

Enjoying the Fall

The Normalisation of the Far-Right as an Algorithmically-Mediated
Fantasy of Ontological (In)Security

Pasko Kisić-Merino



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Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Political Science

DOCTORAL THESIS | Karlstad University Studies | 2025:9

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urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-102957

ISSN 1403-8099

ISBN 978-91-7867-544-9 (print)

ISBN 978-91-7867-545-6 (pdf)

<https://doi.org/10.59217/ygdq9007>

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Distribution:

Karlstad University

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Department of Political, Historical, Religious and Cultural Studies

SE-651 88 Karlstad, Sweden

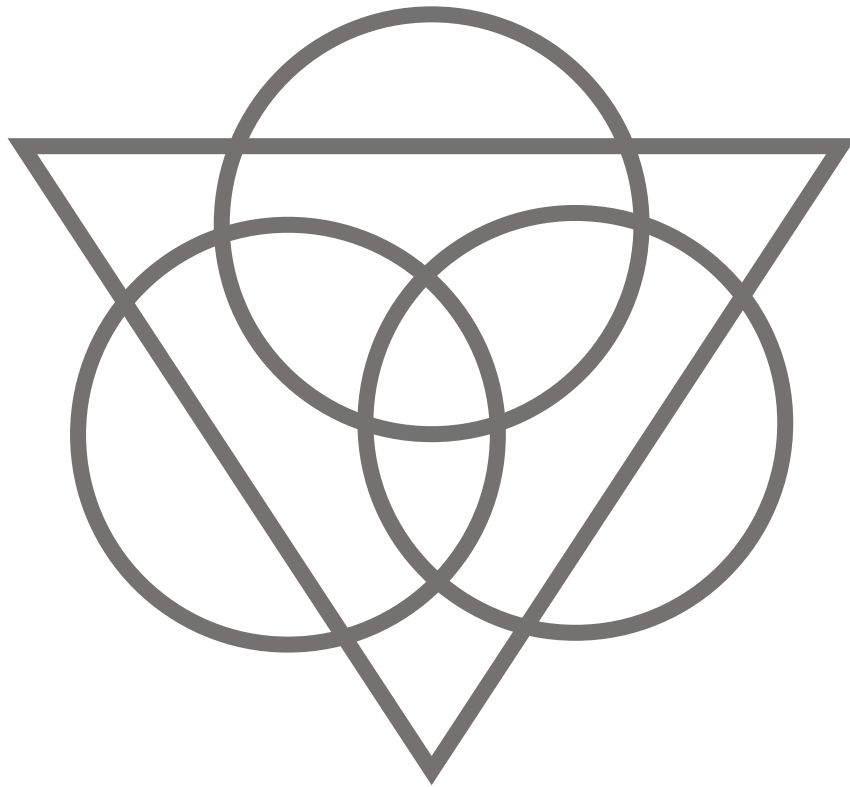
+46 54 700 10 00

Print: Universitetstryckeriet, Karlstad 2025

WWW.KAU.SE

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Department of Political Science
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Declaration of funding: This work has been partially supported by the Wallenberg AI, Autonomous Systems and Software program – Humanity and Society (WASP-HS) funded by the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation and the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg foundation.

To Kate, Alana, Carmen, and Rachael.

Acknowledgements

Well, that was a ride. I have been warned to keep this succinct. I will fail. It takes a village to raise a thesis, and I am very lucky my village is vast. Reflecting upon my entire PhD is frankly daunting as I finish off the last details of this thesis. Gradually, since moving to Sweden to do my Masters degree, my interest towards developing a career in academia peaked. However, my particular focus on both psycho-political and technological phenomena made it very difficult to convince some faculties of my project's value, which was very discouraging.

