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An ideology-critical examination of the cultural heritage policies of the Sweden Democrats

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage is increasingly used as a political force to achieve societal goals. This is specifically noticeable in the rhetoric of right-wing nationalist parties in Europe. Cultural heritage and 'politics of the past' have become key tools in explicit nationalist agendas and right-wing politicians are using cultural heritage to attract disenchanted voters. But how is cultural heritage constructed through these processes? The aim of this paper is to explore the constructions and uses of cultural heritage within the Swedish nationalist party the Sweden Democrats (SD). With non-government bills formulated by the Sweden Democrats as a point of departure, the paper illustrates how an ideological fantasy is reproduced, which is based on establishing a direct connection between the party's seemingly non-ideological ideology and ideas about an authentic Swedish cultural heritage. The latter reflects a 'return' to neorigorism, which refers to the belief in cultural heritage as an objective, given, and non-negotiable, phenomenon.

Introduction and aim

Cultural heritage is no 'innocent' or 'neutral' phenomenon reflecting the past in objective ways. During the last decades, research has emphasised its constructed character, arguing that heritage should rather be defined as different forms of meaning making or as the result of 'heritagisation' – the social and political processes through which heritage is created (Kuutma 2009). In line with Smith (2006), heritage has been described as a discourse or as the result of a performative process of heritage making, which occurs when people interact with both material and immaterial aspects of culture (see also Smith and Campbell 2017). Or as stated by Lowenthal (2015), it is by manipulating our legacy that we can secure it as heritage, and also use it politically: 'Museums and heritage may become cultural carriers of ideology, imbedded in selective versions of history. Consequently, heritage can be used as a powerful weapon in support of political rhetoric and ideologies . . .' (Goulding and Domic 2009, 99; see also Madsen 2014). For example, notions of an authentic heritage that is not based on a mixing of cultures can be given priority because of political ambitions. This means that heritage is as much about the present and the future as the past (Smith 2006). Harrison (2015) states that heritage is the result of a collaborative and dialogical process, and that it is produced as part of an ever-ongoing conversation with the past, but that it is actually always about the future: 'We could almost say that the "new heritage" has nothing to do with the past at all, but that it is actually a form of "futurology"' (Harrison 2015, 35).

This 'futurological' dimension implies that heritage making must be described as inherently political, which in turn raises questions about power and governmentality. According to Smith (2006), what is sometimes referred to as 'authorized heritage' can be regarded as a result of the

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cultural practices by which state actors construct specific understandings of the past. 'Authorized heritage' as a discourse emerged in relation to the 19th century nationalism and was manifested in cultural heritage institutions, not least museums. This way, museums were used to represent nations in beneficial ways (Duncan 1999; Duncan and Wallach 2004), and, also, to legitimise regimes (Ajana 2015; see also Ashley 2005) by contributing to the consolidation of national self-images and national narratives (González 2014; see also2016). Studies of the activities of museums further show that they have legitimised the authority of ruling classes (Smith 2006; Coffee 2006), excluded subordinated groups (Coffee 2008), and that they have also had a disciplining function 'educating' citizens about civilised behaviour (Bennett 1995).

In opposition to the hegemony of 'authorized heritage' it is possible to use heritage in subversive and oppositional ways that reject established notions of identity: 'Heritage thus becomes not only a tool of governance but also a tool of opposition and subversion' (Smith 2006, 52). Robertson and Webster (2017) state that 'heritage from below' is manifest in local practices and in lived experiences, in recollections of the mundane of everyday life, and in notions of the work of past and present generations. It could comprise desires to be represented at museum exhibitions. Hence, the criticism of 'authorized heritage' is appealing to various groups of people, but also to seemingly more general constructions of the 'people'.

Politically, it is right-wing populist parties, which have been described as more attentive than mainstream political parties to the political potential of 'heritage of the people' (cf. Kaya 2020) or 'heritage of below'. By emphasising the importance of preserving popular traditional culture (or heritage of the people), right-wing parties offer an alternative collective identity while presenting this identity as threatened by hostile outside influences as well as by the establishment governing the museums. Thus, with the emergence of right-wing nationalist movements, the political function of cultural heritages has been accentuated; cultural heritage – or what Lähdesmäki (2019) refers to as 'politics of the past' – have become key tools in explicit nationalist projects.

