turn to the central role of military institutions in such terrains of meaning.

Gender, Sexuality and/in Military Institutions

Due to their role in performing and sustaining state sovereignty and the well-researched connection between soldiering, masculinity and heterosexuality (Bulmer 2013, 140), military institutions play key roles in the gender and sexualized (re)production of states and international orders. These links are manifested in numerous ways – from the mobilization of masculinities in military recruitment campaigns (Brown 2012) to the messy and contradictory performance of masculine heterosexuality in military training (Belkin 2012; Welland 2013). Recent research also shows how gendered and sexualized subjectivities are produced and presupposed in debates about the “equal opportunities military” and the inclusion of “non-traditional” recruits (Bulmer 2013, 139-140) in a long range of different national defense discourses (cf. Stachowitsch 2012). The recruitment and deployment of ‘women soldiers’ – as well as more general claims of “gender-friendly” armed forces (Kronsell 2012, 17) – articulate western military institutions and societies as progressive, thus making possible a familiar ‘white men/women saving brown women from brown men’-narrative (Spivak 1988) when legitimizing military deployments and interventions (cf. Kronsell 2012; Richter-Montpetit 2014; Dyvik 2014).

Similar to ‘women soldiers’, the enlistment of ‘LGBT-soldiers’ has been debated, contested and celebrated. Bulmer (2013) has shed light on how the ‘LGBT-soldier’ long has been an invisible, unavailable and impossible subject position within the British Armed Forces due to regulations rendering (homo)sexuality a ‘private’ matter (see also Belkin 2012). The feasibility of a sharp line between ‘the private’ and ‘the public’ was proven (also *practically*) impossible by the decision to let LGBT-troops participate in their official capacities in London Pride in 2008 (see also Wool 2015). Bulmer (2013) illustrates how both the debate leading up to the decision and the reactions it provoked uncovered the military as always already ‘heterosexual’, both constituted and haunted by the ghostly ‘homosexual’ Other (Welland 2013). As such, even when rendered visible and available, performative enactments of the LGBT-soldier can contribute to reproducing the military as patriarchal and heteronormative (Bulmer 2013). The work done by LGBT subjectivities mobilized and/or performed in defense discourses is thus ambiguous and often contradictory. We will return to these contradictions below when discussing how these subjectivities figure in the Swedish defense discourse, both as soldiers but also as ‘rights holders’ (Weber 2016). Before that, we offer some brief notes on methodology.

Analyzing State Performance in Swedish Defense Discourses

In this article, we are concerned with gendered and sexualized subjectivities mobilized in Swedish defence discourses. Since a clear, singular delimitation and definition of

‘the Swedish defense discourse’ (or any discourse) is impossible, we denote a broader terrain of meaning, accessible to the Swedish public, where the SAF – particularly its role and relevance – is articulated and performed in relation to gender and sexuality. Our empirical material consists primarily of the campaign *Thou new, Thou free* and its communication through various media platforms. This is complemented with interviews with the SAF officials responsible for the SAFs marketing strategy, as well as with public commentary and reactions to the campaign. Since the gendered and sexualized performance of a Swedish Self is clearly (re)produced beyond this campaign, we have also analyzed the SAF’s active involvement in Stockholm Pride as well as gendered and sexualized subjectivities called upon in recruitment and poster campaigns launched both succeeding and preceding *Thou new, Thou Free*.

Thou new, Thou free warrants particular attention for several reasons. Firstly, in the wake of the transformation from a conscripted to an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 2010 and the attendant drastic ‘marketization’ of the Swedish military machinery, the SAF is now commonly referred to as a “brand”, forced to “sell” its role and mandate to the population as well as military careers to young individuals (Strand and Berndtsson 2015). As illustrated by the quote opening this article, different techniques of the market enable the articulation of the SAF as a ‘societal resource’ (Basham 2016). Campaigns communicated to the Swedish population therefore provide an important space for military power and institutions to be negotiated and ascribed meaning. *Thou new, Thou free* is perhaps particularly important for the meaning making process constituting the Swedish military apparatus, being the first wide-reaching *information* campaign launched by the SAF. Instead of focusing on recruitment and thus targeting the younger population, this campaign targeted the Swedish population at large, and was therefore distributed through more broadly than usual. Besides via social media platforms, it also figured in newspapers, printed commercials, and placards as well as on television and YouTube⁶. Secondly, *Thou new, Thou free* was launched at a time of large-scale transformations of the SAFs’ structure and mandate, particularly through a (re)territorialisation and rearmament of the SAF (to be further discussed below). An important part of our analysis has therefore been to carefully situate our reading of the campaign within broader shifts in Swedish defense policy. We consider this crucial in order to better understand the stakes involved in the campaign and thus in the (re)constitution of Sweden as a (gender) exceptional sovereign state.