In this context, Annika Fredén's project with WASP-HS took not only an interest in my project and profile but also in how I visualised researching politics. It is, then, to Annika to whom I offer my opening thanks for trusting me, giving me the opportunity to participate in a challenging yet inspiring research project and team, and especially for tolerating my poststructuralist verbosity. Your constant support throughout these years has been invaluable not only to completing this project but also to developing as a better (yet perhaps grumpier) researcher. Briefly after, I also met my co-supervisor, Malin Rönnblom, who was always keen on involving me and my research with the department, sharing in rich discussions (sometimes with a good hefeweizen or her personal favourite, Norrlands Guld) and otherwise trying to support and inspire me through both joyful and harrowing times. I thank you, Malin, for your indefatigable belief, optimism, support, and directness, without which I could not have made it. As my research continued into the second year, I agreed with Annika and Malin that given my theoretical and topical bent, it would be important to bring my former mentor, Catarina Kinnvall, to the supervision team. Akin to Rambo, Catta had veteran-like, first-hand experience in dealing with the chaos of my research process, thought patterns, and conceptual shelling, yet always remained a calm, kind, intellectually inspiring, and nurturing presence. Catta, thanks so much for – once again – guiding me through these analytical and conceptual trenches, for your enormous friendship, and your refreshing candidness. To my dear supervisors, then: you have been fantastic bosses (and sorry for all the long emails).

Writing a PhD thesis transcends the monstrosity that awaits you in the following pages, instead also entailing the construction and nurturing of a community of researchers, colleagues, and friends. In that sense, I want to thank my inspiring colleagues and friends at Karlstad University for welcoming

me with open arms, for sharing good moments and laughs, and for challenging my work and views in a way that improved them. I thus offer enormous thanks to Tomas Mitander, Andreas Öjehag, Micke Granberg, David Olsson, David Scott, Idris Waysi, Mette Marie Stæhr Harder, Inga Narbutaitė Aflaki, Freddy Kjellström, Malin Stegmann, Caroline Karlsson, and Magnus Lindh for their support and camaraderie throughout these years. I would also like to express my enormous thanks to Maria Alakangas and Tonje Grahn for always making me feel welcomed and supported as part of this institution. Another special group of colleagues at Karlstad University I would like to thank is my dear PhD friends: Petter Falk, the first Karlstad PhD I got to meet, with whom I've been able to share my passion for the interplay of technology and politics, as well as having amazing debates about Deleuze and Lacan. Your welcoming spirit will be missed; Alesia Rudnik, with whom I have shared countless hours of complaining about the universe, waiting for late SJ trains, and, most prominently, interrupting our talks about STS to share pictures of our kitties; Johanna Tängnas, for being my PhD sensei in the early, uncertainty-ridden career moments; Jasmin Doreen Lind, my Lacanian sister-in-arms, for your infatigable support and protection, for challenging the man, and for your sharp, critical, and direct mind; Kristin Mikkalsen, for your amazing friendship all these years, kindness, care, and unwavering support – also, for introducing me to everything Norwegian-cultural. A very special thanks goes to my friendo, Michaela Padden. Throughout these years, you have always supported me in every way, from opening your home, discussing our research, sharing dinners and drinks, and our love for late 80s and early 90s music. We do not deserve you, amiga (and yes, let's have yet another glass of wine).

This PhD journey could not have been possible without the support of the Wallenberg AI, Autonomous Systems and Software Program – Humanity and Society (WASP-HS) and the many colleagues and friends I made through it. I want to especially thank Eva Sjöstrand for being the charismatic, supportive, and caring face of WASP-HS – Eva, none of us swamp critters would have been able to traverse this maze without you; you are awesome. Enormous thanks also go to my WASP-HS research team, with whom, despite our epistemological differences, we have been able to develop some great research on AI and politics: Moa Johansson, Bastiaan Bruinsma, and my dear and bright Denitsa Saynova. I also want to thank Francis Lee and Ericka Johnson for being both inspiring, welcoming, and thought-provoking – your STS course was the first time I felt welcomed in my hectic epistemological approach. In the same line, I thank Simon Lindgren for welcoming me as a visiting fellow at Umeå

University and for taking the time to help me shape some challenging angles of my research on social media. Many thanks go also to the dear friends I have made through WASP-HS: Sophie Mainz, Clàudia Figueras, Henrik Sigurdh, Alexandra Farazouli, Charlotte Högberg, Maria Rogg, Bijona Troqe, Johannes Geith, Igor Ryazanov, and Gregor Retteneger. Special thanks to Emelie Karlsson, Dr Je, for your indefatigable kindness and empathy, all the amazing talks about life, politics, and the PhD experience, and introducing all things norrländsk and (I guess) P2. They should call it P2SD.