This paper deals with 'politics of the past' or political aspects of cultural heritage by exploring how the Swedish right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), treats cultural heritage as an objective phenomenon – ready to collect and display – and enables dis-identification with established political views on heritage in a mission of legitimising an oppositional political ideology.

The Sweden Democrats (SD) was founded in 1988, and with 5.7% of the vote, the party was elected to the Swedish Parliament for the first time in 2010. The number of sympathisers has increased since then and at present time (2021) just over 20% of the citizens support the party. In a similar way as other radical right parties, SD's politics are characterised by ethno-nationalism, anti-immigration, extensive risk production (society is threatened by immigration, criminality and social insecurity) and anti-elitism. Repeated references are being made to 'the people' ('discourse of the people' [Hellström 2006]) and the nation (Stavrakakis 2004) as if they were obvious phenomena. Furthermore, SD's politics are based on a rebranded version of 'Peoples Home of Sweden' (Folkhemmet), a Golden Age attributed the 1950s (Elgenius and Rydberg 2017; Rydgren 2018), and an apocalyptic rhetoric according to which is important to secure the Swedish cultural heritage.

Several researchers have investigated how cultural policies and cultural heritage are put to work in the rhetoric of SD and other Scandinavian right-wing parties. While Niklasson and Hølleland (2018) state that the main impact of Scandinavian far-right has been to establish cultural heritage as a central theme in political discussions around national belonging, Lindsköld (2015) concludes that a key idea in the SD's ideology is that national cultures have to be protected from other cultures to avoid the risk of extinction. Gustafsson and Karlsson (2011) state that in cultural heritage, the SD has: '. . . found a way of packaging and promoting its xenophobic and exclusive ideas in a seductive form' (2011, 21). A similar point is made by Gill (2012) who illustrates how the cultural policies of the Sweden Democrats draw a sharp line between 'Swedes' and the 'others'. In a study of the Finns Party and its ambivalent relationship with the EU, Lähdesmäki (2019) applies a broader perspective and demonstrates how notions of a common European culture and heritage are used as political tools in a right-wing populist discourse.

In many ways, the politics of the SD resemble 'heritage populism', characterised by a hostility towards elites, and by being in opposition to for example the EU, immigrants and Islam (Reynié 2016). The opposition to this type of influence is not only based on explicitly racist ideas, but are also communicated through fictional concerns for defending values such as gender equality, freedom of speech, and secularism. Heritage populism also reflects the consternation of Western people '. . . who fear the loss of both economic and cultural influence as globalization prompts a worldwide redistribution of power' (Reynié 2016:48; see also Kaya 2020), as well as 'white melancholy', the loss of a white homogeneous population (Lundström and Hübinette 2020). Hence, heritage populism works through an appeal to emotion, including fear and feelings of loss but also heartfelt nostalgia for a heritage that is perceived to be disappearing.

Especially nostalgia has been conceptualised as related to reactionary heritage politics (Smith 2006) for the ways in which nostalgic feelings seem to work as drivers of attempts to reinstate an imagined past, or efforts to handle tensions between notions of a glorious past and a problematic present (Boym 2001; Smith and Campbell 2017). For the purposes here, it suffices to emphasise that emotions such as nostalgia may work as active effective practices (Campbell, Smith, and Wetherell 2017) and that they are ideologically and culturally productive (Johannisson 2001) also in seemingly emotion-free genres such as the non-government bills that constitute the material for this study.

It should be clear from the above that heritage populism has attracted a lot of interest. However, there is a lack of studies based on an ideology-critical reading of cultural heritage policy in relation to what can be called a *post-ideological stage*, characterised by a 'return' to seemingly self-evident and unproblematic ideals, and by encouraging people to distance themselves from established political ideals such as gender equality and equity. The post-ideological stage has been suggested to contribute to the anchoring of right-wing nationalist ideologies in broader populations (cf. Minkenberg 2001a; Lindsköld 2015). This paper attempts to fill that gap by exploring how the post-ideological state is manifested in the SD's cultural heritage policy, as it is described in non-government bills to the Swedish Riksdag.