PERFORMING AND SECURING “A COUNTRY TO FALL IN LOVE WITH/IN”

In this section we will provide our analysis of the campaign *Thou New, Thou Free* as well as wider gendered and sexualized articulations of the SAF by loosely drawing on Stern’s (2006, 193-194) “discursive moves” to secure the Self. We begin by accounting for the performance of an exceptional Swedish Self, thereafter turn to the production of the Other and lastly discuss what is rendered (im)possible and (in)visible by these dividing practices.

The Myth of a Progressive Swedish Self

The campaign's title, *Thou New, Thou Free* [Du nya, du fria], alludes to the Swedish national anthem *Thou Old, Thou Free* [Du gamla, du fria]. According to one SAF official, the re-written title signifies a Swedish Self that constantly changes, progresses and evolves towards a better version of itself⁷. Throughout the campaign, this notion of a 'free' and 'progressive' Sweden is performed in different ways, often by calling upon gendered and sexualized subjectivities. In one of the broadly distributed campaign slogans, Sweden is performatively enacted as "a country to fall in love with/in"⁸. The Swedish term used here allows for double meaning, indicating that Sweden is both a country to fall in love in and to love. In several places where this message appears, it is accompanied by the image of a rainbow flag⁹, thus signalling a particular understanding of 'normal' sexualities that includes LGBT citizens. When asked about role the rainbow flag played in the campaign, one interviewee responded,

We usually say that it is a marker. [...] We don't exist specifically for LGBT-issues or for homosexuals... but we are the defense force of all [...] Swedish citizens [...]. *All*. And by referring to minorities who in many cases are exposed, questioned or distinguished [...] we want to show that, as a group, this is something that... they are also ours... they are a part of us and we are the defense force of all Swedes. So this is a profile-question – it is profiling. We are choosing... a typical marker, and we use it to say that *in Sweden you can love whomever you want*. It is so nice to be able to say that and to some extent be the guarantor for that¹⁰.

The understanding of sexuality displayed above is conveyed to the Swedish public by mobilizing the LGBT person as a 'rights holder' (Weber 2016), both throughout the campaign and within the broader Swedish defense discourse. In one series of advertisements, the SAF imagines the birth of a future Swedish citizen. The premise of the add, which was distributed through television as well as in print and social media, is that even though the SAF do not know anything about this person yet, it is still their mission to "defend her right to think, believe and live the way she chooses"¹¹. The add imagines a variety of possible subject positions for this citizen, two of them being,

She might not at all be a 'her', but instead consider herself a 'him'¹².

She might become a hockey-mom. Or a hockey-pro. Or both¹³.

Recalling this part of the campaign during our interview, one SAF official said,

Ten years from now a person will be born. We don't know who he or she is or how he or she understands him/herself [sig själv]. We don't know what preferences she will have either sexually or politically. How [politically] brown,

blue or red he or she is, or ‘hen’ is. But damn if she isn’t our mission nonetheless [likt förbannat]¹⁴.

In the TV commercial, these suggested subjectivities are accompanied by images of citizens who seemingly represent diversity across genders, sexualities, ages, religions and ethnicities, including two female-presenting individuals kissing each other in the backseat of a car. Several citizen subjectivities called upon in the campaign challenge gender stereotypes and identities, e.g. by being a ‘hockey-mom’ *and* a ‘hockey-pro’. The commercial also pictures a person, wearing make-up in the form of red lips and black eyes, who – with a determined facial expression – shaves of their long hair, thus seemingly performing their gender identity in non-normative ways. Not least the use of the pronoun ‘hen’ by the SAF official is significant, challenging how binary gender as well as heteronormativity is manifested in language. Hen is a gender-neutral pronoun officially introduced to the Swedish language thesaurus in 2015 and whilst increasingly used in both legal and policy documents it has been heavily criticized as ‘politically correct gender-indoctrination’.