Some of you may be asking, “*Whoah, hold on, I am from WASP-HS too, where is my mention? What’s up with this guy!?*” – and if you do, then you are a #MeanGirl, chillax. My deepest thanks to Amandus Krantz, Kashyap Haresamudram, Silvia Carretta, Dominika Lisy, Mafalda Gamboa-Samuelsson, and Rachael Garrett. This wonderful WASP-HS group of scoundrelly, yet irrefutably good-looking PhDs formed, as one does, over common grievances against...well, the Symbolic Order. They have been sisters and brothers throughout the absolute worst of this journey, yet by themselves compose the high points. Your love, support, optimistic pessimism, and rageful protection will always remain with me, and I hope it acts as a basis for the longest of friendships. Thanks for being a wonderfully everpresent element in my life. Amandus, thank you for being such a staunch, caring, and unwavering friend; you are truly an inspiring Tolkienian-like character shining in an apathetic world. Kash, thank you for your riveting chaos, your contagious energy, for all those political debates, and for always making time for us. Silvia, thanks for your empathy and for always being concerned for my well-being. At some point, we should write that paper! Mafalda, thanks for being an inspiring human being, always directly, critically, and strongly speaking your mind, especially for those who can’t. Nika, thank you for your amazing combination of optimistic energy, sudden “*HÄ!?*”s, German seriousness, amazing humour, and your amazing and inquisitive intellect – I’d be terrified to debate you, especially considering Schrödinger. And Rachael, you will have to wait.

I would like to thank a number of inspiring colleagues, researchers, writers, journalists, and thinkers with which – directly and indirectly – have greatly influenced my research: Ian Manners, Christoffer Kølvråa, Tobias Hübbinette, Tereza Capelos, Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Ruth Wodak, Kristina Jönsson, Magdalena Bexell, Derek Hook, Aurelien Mondon, Aaron Winter, Christopher Browning, Jacob Johanssen, Michał Krzyżanowski, Daniel Møller Ølgaard, Yannis Stavrakakis, and Mathilda Åkerlund. I also want to extend my thanks

to Michael Burns (and the Wisecrack team), Natalie Wynn, Kenan Malik, Owen Jones, Arwa Mahdawi, and for all the amazing, urgent, and inspiring political content produced through these tough years. Furthermore, I want to express special thanks to my opponents throughout my PhD journey for their kind yet critical, imaginative, and provocative comments: Ov Cristian Norocel and Ted Svensson. Finally, I would like to thank my PhD examination committee, Tina Askanius, Henrik Örnebring, Stefan Borg, and my opponent, Jason Glynos.

Enormous thanks also go to my dear friends in Sweden, Peru, and elsewhere. From my friends in Sweden, I would like to thank Thea (and Tiki), Lisa (and Loke), Filip, Saša, Lana, Joakim, Charlotte (and lil' Harry!), Erin, Axel, Tom, Sarah, Claudia Núñez-Pacheco, Jorge, and Miranda. I am too lucky to have such a wonderful group of friends and a second family even, without which this place and time would lack any meaning. Special thanks to Thea, Lisa, Filip, and Saša, who, through these years and far before, have always been there to drag me out of my depressive rabbit hole – those dinner parties, political debates, hangouts, and, of course watching Derek and cousin Greg's shenanigans have been more important than you could imagine. A big thanks goes to my dear friend Frederic, who despite the distance keeps being an source of inspiration; and to Aleksandra and Tonka for your support, amazing humour, and candidness. Many thanks also go to my dear friends from the Masters who have kept their support and friendship after these years: Vincent, Emilia, Suzanne, Julia, Fabian, and Nino (and Noah!). Special thanks to Erla (and Meowfi and Lepurushi), who greatly helped me not to give up in attempting to get this PhD and supported me in every way during the harsh early stages.

I would also like to extend enormous thanks to a group of friends who have been ever-present, caring, creative, and simply wonderful during these torrid years: the Faserast crew. Dominic/[Jimmy], thanks for being the least English English Frenchman I've ever met – your wit, wisdom, friendship, and dry sense of humour have always been incredibly refreshing, as well as your great debating skills and passion for history. You should do a PhD. Sofia/[Aurma], thanks for your amazing energy, unquenching enthusiasm, kindness, and always being welcoming and tolerant enough to laugh at all of our geek jokes. Michael/[Siubhan], you are one of my oldest friends in Stockholm, and I couldn't think of someone more supportive and loyal; thank you for always welcoming me into your home, for your energy and amazing political engagement, and for being a never-ending source of ideas and creativity. Petter/[Alfred], my most demure Swedish friend, thanks for your incredible

warmth and kindness, for always honestly and directly inquiring about my health and wellbeing, and for your sharp and critical yet calm mind. *Mon ami*, Camille/[Daggy], thanks a lot for your beautiful mind and heart; I have met very few people with such inspiring wanderlust, and your energy, pessimistic optimism, creativity, and kindness are an example of how to improve as a person. Rachael/[Devy], you will have to wait.