With an ideology-critical perspective as a point of departure, the overall aim of the paper is to explore how the notion of cultural heritage is defined and used in the oppositional political ideology of the Sweden Democrats. A key argument in the paper is that ideology-critical theorisations of the post-ideological state are key to understanding how the rhetoric of SD not only represents specific interpretations of cultural heritage but furnishes the political discussion with appealing notions of an objective cultural heritage and populist dis-identifying points of identification.

Method

The material comprises non-government bills, i.e. written proposals from politicians to the Swedish Riksdag. Searches were made in the digital archive of the Swedish Riksdag (riksdagen.se). To find relevant bills, various keywords such as 'SD AND cultural heritage', 'SD AND museums', 'SD AND cultural history' and 'SD AND civilization' were used. The two first keywords proved to be the most relevant, and the paper focuses on the result of them. The searches were conducted in March and May 2021 and cover non-government bills that were written from 2013 to 2020 and 2011 to 2020, respectively. No non-government bills were found before 2011 because the SD became a parliamentary party in 2010. The first search resulted in 58 hits and the second in 239. The material does not exclusively deal with cultural heritage and museums, but can, for example, cover general budget issues in which museums and cultural heritage are included. However, all material that mentions the 'SD', together with 'museums' and 'cultural heritage', has been analysed. A non-government bill can include anything from one page to hundreds of pages. The choice of combining 'cultural heritage' with 'museums' was motivated by the fact that they are closely linked, i.e. museums are often at the centre of cultural heritage policy discussions (Gustavsson 2018). It could be regarded as a limitation that the paper focuses on the production of and not the reception

of ideology. However, an advantage of studying non-government bills is that they make visible political operationalisations of ideologies on a concrete level and how specific definitions of cultural heritage are used for political purposes.

Analytical approach

The analysis is based on an ideology-critical approach influenced by Slavoj Žižek and Ernesto Laclau. The approach furnishes the analysis with tools to identify and analyse key tendencies in right-wing political ideas regarding cultural heritage in relation to the present and what has been referred to as a post-ideological stage. By offering theorisations of the workings of symbolic signifiers, the approach makes it possible to explore the often multiple and sometimes contradictory functions that may be ascribed to signifiers such as cultural heritage or multiculturalism.

With references to Sloterdijk, Žižek (2008) describes cynicism and irony as contemporary tendencies and as possible signs of a post-ideological stage. Characteristic of such a stage would be that people do not take ideology seriously; they claim not to believe in ideological statements at all and are explicitly critical of what they refer to as expressions of ideology. However, Žižek (2008, 30) points out that such an approach misses a basic level of ideological imagination, to structure social reality itself: 'even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*'. As an example, he states that people in general know that the idea of freedom masks exploitation, but nevertheless they take it seriously.

What the contemporary post-ideological state provides in terms of ideological climate is the possibility of *dis-identification*. It enables people to doubt and distance themselves from identification with (traditional) ideologies, while at the same time voluntarily 'choosing' to support their ideals (Žižek 2008, 25). Dis-identification is also an aspect of ideologies that creates a sense of voluntary consent, that people voluntarily support ideological ideas. Furthermore, processes of dis-identification are closely related to populism, which according to Laclau (2005) is the result of the linking of different (political) demands in a series of equivalences that unite people under common signs such as 'the people' or 'the nation'. This unification of people usually takes place in relation to an external enemy, and it represents the foundation of a division between 'us' and 'them'. To succeed in this, a common set of values, ideas and symbols in relation to which disparate groups of people can unite, is required (Laclau 2005). But more than that it is necessary to consider *how* populist discourses construct the enemy. Žižek (2006, 556) argues that the vagueness, which, according to Laclau, characterises populist master signifiers is always 'supplemented by the pseudo-concreteness of the figure that is selected as the enemy, the singular agent behind all threats to the people'. Following this, and with reference to the material in this paper, it could be asked how antagonistic relationships are created in which populist agents consider themselves as preceding the enemy and that this precedence gives them priority, and in which the annihilation of this more or less concretised enemy is regarded as enabling the restoration of (social) balance.

The concrete analysis is based on repeated and close readings of the material, with a focus on how the bills are constructed, and on the narrative that structured specific arguments. Recurring signs were identified, and it was noted how these signs are constructed rhetorically. Of special interest was how 'cultural heritage' is articulated and given meaning in relation to other signs and ideas. To capture the ideological reasons for writing the bills, I focused on identifying key objectives in relation to cultural heritage, preferred measures, perceived obstacles, and on how the authors position themselves politically and ideologically vis-à-vis other actors on the political field (cf. Nilsson & Lundgren 2015). An advantage of this approach is that it makes it possible to analyse all bills in a similar manner, even though they vary in design.