The employment of transgender and other gender non-conforming people as ‘rights holders’ within the campaign – otherwise often excluded from policy figurations of LGBT people (Weber 2016; Baker 2017) – reappears in the Swedish defense discourse even beyond *Thou New, Thou Free*. In 2017, the SAF launched a recruitment campaign titled *How many reasons do you need?* One of the commercials features a boy called Alex who appears to have sneaked into his sister’s [pink] room to borrow her dress and make-up, when his sister shows up and throws him out. The voiceover then suggests that there are many reasons to enlist with the SAF,

You can do it for every person’s right to be, look and express themselves [sig själv] the way they choose¹⁵.

In the same campaign, same-sex marriage is referred to as another reason for why Sweden is worth defending¹⁶. Same-sex marriage is also on top of the list of things that make ‘Swedish values’ ‘extreme’, according to one SAF official.

Author 1: Would you like to help me to fill this exceptional, extreme, Sweden with meaning? What... ehm... is it that makes us so extreme?

Interviewee: Well, let me see here. Same-sex marriage. Free abortions. Free education for everyone. Free health care [...] the work for [gender] equality, which has come very far in Sweden. And *very* far within the SAF¹⁷.

The examples above illustrate how heteronormative, cis-binary and patriarchal structures commonly associated with military institutions are challenged in *official* Swedish defense discourses. (Discursive practices *within* the SAF are another issue, clearly beyond the scope of this article.) When called upon as ‘rights holders’ (Weber 2016), LGBT as subject position(s) are normalized and included in the Swedish Self. They are made part of that which should be secured, even serving as the “markers” of

its boundaries. However, LGBT as well as women subjectivities are not only employed as citizens, but also as soldiers. One example of this is a SAF poster campaign from 2015, showing a soldier in full camouflage, wearing a rainbow flag on their sleeve. The campaign's tagline "some things should not need to be camouflaged" writes the SAF as an "inclusive organisation" where "everybody who contributes to our work should feel welcome and respected"¹⁸. This LGBT soldier subjectivity is also promoted through communication about the SAF's involvement in Stockholm Pride, often motivated in organizational terms as a way to improve work climate and increase operational effectiveness (cf. Svensson 2017). When mobilized in this way, the LGBT soldier subjectivity signals a form of homonormativity where the inclusion of LGBT subjectivities seemingly is conditioned against their contribution to the SAF as an institution of neoliberal society. Yet, the SAF's activities during Stockholm Pride are also called upon internationally in ways which contribute to the performance of a 'progressive' Swedish Self. For instance, when asked about his participation in the parade, the SAF Commander in Chief Michel Bydén noted how his partaking often was described as "unique" by international colleagues (Svensson 2017).

Distant and Dangerous Others and the Rearmament of the SAF

Clearly, the configurations of sexuality and gender mobilized within Swedish defence discourses and described above do not only form part of domestic marketization, they also make claims on international political orders (Weber 2016). Within these (in)security and defense discourses, Sweden is ascribed meaning in relation to (sometimes not so) distant and dangerous Others (Campbell 1998). The haunting presence of Other(s) is illustrated by two main messages in the *Thou New, Thou Free*-campaign, broadly communicated across media platforms:

Many of the 'freedoms' that 'make Sweden Sweden' are considered extreme *in the eyes of others*. For us they are extremely important. We stand up for every citizen's right to live her life as she wants and chooses¹⁹.

Freedom to live the way you choose, and with whomever you choose, cannot be taken for granted in this world. But it is self-evident for us. And it is without question worth protecting.²⁰

In another advertisement, the SAF suggests that what "makes Sweden, Sweden" is "democracy, freedom and the right to love whomever you want"²¹. Other advertisements ask potential recruits if they "also want to defend extreme values?"²². When read together with the sexualized and gendered subjectivities described above, Sweden is performed as an exceptionally and "extremely" progressive, modern, tolerant and inclusive sovereign nation-state whose citizens hold values, rights and freedoms currently under threat from distant and dangerous Others. More precisely, it is *because* of its progressiveness that Sweden is threatened and thus must be defended.