Many thanks also go out to my dear Peruvian friends. While time has been cruel in extending distances, all your love and care are still and will always be there. Enormous thanks to my Peruvian/Catalan contingent in Barcelona, (my bestie) Renzo, Diana, Matías, and Julia, who, despite the pressures of time and space, have managed to be a constant, encouraging, and reassuring presence in my life. Verónica (Veri), Elisa, and Elio, thanks for always being fabulous and somehow managing to produce the best laughs despite the sheer horror of the world. To Ignacio, one of my oldest and dearest friends, thanks a lot for being such a staunch and loyal friend throughout the years despite the impending radio silence. Many thanks also go to my friend and mentor, Farid Kahhat – if you wonder, “*Where the hell does this type of research come from?*” he is your answer, so please direct any complaints towards him. Special thanks go to my lovely and scoundrelly möträ, who are the absolute core of my Peruvian heart, brothers and sisters: Martín, Micaela, Gonzalo, Laura, (also my bestie) Mariano, Camila, Nicolás, and Kiara – I love you and miss you deeply. A giant thanks goes to my dear friend Andrés Abugattas, who is also on a PhD journey. Abiuf, your constant, unwavering, and absurdly supportive friendship throughout these years has kept me sane, and our political and philosophical debates have improved me as a person and a researcher. I am too lucky to have you as a friend and mentor [*bre bre jurriar, copo de nieve*].

In all these years, my family has been a cornerstone of my survival and growth. It is not easy to put this into words, but I will try. To my new family: Ali, Bill, Wendy, and James (and, of course, Bertie, Luna, and Benny): thanks so much for welcoming me with open arms, for your warmth, kindness, and incredible sense of humour. To my sister- and brother-in-law, Carolina and Alessandro, first and more importantly, for being living saints who tolerate my siblings, but also for all your incredible support for them, my family, and myself. To my father, Pasko, despite our many differences, thanks for trying to constantly connect me to Peru, for always checking on me and wanting to involve yourself in my life despite the distance. To my brother, Ivo, for having the sharpest, most inquisitive mind I know, but especially for having an enormous and kind heart

and always trying to keep the family together despite my penchant for isolation. To my niece, Alana – like Kevin Costner said in that song: *everything I do, I do it for you* (I think it was when he was cosplaying as Robin Hood). You are the most wonderful inspiration, an amazing and loving person; your joy, intellect, and political commitment tethers me to your waking world. I do not deserve to have you as a niece (but you do need to get better at Overcooked, though). To my sister, Kate, I have run out of words to describe not only how much I owe you in all these years but how you have impacted me as a person. You are the eldest sister, an example and a constant source of strength, inspiration, and unconditional care that I can only hope to learn from. I wish I had 1/10th of your energy, hermana, and 1/10th of your drive to make everyone's lives better. Thank you for not giving up on me. Finally, to my mum, Carmen: your unwavering, fan-like support, optimism, and care since I am in Sweden and despite these tough years is without parallel. Much of the essence of what I do and what I want to accomplish with this thesis, as a professional, and as a political human being, come from your example. Your enormous empathy, your ability to truly listen and understand, and your belief that no matter what personal pit of despair one is in, we should never stop caring for the other keep animating the charcoal that passes as my heart. My solidarity I owe to you.

Finally, the biggest thanks go to Rachael. Rach, throughout these long years in which mind and body have suffered horrendously time and again, you have always carried me, smiled, and protected me against myself (or, as you call it, *douche Pasko*). I admire you enormously, in so many ways. Your wit and intellect have inspired not only my research but also my views of society and politics. You are a star already, but I do not doubt that one day, you'll shine even more – I hope, in my sky. Beyond the emotional-gas metaphors, I want to thank you for all your love and unwavering companionship, for taking an honest interest in almost every aspect of my life, and for building the most beautiful, welcoming home with me in the farthest land (like Alana, though, git gud at Overcooked). This thesis would truly have been impossible without you and Filete. Which, of course, means: thank you, Filete / Chanchi / Pepito, for being the best, cuddliest, yet most annoying companion ever – you are a fur goblin and a scoundrel, but we love you just the way you are.