Results

In line with descriptions of cultural policy as a conflict zone (Nielsen 2006; see also Lindsköld 2015), the SD's non-government bills are often written in clear opposition to the government and regularly point out dangers in the government's cultural policies. In the following, I describe and analyse the bills' ideological operationalisation of cultural heritage, beginning with a presentation of what can be seen as the SD's definition of cultural heritage, and continuing with discussions of the supposed threats to this heritage, and how objectivity and dis-identification become central aspects of the SD's cultural policy and populist agenda.

Heritage of the people

This section explores how the rhetoric of SD politicise 'heritage of the people' by pointing out specific phenomena as expressions of culture heritage, and how the party thereby presents itself as a saviour of a common national culture.

The contemporary Swedish government states that the Swedish cultural heritage 'can be understood as traces and expressions from the past that are attributed value and are used in the present' (Prop. 2016/17:116, p. 57, accessed 2 April 2021). The significance of keeping definitions open and leaving ongoing concretisations to professionals and civil society is recurringly emphasised.

In marked opposition to this view, the SD's definition is on another level. Not only do the party treat cultural heritage as a set of traditional and popular historical artefacts and events – as a common Swedish legacy to which Swedish people of today can supposedly relate. They also do not hesitate to argue in favour of themselves designating specific phenomena as cultural heritage. This view of cultural heritage is characteristic for the bills in general. It is reflected when representatives of the SD urge the government to preserve summer pasture farming as part of Swedish cultural heritage (bill 2014/15:2833 accessed 26 April 2021), as well as when they strive to constitute snuff as an important aspect of Swedish cultural heritage:

> It has centuries-old origins and is completely unique in the world. The Sweden Democrats takes pride in wanting to preserve and strengthen Swedish culture and Swedish traditions, products and other phenomena connected to it (bill 2020/21:2030 accessed 27 April 2021).

Snuff is presented as a 'world-unique' phenomenon with 'centuries-old origins', and is something which the SD 'takes pride' in wanting to preserve and strengthen. But it is when the concrete phenomena such as snuff and summer pastures are linked to 'Swedish culture' that the idea of a (possible) cohesive community is supported. While 'Swedish culture' mainly refers to itself, it also manages to ascribe value to other signs. In this sense, 'Swedish culture' works as a 'master signifier', a positively charged sign that brings order and creates harmony in a fragmented reality (Žižek 2008, Žižek 2006). In the SD's rhetoric, 'Swedish culture', but also statements about the importance of (preserving) 'Swedish history' and 'Swedish identity', appear as such signs that manage to lend an aura of specificity to the phenomena of pasture farming and snuff.

Contributing to the power of master signifiers is an emotional charge or 'stickiness', which means that they can speak to many people despite or thanks to their ambiguity:

> As a part of the Sweden Democrats' long-term efforts to strengthen the core of Swedish culture and re-establish a common national identity, we propose a sharp increase in support of the preservation of cultural heritage and the revitalisation of traditional, popular Swedish culture (bill 2015/16:761 accessed 14 April 2021).

This is an example of how SD politicise 'heritage of the people' (cf. Kaya 2020) as a 'heritage of below' (Robertson and Webster 2017), by the linking of a 'common national identity' and a 'traditional popular culture'. However, it is only through its lack of precision, as well as emotional charge, as 'Swedish culture' – in formulations such as 'the core of Swedish culture' – can form the basis of notions of a desirable national community. Although many are probably aware of the

difficulties of identifying the core of Swedish culture or establishing a common identity, the ideas comprise an appealing attraction through allusions to belonging and a traditional folk culture. The choice of the word 're-establish' further suggests that the 'common national identity', something that once was, but is now threatened or even lost. By positioning themselves as a party whose 'long-term efforts' has been to counteract the threats, the SD emerges as a reliable saviour and restorer of national identity.