The identification of the Other is an important “move” to stabilize the Self in (in)security discourses, making possible both the definition and the protection of the subject of security (Stern 2006: 194). Yet, within the gendered and sexualized articulations of the SAF exemplified above, Sweden seems to be performatively enacted despite the Other not being explicitly named. Instead, what we get to know is that the Others are those who consider “Swedish values, rights and freedoms” to be “extreme” and those who “lack” the values, rights and freedoms which “make Sweden, Sweden”. They are “the rest of the world”; those for whom Swedish values, rights and freedoms are not “self-evident”. These distant and dangerous Others appears to be precisely *distant* and external, located outside of the territory of Sweden. The non-naming of the Other made us ask one SAF official: When the campaign mentions “extreme in the eyes of others”, then who are these Others?

Interviewee: [I]f we speak about LGBT and ‘homo-rights’ in Sweden and how we in Sweden view it pretty much across the spectra, then it is enough to go to the Baltic states for a *completely* different view. There you can actually not arrange a Pride parade without it being life-threatening. I would say that the possibility for minorities to be an active part [of society] and be accepted is very different [in Sweden]. It is enough to go to Denmark to find a different view on immigrants [*nysvenskar*] and integration. [...] there are many countries getting browner and browner [reference to far-right extremism] right now. [...] Hungary is one. [...] We don’t really know where Turkey is going after the recent referendum... things happen that, in my view, are taking us in the wrong direction. *And here Sweden is a beacon of light [Här står Sverige som ett ljus]*. And right now there are many things... [...] there is so much negativism... there is so much ugliness... everything from Daesch and their take-overs to the new regime in Washington... We have Putin who is chauvinistic and Russia that was on the right track but now is going in the *complete* wrong direction. [...] Even Poland shown proof of scary things. In the midst of this we wanted to show something very strong, very bright and very good. It [Sweden] is a great country, that looks ahead [*blickar framåt*]. *Hence, Thou New, Thou Free*²³.

This answer very clearly illustrates how Sweden is constituted in complicated, messy and non-binary terrains of meaning. Sweden is performatively enacted as a progressive, modern, tolerant and inclusive sovereign state not only in relation to traditional ‘dangerous Others’ (such as “Russia” or “Daesch”), but also in relation to its allies in the European Union and “the regime in Washington”, with which Sweden has a defense partnership. In addition to the list above, this interviewee also referred to “the EU”, “France”, “England” as well as “tribes of Africa” in different efforts to write Sweden as extreme²⁴.

Nevertheless, even though a multiplicity of Others are constitutive of the Swedish Self, these Others hold very different positions within the broader Swedish defense discourse. Importantly, *Thou New, Thou Free* was launched to “create relevance” for the SAF in the midst of large-scale transformations within the Swedish defence policy

and enacted in relation to representations of “Russian aggression” (Swedish Ministry of Defence 2015). After less than two decades of primarily conducting expeditionary operations abroad – and less than one decade of employing an AVF – the Swedish Government ordered the SAF to refocus on defending the borders of Sweden and “increase its operational effectiveness” (ibid.). In order to ensure provision of military personnel, they also decided to reinstate (a partial and “gender neutral”) national conscription. This territorial (re)turn and rearmament process is continually motivated through Cold War-akin narratives about increasing “tensions” in the Baltic Sea (ibid.). More specifically, the Russian Government’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine since 2014, as well as the increased number of Russian military exercises and activities close to (sometimes even crossing) Swedish territorial borders, are called upon and condemned by Swedish political and military elites (ibid.). Russia has increasingly replaced Afghanistan (and other ‘failed states’) as the main adversary in Swedish defense policy.²⁵