February 2025

Abstract

Over the past decade, the far-right has become normalised globally. The tolerance and wilful welcoming of these once-shunned ideologies challenge the weakened modern liberal order and signify its limitations as modernity's symbolic authority. This phenomenon involves an unprecedented ontology in which far-right fantasies of "stolen" ethnocultural wholeness and supremacy propagate through social media governed by anti-democratic, neoliberal imperatives of attention hoarding. Fantasies of self-continuity amidst "permanent crises" – ontological security – are diffused via social media, whose algorithmic governance of our everyday shapes our identities and experiences of the political. This problem points to the pressing need to explore the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions of far-right normalisation.

This thesis provides a novel perspective by mobilising Lacanian ontological security to investigate the role of these dimensions in normalising the far-right. First, examining the link between White supremacy and deglobalisation discourses, I find that these pushbacks against liberal democracy become affectively influential in justifying violence against essentialised others. Second, social and traditional media enable the emotional governance of far-right actors, generating feelings of ontological (in)security that position them as legitimate interlocutors. Third, I examine how mainstream right-wing politicians partake in transgressive enjoyment with the far-right against "threatening" others. I find that far-right normalisation is inextricable from the reformation of identities, in which previously held liberal beliefs recede due to the anxiety of becoming politically undesired. Finally, I analyse far-right normalisation as a fantasy of ontological security produced by social media. I find that, in commodifying political antagonisms between liberals and the far-right, these platforms reinforce neoliberalism while gradually eroding the modern liberal order.

Svensk sammanfattning

Under det senaste decenniet har högerextremismen ökat och normaliserats i den så kallade västliga hemisfären och i andra delar av världen. Denna högerförskjutning, tolerans och välkomnande utmanar den försvagade moderna liberala ordningen och visar på dess begränsningar som modernitetens symboliska auktoritet. Detta fenomen innebär en ontologi där högerextrema fantasier om "stulen" etnokulturell helhet och överlägsenhet sprider sig till offentliga sfärer genom sociala medier som styrs av antidemokratiska, nyliberala krav på vår ständiga uppmärksamhet. Dessa fantasier om självkontinuitet mitt i "permanenta kriser" - ontologisk säkerhet - sprids via sociala medier, vars algoritmiska styrning av vår vardag formar identiteter och upplevelser av det politiska. Detta pekar på ett akut behov av att utforska de psykopolitiska och teknomediala dimensionerna av högerextrem normalisering.

Denna avhandling bidrar med ett nytt perspektiv på detta genom att använda Lacaniansk ontologisk säkerhet för att undersöka vilken roll samkonstitueringen av dessa dimensioner har för normaliseringen av extremhögern. Först undersöker jag den historiska kopplingen mellan vit makt och deglobaliseringsdiskurser i normaliseringen av extremhögern, och finner att denna motreaktion mot liberal demokrati blir affektivt inflytelserik i sin förmåga att rättfärdiga våld mot essentialiserade "andra". För det andra analyserar jag sociala och traditionella mediers roll och konstaterar att de möjliggör en känslomässig styrning av de högerextrema aktörerna genom att generera känslor av ontologisk (o)säkerhet som positionerar dem som legitima samtalspartner. För det tredje undersöker jag hur vanliga högerpolitiker deltar i gränsöverskridande "nöjen" tillsammans med högerextrema mot "hotfulla" andra. Jag finner att högerextrem normalisering hänger ihop med reformeringen av identiteter, där tidigare liberala övertygelser försvinner på grund av oron för att bli politiskt oönskad. Slutligen analyserar jag högerextrem normalisering som en fantasi om ontologisk säkerhet som skapas av sociala medier. Jag finner att dessa plattformar, genom att kommersialisera politiska motsättningar mellan liberala och högerextrema subjekt, förstärker nyliberalismen samtidigt som de gradvis urholkar den moderna liberala ordningen.