An objective cultural heritage and evidence-based museums

In the rhetoric of the non-government bills, cultural heritage is treated as a tool or a means to achieve political goals, such as a unified and monocultural nation. In order to achieve this unity, the politicians of SD emphasise their role in countering threats to the Swedish cultural heritage. This section explores the SD's relation to contemporary political views on cultural heritage as an objective phenomenon. A initial example can be found in a non-government bill in which the party presents an idea for a fund with the purpose of making cultural heritage and museums accessible to more people. But the proposal is conditional and entails reduced funding:

> . . . we reduce funding that focuses on multiculturalism, as well narrow and polarising integration measures. In addition, funding for organisations based on gender and ethnicity has been reduced. It should be obvious that associations that receive some form of public support must also be open to the public (bill 2018/19:1913 accessed 13 April 2021).

The non-government bill as a whole is characterised by traditional rhetorical strategies, for example, the linking of political opponents and specific phenomena, such as multiculturalism and integration, and attributing negative connotations to these phenomena through words such as 'narrow' and 'polarising'. Furthermore, the bill states that certain sectarian activities, i.e. associations based on gender and ethnicity, have excluded people in general. According to the SD, this justifies grant reductions. Even more interesting is that the bill appears to refer to fundamental and universal rights. The SD's ambition appears to be to restore an 'objective' social order, in which everyone (the 'people') is treated equally and where no one receives special benefits on the basis of either gender or ethnicity.

These allusions to an 'objective democracy' serve as an example of the thesis that we live in a world in which (successful) ideology seems to be non-ideological: 'the prevailing ideology is that of cynicism; people no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological propositions seriously' (Žižek 2008, 30). This does not mean that ideology is no longer important, but that people have become blind 'to the structuring power of ideological fantasy' (Žižek 2008, 30). In other words, it is by appearing to be more important than politics and ideology that an ideology becomes effective: it is when an ideology expresses something that seems reasonable and motivated (common-sense) that it is perceived as being representative of the right and true. As stated by Falk (2020): ' . . . belief in facts becomes the cynical subject's last hope for a non-ideological reality, free from political struggle between different interests' (Falk 2020). Non-ideological ideology simply appears to be the most realistic alternative.

The SD's rhetoric gives the impression of offering such a reality when a non-government bill states that: '. . . the task of museum politics must be to strive for an evidence-based dissemination of knowledge based on the museum collections' (bill 2020/21:799 accessed 23 April 2021). In the rhetoric, the very idea of museums as evidence-based knowledge institutions that communicate true cultural heritage can appear to be 'objective', self-evident and non-ideological aspirations.

Political opponents, on the other hand, are regarded as being representatives of a harmful and biased cultural heritage policy. The SD believes that the government's policy poses a threat to the independence of museums, as they, for example, are expected to counteract xenophobia. The SD emphasises that it is important to 'avoid museums of the future becoming platforms for certain political ideas or ideologies' (bill 2020/21:799 accessed 11 March 2021). Furthermore, the SD states

that museums should not contribute to a certain kind of societal development or be encouraged to challenge those in power: 'Our history has its own value and should not be filtered through contemporary values' (bill 2020/21:799 accessed 12 April 2021). This is also why the SD advocates for investments in such institutions that are considered to strengthen a common cultural heritage, for example, the The Royal Armoury, 'Nordiska Museet' and the Swedish defence history museums (bill 2010/11:Fi231 accessed 16 April 2021). These institutions are regarded by the SD to (have the potential to) represent a historically correct heritage free from ideological missions. Thus, characteristic for the rhetoric of the SD is a prioritisation of the view that cultural heritage is a factual phenomenon, and also, that their political opponents as well as some museums have purely ideological purposes.

The SD claims that once museums become based on correct knowledge and accurate information, no special measures will be needed to counter xenophobia:

> If the purpose is to increase the Swedish people's knowledge of other cultures, this will be best achieved through the correct dissemination of information, and if the correct information is disseminated, no [political] goal is needed to curb xenophobia (bill 2020/21:799 accessed 12 April 2021).

Notable in the rhetoric of the SD is that 'ideology' exclusively includes phenomena such as work to counter xenophobia, not the SD's own view of what a museum should represent. This exemplifies how their own ideological viewpoint is being 'de-ideologized': it is by positioning themselves as neutral observers of the museums' activities, and promoting (and hence neutralising) ideas that museums should be exclusively evidence based and not function as tools for political aspirations that the SD's arguments appear to be reasonable.