Hence, reading gendered and sexualized articulation of the SAF together with the ongoing transformations in Swedish defence policy – as well as in relation to broader tendencies to mobilize the LGBT in distinguishing ‘Western’ from ‘Eastern Europe’ (Baker 2017; Rivkin-Fish and Hartblay 2014; Kulpa 2014) – a clearer image of Sweden’s distant and dangerous Other emerges. When Sweden is constituted in relation to the Russian and/or Eastern European Other (as illustrated in the lengthy citation above), its ‘progressiveness’ is performed in slightly new ways. While previously ‘women’ figured as ‘rights holders’ in legitimizing Sweden’s participation in the 2001 military intervention in Afghanistan (Kronsell 2012), the (in)security discourse probed above primarily promotes the ‘LGBT right holder’. In light of the Russian Government’s recent infringements of human rights for LGBT citizens (Wilkinsson 2014), widely covered in Swedish media, the modern, tolerant and inclusive Swedish Self appears to be under threat from a traditional, patriarchal, homo- and transphobic Russian Other. This dividing practise ‘territorializes’ the values, rights and freedoms which “make Sweden, Sweden”, stabilizing them across space.

Yet, the myth of the exceptional Sweden is not only (re)producing treacherous, single narratives of distant and dangerous Others and forming part of and enabling rearmament. In the next section, we will shed light on domestic narratives and strategies made (im)possible and (in)visible through and within performative enactments of a progressive Sweden.

SAF as the Guarantor of Swedish Progressiveness: Externalising and Silencing Discrimination ‘Within’

The myth of the exceptional Sweden – characterised by equality across gender identities and sexual orientations – is not performed in isolation or at one particular moment of time. This (in)security discourse is continuously reproduced and thus dependent on a particular temporality (Stern 2006; Butler 1990); a linear story

connecting history, present and future. Nothing illustrates this temporal dimension better than a ‘progress timeline’ on the SAF website, launched as part of the campaign *Thou New, Thou Free*. The timeline asks visitors to enter their birth dates in order to receive dates and descriptions of events illustrating how Sweden has “progressed”, followed by the message: “a country in transformation is worth defending”²⁶. The selection of the events and dates constituting the timeline largely appears to coincide with the values, rights and freedoms discussed above²⁷. For example, when 2009 – the year in which same-sex marriage in Sweden was legalized – appears in the timeline as “a decisive year for your right to live how you like, with whom you like”²⁸, Sweden is re-enacted as exceptional. In other words, while history is written, so is the Swedish Self. Importantly, when the history of Sweden and/in the world is negotiated, promises are seemingly also made about continued evolution and progress ahead (Martinsson et al 2016), bringing to mind similar (colonialist) developmental temporalities (cf. Butler, 2008; Keskinen et al, 2009; Weber 2016).

This premise and promise of ‘progress’ also makes *Thou New, Thou Free* an intriguing (in)security discourse to study. As others have suggested (cf. Stern 2006), one of the characteristics of (in)security discourses is that they appear to (at least temporarily) lock down, delimit, fix and *stabilize* the subject of security by ascribing it a particular identity. This seeming stability makes the subject of security securable. However, in this national (in)security discourse, the Swedish Self is characterized by its constant transformation, and therefore, its *instability*. Within this discourse, progress in itself constitutes an identity performance; progress *is* ‘Sweden’ and thus what must be protected. In one sense then, the mobilization of the ‘LGBT rights holder’ in performative enactments of ‘Swedish progressiveness’ is an almost typical example of ‘homonationalism’ (Puar 2007). Inclusivity is performed as part of “the Swedish core” and thus easily appropriated by ‘cultural racism’ (Martinsson et al 2016, 213). Yet, what these performative enactments *do* is also contradictory and perhaps impossible to capture by either/or logics and explanations (Weber 2016; Rossdale 2015). While challenging gender binaries, heteronormativity and patriarchal structures, the gendered and sexualized articulations of the SAF might also render discrimination based on these norms more difficult to address. Because the gendered and sexualized myth of Sweden is stabilized across time and space, discrimination and harassment on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation is effectively externalized, both to a spatial Other, but also – as illustrated by the ‘progress timeline’ – to the Swedish past, a temporal Other. We suggest that these exclusionary enactments can both be understood *as* violence and *as enabling* violence. That is, when inequalities and discrimination are externalised, their presence within Swedish society is made invisible and silenced (see also Agathangelou 2013; Martinsson et al 2016).