Preface

This preface is a personal note on the motivation that shapes this dissertation. The song “Bullet with Butterfly Wings” by the Smashing Pumpkins (Corgan, 1995) acted both as an initial inspiration for and a metaphor evolving alongside the development of this thesis. Initially, this metaphor of an all-consuming world [*“the world is a vampire”*] was transposed into how social media has been conveyed and celebrated as a key *promise* of modernity. This promise encompassed connection, freedom, and progress achieved through reason and technological prowess, especially in the so-called Western hemisphere. The “bullet” symbolised the harm accompanying this promise: the rise and normalisation of far-right discourses threatening the hard-earned progress of liberal democracy throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Originally, I saw this process as a cruel twist of social media’s promise, with far-right leaders, followers, and networks exploiting their organisational- and emotional-binding capacities to mainstream their exclusionary grievances and rage. My immersion into Lacanian psychoanalysis, critical studies, and ontological security illuminated yet complexified this problem, forcing an encounter with a glimpse of its unfathomable darkness. The interplay between the attention economy’s preeminence, the neurotic complicity of (neo)liberalism, and the affective processes shaping our identities amidst the crisis-ridden fall of Empire expanded and blurred the metaphor. This techno-mediated encounter with *the Real* – that which resists symbolisation – of far-right normalisation as a *symptom* and stabilising *fantasy* of late modernity guided this expansion, highlighting the obscenity of the allure of its (neo)liberal wings.

The metaphor’s conundrum became about its grotesque yet captivating composition, serving as a window into an unprecedented, anxiety-inducing stage of world politics. In this undecidable epoch, the Real of the political has been sublimated through technologies of “freedom” (brutalisation), “connection” (supremacy), and “love” (exclusion) compelling our genuflection towards “the” algorithm. The ubiquity of social media mirrors that of its techno-libertarian, proto-fascist oligarchs like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg. They and their Silicon Valley facsimiles drive and profit from the disaffection concocted via these technologies, and their centre-stage in the public sphere also signifies our embeddedness *into* and the structure *of* this fall of Empire. This is, the transition into neoliberalism’s new host, a far-right monstrosity grafting the legitimising limbs of a paradoxically nurturing liberal order. We are not nudged to “*enjoy!*” and consume the online for sedation but

to mobilise our anxieties and enjoyment against radical change, reproducing political belonging in the comforting bosom of neoliberalism's spectacle. Where before liberal wings seemed to veil the surreptitious far-right ugliness carried by the bullet, the harrowing journey of this thesis reveals their unconscious inextricability or, speaking with Žižek, that this *mask* is all there is. The political sphere's semi-public nature responds to this sublimation of the Real of the political, projecting and reinforcing the obscene yet alluring continuum of political bodies it claims to abhor: the far-right. Liberal modernity is the bullet with butterfly wings, the graspable aspect of our Symbolic Order. Social media is its Imaginary reflection and the symbolic perpetrator enabling the encroachment of far-right techno-brutality that is groomed into hosting and inheriting neoliberalism's hegemonic mantle.

Crises, like those shaping modern subjectivities, imply an eventual resolution or release. However, the neoliberal apparatus operating through social media, increasingly explicit in their support for a "new era" of normalised far-right politics, forecloses this unravelling and perpetuates crises. Antonio Gramsci's 1930s reflection on crisis under capitalism forebodingly resonates with its contemporary structure: "*The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear*" (Gramsci, 1999, p. 554). Like the savage plundering of our planet, our affects, emotions, fantasies, desires, enjoyment, and bodies are exploited as limitless resources under the attention economy of crises. This relentless, gorging apparatus drains us through the spectacle – the perversion of the political under neoliberalism – that we "need" to consume in order to belong. However, this assumption and operation mark the fracture point of neoliberalism's far-right enabling structure. The crises that *make us* via social media entail and unearth (neo)liberalism's unwillingness to face the inexorable Real of its historical contradictions. The "flooding" of the traumatic Real of neoliberalism's shortcomings and obsolescence as graspable Symbolic Order and civilisational fantasy dislocates the effectiveness and adequacy of its community-building and agency-reinforcing entertainment. While potentially a space for radical, pluralist, and progressive resistance, it is already conditioned by far-right discourses benefiting from the algorithmic-mediated retreat of liberal democracy. This space of democratic resistance is thus also the obscene breeding ground for brutalising far-right civilisational prospects.