Dis-identification and legitimisation of a non-ideological heritage

The SD's rhetoric is primarily about creating a sense of belonging between subjects, which is accomplished with the help of the above-mentioned master signifier, as well as by creating a position in opposition to the establishment, that is, by expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and conveying the impression of both representing and wanting to reintroduce order. With the help of the 'politics of decline' (Elgenius and Rydberg 2017), the SD creates an image according to which the political opponents use cultural heritage for wrongful purposes, and in general have created an overly complicated society that is now threatened by decay. Thus, the politics of decline favours an oppositional attitude while also demanding change and hoping for a political alternative that re-establishes a more respectful approach to the Swedish cultural heritage, as well as a cohesive national identity.

When the SD states that 'Swedish history and our cultural heritage are actively being destroyed' (bill 2017/18:3844 accessed 27 April 2021), and that 'our Christian cultural heritage [...] has unfortunately been deprioritised for a long time' (bill 2011/12:Fi242 accessed 16 April 2021), they pave the way for an oppositional, anti-elitist position and a rebellious subject who is appalled by the current state of affairs. This position draws strength from an ideology that has recurringly been described to create the impression that the major conflict is between the people and the elite (Jupskås 2012; Reynié 2016; Betz & Johnson 2004), and that right-wing radicalism represents 'ordinary people' opposing an unjust supremacy (Rydgren 2018).

Hence, the oppositional dimension in the SD's cultural heritage policy not only works politically but also ideologically. By presenting Swedish cultural heritage as being threatened by an ideologically biased supremacy, that is, by the government and the establishment, the SD opens up a position whereby people who oppose the government appear to do so because they are somehow free from ideological blinders and are exercising their *free subjectivity*. They seem to be able to make this choice voluntarily, with no ideological pressure. Thus, ideologies enable and protect a notion of *voluntary consent* (Žižek 2008). According to Althusser's concept of interpellation, the subject is (totally) subordinated ideological power. In contrast, Žižek suggests that successful ideologies work

through ideological *dis-identification* (Žižek 2008), that is, ideologies enable people to consciously distance themselves from established political ideals. The SD's idea of a threat to Swedish cultural heritage and cultural heritage institutions is effective in this context, as it not only supports an oppositional attitude but also notions of the critics' ideological independence.

A proposal that summarises key parts of the SD's oppositional view is presented in government bill 2020/21:799, where it is suggested that the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg should be closed because it '... is founded for a political purpose and has an ideological focus rather than a knowledge-based one' (bill 2020/21:799 accessed 210412). The proposal is in line with the SD's goal of preserving Swedish culture by replacing ideological institutions with more evidence-based ones, but it also enables people to see established institutions as inherently ideological and to distance themselves from them. Regardless of whether the proposal is accepted or not, it offers emotional satisfaction because it represents an oppositional position in relation to the establishment. Due to its transgression of the view of established society, the proposal is perceived as appealing. It offers the opportunity to, at least symbolically, 'punish' politicians believed to have abused their power. The proposal can therefore be seen as an attempt to establish social cohesion through disobedience or through a *'violation'* (cf. Žižek 2008). However, it is not a violation in a legal sense, but in relation to official values. The proposal allows for a collective departure from an official position, a dis-identification that is socially cohesive and that legitimises notions of a knowledge-based and non-ideological cultural heritage.

Multiculturalism as a sublime object

According to the rhetoric of the non-government bills, and as indicated throughout this text, Sweden's cultural heritage is threatened by multicultural forces. This is reflected by the recurring use of polarisation as a tool articulated in populist discourses to 'demarcate frontiers between "us" and "them"' (Palonen 2009, 321). 'Us' is represented by Sweden's cultural heritage and Swedish culture, history and identity, but also by the SD and the category of 'Swedes'. Correspondingly, 'them' is created through a linking of multiculturalism, world culture, non-Swedishness, but also by political opponents and the 'establishment'. It is also 'them' who constitute the enemy and represent the main threat to 'us' and to what is perceived as the 'true' cultural heritage in the SD's populist discourse. Because the cherished cultural heritage is often explicitly described as 'ours' 'they' are positioned as the reason for 'our' loss. With reference to Wodak (2015), it could be argued that the SD – through 'politics of fear' – constructs dangers and proposes scapegoats that are blamed for damaging the society.