At the same time, research both on the SAF and wider Swedish society clearly shows that homophobia, transphobia and discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation persists (Sundevall and Persson 2016; Martinsson et al 2016).

Moreover, the reactions to the campaign *Thou new, Thou free* itself bear clear witness to such persistence. In our interviews, SAF officials repeatedly mentioned the sharp criticism directed towards the campaign. Its video commercial was described as having received more “dislikes” in social media than any other prior SAF commercial. The campaign in general was criticized for being “too political”,²⁹ “politically correct”, for “attacking the national anthem” and for “dishonouring the Swedish flag” [referring to the use of rainbow flags]³⁰. The comment sections under the video, as well as latter videos employing the ‘LGBT-rights-holder’, contained homophobic, transphobic, and culturally racist statements.

This ‘critique’ not only reveals the inherent instability of ‘Sweden’, when “that which is placed on the outside – the other – turns out to be on the inside after all” (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999, 1). More importantly, it serves as a reminder of the stakes involved in the Swedish defense discourse. On the one hand, the employment of the ‘LGBT rights holder’, as well as non-normative/queer (gender) identities more broadly might challenge discrimination, structural inequalities and normativities, both within military institutions and in wider society. On the other hand, the myth of the gender exceptional Sweden also conceals discrimination and harassment based on sexuality and gender within Sweden. As such, it does not only risk de-politicising inequalities, making them more difficult to address, it also *constitutes* the articulation of the SAF as a guarantor of the sovereign Swedish state and Self. If ‘Sweden’ was the host of inequality and discrimination, *then why would it be worth protecting?* In other words, narratives and experiences from Swedish citizens having lived through inequalities and harassment on the basis of their gender and sexuality would collapse the *raison d’être* of the SAF as the defender of Sweden’s alleged progressiveness and tolerance. LGBT subjectivities therefore remain to a significant extent de-personalized “markers” of gender-exceptional ‘Swedishness’, their actual experiences once more made impossible and unspeakable. The employment of the ‘LGBT rights holder’ in Swedish defence discourses thus governs domestic politics by superficially challenging, but at the same time externalising and hiding existing normativities regarding sexuality and gender. It thereby also reproduces a familiar gendered and sexualized order of international politics (cf. Weber 1998, 2016; Petersen 1999, 2014; Sjöberg 2015).

Finally, the externalisation of discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality stabilizes Sweden as a spatial totality and allows for the SAF to emerge as the very guarantor and defender of continued Swedish progressiveness. This articulation of the SAF not only makes it relevant to Swedish society – even beyond wartime – it also rationalizes the territorial (re)turn in Swedish defense policy. While previous research demonstrates how employments of the ‘LGBT rights holder’ in foreign policy discourses make possible forms of ‘homo-colonialist’ and ‘homo-imperialist’ projects (Puar 2007; Weber 2016; Rahman 2014), our analysis thus suggests that these ‘normalised’ LGBT subjectivities are also employed to rationalize a military defense of Swedish territory. When called upon in the defense and (in)security discourse, the

‘LGBT rights holder’ therefore contributes to enable and possibly legitimize the ongoing military rearmament.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have discussed how gender and sexuality are mobilized in Swedish defence discourses. We have demonstrated how LGBT people (and to a certain extent women) are called upon as ‘rights holders’, worthy of respect, dignity, and, crucially, protection by the SAF. This discursive move renders equality between all genders and sexual identities a Swedish ‘national trait’. ‘Sweden’ is performatively enacted as an “extremely” equal, tolerant and progressive, sovereign state, currently under threat from a ‘traditional’ Other. These dividing practises separating Sweden from Russia (as well as Western from Eastern Europe) construct the protection of equality, tolerance and progressiveness as the *raison d’être* of the SAF.