This pessimistic reflection embodies the spirit of this dissertation, offering a glimpse into my writing process and the evolution in approaches stemming

from my encounter with Jacques Lacan and his interpreters. However, my intention is not to discourage you, dear reader. Instead, I aim to provoke a spark of necessary anxiety to mobilise active critical thinking and political involvement, which contemporary political studies research increasingly disregards in favour of the ontologically-securitising comfort of epistemically-robust vapidness. Political research, especially from the critical and Lacanian left, needs to re-engage and re-populate the aforementioned space of resistance with both relentlessness and *hopelessness*. This process implies constantly and critically un-fixing *hope* for ontological security – e.g., of a united nation, state, group, and home – as a horizon both swaddling us in post-political comfort and legitimising the brutalisation of the other. Hopelessness requires us to engage with fantasy as necessary yet inherently feeble and ever-changing – i.e., to face the Real rather than foreclose it. Hopelessness is the radical refusal to entertain the fantasy of liberal modernity as a “natural”, “commonsense”, or fixed ontology governing our horizons. This movement traverses the fantasy of hope, favouring solidarity, equality, and justice while wielding a critical, post-utopic approach to revitalise our political imaginaries towards radical democratic plurality while accepting the Real of the latter’s protean structure.

This thesis complicates the study of far-right normalisation and its connection to AI-fuelled social media. It does not offer a solution to their unique, combined threat. Instead, it provides a humble yet novel visage into this issue, potentially (and hopelessly) informing and inspiring political research and critical thought on the retreat of the modern liberal order – or, the *fall of Empire*.

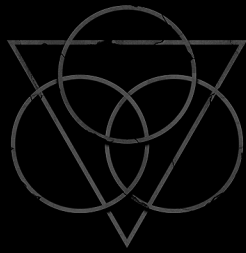
Lest we forget, ontology is indolent.

¡No Pasarán!

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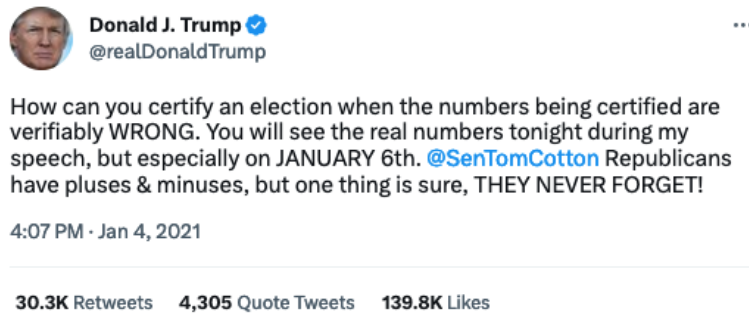


I. Introduction

1. Introduction

The promise of righteous retribution for those who self-perceive as wronged and displaced by political antagonists (e.g., the “corrupt elites”, the “illegal” immigrant, the “woke” feminist) is a powerful and disruptive rhetorical mechanism wielded in an increasingly personalised fashion via social media. As Donald Trump’s [tweet excerpt 1](#) shows (2021), a single instance of communication reveals how different discursive dimensions of right-wing grievance overlap with technosocial affordances to manufacture a political timebomb.

Tweet Excerpt 1. @realDonaldTrump [4th of January 2021]



In the tweet, Trump combines definition-based arguments (repurposing scientific terms like “certified”, “numbers”, and “verifiably” to assert authority) with a condemning rhetoric to admonish Republican Senator Tom Cotton for certifying the 2020 election results. The immediate background is the 2021 US far-right insurrection in Washington D.C., leading to the violent storming of Capitol Hill. A deeper examination of the discursive context shows that the long-term process sublimated in this tweet concerns a right-wing and far-right civilisational struggle in the US (Lowndes, 2021; Seymour, 2024, pp. 263–266). This struggle is embodied in a discourse of grievance through interlocking narratives (“Stop the Steal”, “America First”, “Make America Great Again”, and “Drain the Swamp”) framed in real-world processes of ontological attrition¹. These struggles imply a promise of righteous retribution manifested in a paradoxical narrative of ontological (in)security²: one that generates a stable sense of self (e.g., Republicans are righteous and “never forget”) by

¹ E.g. the battle against “wokeism” (awareness and activism for social justice and equality) and liberalism; the ills of globalisation; the enrichment of liberal elites; the disenfranchisement of the “left behind” Whites.

² See [section 3](#) for details on “ontological (in)security”.

simultaneously *threatening* it (e.g., “the numbers are wrong”, i.e., “America” is being stolen from “us”).