That the SD – together with other right-wing parties – is using cultural heritage in the service of xenophobia and that they oppose multiculturalism has been highlighted in previous research on populism (Gustafsson and Karlsson 2011; Niklasson & Hølleland 2018; see also Reynié 2016). Lindsköld (2015) concludes however that the SD expresses itself more aggressively on the topic of multiculturalism than other Nordic right-wing parties, and that the abolishment of support for multiculturalism is a main issue for the party.

The ways in which multiculturalism surfaces in the bills as an important symbol of what the SD perceives as the 'enemy' and a threat to cultural heritage, is interesting because it exemplifies what Žižek (2008) refers to in terms of a sublime object: an 'obstacle' or impediment to a fully realised desire. In analyses of right-wing ideologies, such 'obstacles' are often pseudoconcretised into the figure of the immigrant – it is the immigrant that stands in the way from 'us' fulfilling our dreams of a society without internal contradictions. This is a rhetoric that often capsizes in racism. What happens in the studied bills is however that multiculturalism – a word that denotes both an observable societal condition and an ideology – takes the place of the immigrant. This way, the SD avoids the risk of being dismissed as racist, and, at the same time, includes the ideology of their opponents in their construction of the 'obstacle'. Multiculturalism is then evoked not only as the condition that causes societal problems (cf. Fangen and Vaage 2018), but more importantly, as an

ideology whose dominance within the establishment can explain why the political ideas of the SD's are not more broadly accepted and appreciated. Because it is the designated ideology of the opponents that is sublimated and constituted as the uncanny disturbance of the desired common cultural heritage, the position from which the SD's rhetoric is evoked as neutral and un-ideological.

This position as neutral and free from ideological thinking is also what helps the SD to distance itself from its affective and partly nostalgic relation to cultural heritage. While nostalgia is often interpreted along the lines of a selective and negatively charged romanticising sensitivity, it can also work to create links between emotional notions of the nation's cultural heritage and what is regarded as real historical events. The nostalgia of SD can be regarded emotionally active and culturally productive (cf. Smith 2006; Campbell, Smith, and Wetherell 2017; Johannisson 2001), in the sense that it utilises these notions to launch a political identity that takes cultural heritage seriously and that is invested in 'saving' it for future generations. Heritage has been described as a form of 'futurology' (Harrison 2015); it is produced in a conversation with the past, but it is used to stake out the future (cf. Smith 2006). In this pursuit, multiculturalism and the Swedish cultural heritage in general work together as symbols of threat and guiding stars, respectively.

Discussion

The idea that heritage is a 'highly politicized process' (McDowell 2008, 43) and that cultural heritage and heritage institutions are used politically in nationalist projects and to legitimise regimes is nothing new (see e.g. Madsen 2014; González 2014; Goulding and Domic 2009). In the cultural heritage rhetoric of the non-government bills, nationalist ideas were reproduced, but not to legitimise a regime (the government) but to attack such a regime and the short-comings associated with it. With references to 'the people', constructions of cultural heritage as objective and related to evidence-based activities (rather than ideological) were used to oppose the hegemony of the 'authorized heritage' (Smith 2006) of established cultural heritage institutions. These constructions were then used as explicit tools in an attack on a government-supported prioritisation of multiculturalism, immigration, norm criticism, etc. Instead of the somewhat more problematising view of cultural heritage that characterise government policies (bill 2009/10:3:25 accessed 30 April 2021), the SD promoted ideas about a traditional and popular cultural heritage supposedly representing both the core of Swedish culture and the resources that could unite the nation (cf. Lindsköld 2015; Helmersson 2020). This nostalgic fantasy of cultural heritage as the basis of a cohesive common identity has parallels with previous research (see, for example, Gustafsson and Karlsson 2011; González 2014; Goulding and Domic 2009).