As we have argued, the process of actively embracing LGBT subjectivities in public articulations of the SAF comes with numerous problems. Projecting homo- and transphobia onto a distant and dangerous other (as well as to a spatial and temporal Swedish past) effectively exports discrimination and anti-LGBT violence abroad, thus potentially turning invisible discrimination and inequalities based on gender and sexuality within Swedish society. The gendered and sexualized articulations of the SAF analysed in this article thus both depend on and reconstruct discursively ‘impossible’ LGBT experiences. Additionally, it reproduces simplified narratives of distant and dangerous Others threatening the Swedish Self. This enables the SAF to emerge as the very guarantors for (continued) ‘Swedish progressiveness’ and therefore as relevant to Swedish society even beyond wartime. Consequently, we have suggested that the employment of the ‘LGBT rights holder’ in the Swedish defense discourse contributes to making possible the ongoing territorial (re)turn and rearmament of the SAF. It does so by (re)establishing a familiar gendered and sexualized order of international politics in which sovereign states engage in a constant preparation for war.

Shedding light on performative enactments of a ‘progressive’ Swedish Self, this article has contributed with insights into how the SAF is ascribed meaning and relevance in a time of large scale and contradictory transformations. By doing so, we have also contributed to broader debates about how gendered and sexualized subjectivities are employed in the process of legitimising military preparations and deployments as well as the counter-intuitive impacts this may have on the visibility and speakability of discrimination based on gender and sexuality.

NOTES

¹ Interview with SAF Market Strategist 1, The Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters, Stockholm, March 22 2017 (their emphasis).

² *Thou New, Thou Free*: main campaign message. The full campaign and its different advertisements (moving and still images, text messages and website material) was provided to us by the SAF in March 2017, on our request. See also the campaign website: <http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/dunyadufria/> (Accessed: 2017-07-29).

³ *Thou New, Thou Free*: main campaign message.

⁴ LGBT as initialism for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender is problematised for being simplistic and not representative of the multitude of sexual and gender identities represented in non-hetero/non-cis communities and struggles. Particularly trans identities are often included with little actual commitment (see e.g. Baker 2017). In the context of this article, we chose to maintain this abbreviation because it represents the identities referred to most frequently in the material we analyse.

⁵ Here, we use the term ‘myth’ to refer to a signifier organizing discourses particularly related to spatial totalities, such as the sovereign state (Laclau 1990)

⁶ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017.

⁷ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017; see also *Thou new, Thou free*.

⁸ *Thou New, Thou Free*: main campaign messages.

⁹ For instance on street signs, the campaign webpage, *Facebook* and *Instagram*.

¹⁰ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017 (their emphasis).

¹¹ *Thou new, Thou free*: TV commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXk3v_fnhC8 (Accessed August 29 2017)

¹² *Thou new, Thou free*: TV commercial.

¹³ *Thou new, Thou free*: newspaper advertisement.

¹⁴ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017.

¹⁵ *How many reasons do you need?* Campaign website: <http://jobb.forsvarsmakten.se/hurmanagaskal/> (Accessed August 29 2017)

¹⁶ *How many reasons do you need?*

¹⁷ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017 (their emphasis).

¹⁸ Poster campaign accessible at: http://www.hbtiforsvaret.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/HBTaffisch_50x70cm_04_LR12.pdf (Accessed August 26 2017)

¹⁹ *Thou new, Thou free*: e.g. campaign webpage and social media posts via *Facebook* and *Instagram* (our emphasis).

²⁰ *Thou new, Thou free*: main campaign messages.

²¹ *Thou new, Thou free*: recruitment message. Material supplied by the SAF.

²² *Thou new, Thou free*: recruitment message.

²³ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017 (their emphasis).

²⁴ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017. See also Lykke (2016) for discussions on how Sweden and Denmark are performed (and thus secured) in relation to each other.

²⁵ Interview with SAF Market Strategist 2, The Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters, Stockholm, March 22 2017. See also Swedish Ministry of Defence (2015).

²⁶ *Thou new, Thou free*: Timeline: <http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/om-myndigheten/vart-uppdrag/ettlandiforandring/> (Accessed August 29 2017)

²⁷ We have not systematically studied the full ‘progress timeline’ and do not know how many potential ‘stories of Sweden’ there is.

²⁸ *Thou new, Thou free*: Timeline.

²⁹ Market Strategist 2, March 22 2017.

³⁰ Market Strategist 1, March 22 2017.

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