With reference to Žižek, it was possible to explore in detail the populist and nationalist discourse that was reproduced in the rhetoric of concrete political proposals of the SD. Master signifiers that refer to an authentic Swedish cultural heritage, and multiculturalism as a kind of sublime object, represented the basis of notions of loss and a nostalgic desire to recreate (the ideological fantasy of) a cohesive nation based on a common cultural heritage. The SD's seemingly anti-ideological stance paved the way for ideological dis-identification, that is, the idea that only subjects who are anti-establishment exercise their free subjectivity and represent defenders of a 'true' cultural heritage, while others blindly submit to the ideological power of an elite. Through repeated references to (the need for) evidence-based museums, the SD's rhetoric also gave the impression of representing an equal social order, in which no one should be prioritised on the basis of gender or ethnicity. In line with Reynié's (2016) view on heritage populism, this is an example of how the rhetoric of SD is based on a fictional concern for defending freedom and equity, thus partly borrowing from the very ideology they portray as a threat.

According to the non-government bills, the SD not only utilises cultural heritage strategically to attack the government but also to establish a direct connection between the party's seemingly non-ideological ideology and Swedish cultural heritage: cultural heritage is not only used to convey a political message and criticise the government, it is also used to legitimise the SD's political project and make it appear rationally based and historically legitimised. Ideology and cultural heritage are intertwined. In that sense, and in the words of González (2014), '[h]eritage no longer functions as a means to convey ideological content; rather, new ideological contents are rapidly materialised to achieve heritage status. Raw ideology becomes bare heritage'. In other words, the SD's populist and monocultural ideology appears to represent something original and authentic, since it is directly linked to Swedish cultural heritage. Multiculturalism and making efforts to deconstruct, criticise and have 'cultural heritage' include and represent different groups' experiences, on the other hand, are made into sentient and hostile disruptions that tarnish cultural heritage. Thus, the SD's ideology gives the impression of being something other than ideology (cf. Žižek 2008) – a direct expression of Swedish cultural heritage. The SD's ideology 'becomes' cultural heritage and vice versa, and if cultural heritage is an objective phenomenon, then the same must apply to the ideology of the SD. When the SD states that Swedish cultural heritage is threatened by other cultures and in need of protection, the party legitimises its own seemingly non-ideological cultural policy (cf. Lindsköld 2015).

The international knowledge crisis associated with post-truth, and which is expressed through concepts such as fake news and alternative facts (see e.g. Harsin 2018; Farkas and Schou 2020), has been regarded as creating a backlash in the form of *neorigorism*, i.e. an emphasis on, and yearning for objective facts (cf. Dahler-Larsen 2013; Carlsson, Carbin & Nilsson 2018). Such facts are not open to critical reflection but can be understood as inviolable and everlasting – and hence offer feelings of security for the ones who are included and acknowledged by them. An interesting aspect of the SD's non-government bills is that they are directly related to post-truth, that is, they draw conclusions about the harmful effects of multiculturalism on the heritage arena without providing specific evidence, and they allude to objective facts, for example, when treating cultural heritage as an actual phenomenon and when emphasising the importance of evidence-based museums. Thus, the SD's cultural heritage rhetoric constitutes a counterpoint to academically established ideas about cultural heritage as different forms of meaning making, the result of 'heritagisation' (Kuutma 2009), where '[w]hat is considered "heritage" is continuously subject to interpretation and reinterpretation, claim and counter claim, and negotiation' (Harrison 2005, 7; see also Lowenthal 2015). At the same time, such an approach to cultural heritage can be used to problematise the SD's rhetoric. If, like McDowell (2008), one believes that: 'heritage can be seen as an aggregation of myths, values and inheritances determined and defined by the needs of societies in the present', it could be said that the SD's monocultural view of cultural heritage 'involves the creation of an aesthetic canon that endows materiality with meaning in the museum by evicting history' (González 2014, 155). For the SD, this creation is about highlighting aspects of unproblematised popular artefacts as objective and unifying cultural heritage in which signs of the multicultural nation as well as the ideology that would value them are disqualified as 'Swedish cultural heritage'.

The Sweden Democrats' rhetoric of positioning themselves as un-ideological, while criticising the establishment for being blinded by ideological convictions that allow for their view on Swedish cultural heritage to go to waste, is key to their politics and the way it is increasingly enmeshing the debate on cultural heritage. It is a strategy that rejects antagonists on the basis of 'being ideological' and thus incapable of seeing reality as it is. It would be of great interest to explore the everyday practices through which the knowledge institutions that the SD includes in their construction of the establishment – e.g. universities, the media and, not least, museums – relate and respond to the post-ideological state that harbours the tendency to undermine their knowledge and practices.

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