In this tweet, Trump used what critical media literature refers to as *technosocial affordances* of AI-fuelled Twitter/X to emotionally govern the discourse of grievance³. Trump’s promise of retribution is entangled with a *faux* personal connection with his followers. Trump writes “Republicans have pluses & minuses”, pointing to common struggles among *all* Republicans and a higher sense of belonging through righteous retribution: “but one thing is sure [about *all* Republicans], THEY [we] NEVER FORGET!”. The “never forgetting” discourse transcends the attack on Cotton and sublimates a broader narrative and feeling of insecurity and displacement in US far-right and right-wing politics⁴: replacement anxiety. In this site of insecuritisation of the aggrieved self, performances of authenticity and relatability confer leaders like Trump a high degree of influence over followers and detractors alike. In crises, this “authentic relatability” between leaders and followers is framed by constructing and deploying authority as what Barry Richards labels “emotional governance” (2007). Trump’s call-out to the personal qualities (e.g., betrayer, disloyal, “spineless”) of Cotton by “mentioning” him in the body of the technology (“@SenTomCotton”) earmarks, by self-opposing to this “betrayer”, the construction of both his authenticity and authority.

Trump signifies authority *within* “real” Republicans (calling out Cotton as disloyal and spineless) and *outwardly* (pointing to the “stolen” election) while affectively contesting the results via legitimising traditional media frame: “You will see the numbers tonight during *my Speech*”. This far-right discourse of righteous retribution is rooted in long-term reactionary narratives of political struggle and authority that affectively resonate with self-perceived aggrieved subjects (Betz, 2023; Capelos & Demertzis, 2022). These forms of authority – e.g., the paternalistic yet “loyal” projection of Trump – and emotional governance – e.g., framing controversies as quests for belonging – co-constitute and dislocate US far-right and right-wing identities and their borders. The authority to emotionally govern amid the “crisis of the West” (Seymour, 2024) shifts *who* and *how* we are in relation to this crisis or fall. Moreover, it defines *who* falls outside the “border” (e.g., “betraying”

³ See section 3 (theoretical framework) for details on “technosocial affordances” and “emotional governance”.

⁴ I advocate for Mouffe’s (2005) and Stavrakakis’ (2017) problematisation of “populism” as a moralistic dimension in *the political*. When associated to right-wing or far-right politics, populism should be understood in its *exclusionary variant* – i.e., as a particular *type* of populism rather than populism constituting a morally-devised qualifier of political discourse (see also “Beyond Populism” for a problematisation of this topic; McAfee, 2021).

Republicans, “woke” feminists) and *how* they threaten it (e.g., by “stealing” the election).

Trump’s tweet and its discursive context are not isolated in the global ecosystem of right-wing and far-right networks on social media. Leaders like Suella Braverman (UK MP, Conservative party), Javier Milei (President of Argentina), and Narendra Modi (Prime Minister of India) have used Twitter/X to, for instance, portray refugees and Human Rights conventions as threats (Braverman, 2023, 2024); bask in the misfortunes of adversaries accused of stealing the “the people’s freedom” (Milei, 2024); attack social justice advocates (Milei, 2020); and weaponise women’s rights to whitewash Islamophobia (Modi, 2019, 2024). These examples indicate how far-right ideologies spread globally, adapt to different sociocultural contexts, streamline through neoliberal technosocial affordances, and integrate into “commonsense” mainstream political discourses. These trends are mirrored in Sweden, where the proliferation of far-right technosocial practices signifies deeper political upheavals. Considering Sweden’s “exceptional” history of progressiveness, pluralism, and egalitarianism (Schierup & Ålund, 2011), the successful proliferation of far-right technosocial practices and performances represents not only a research conundrum. It also points at critical political shifts concerning the (re)production of supremacist regimes of belonging in the so-called Western hemisphere.

Similarly to Trump and far-right Republicans, the main Swedish far-right party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), has used social media to spread and normalise their exclusionary discourses by emotionally governing deep-seated ontological insecurities. SD has affixed debates on criminality and sexual violence to immigration, asylum-seeking, refugees, Muslims, Islam, and ethnocultural diversity, framing the former as metonymic with a broader threat to Swedish civilisational survival (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2014; Norocel, 2016). SD’s leader, Jimmie Åkesson, uses a double strategy on Twitter/X to perpetuate this discursive association while positioning SD as both mainstream and as *the* legitimate voice for Swedes. While rhetorically cautious despite the structural violence inherent in his immigration views (e.g., “returning immigrants to their homes”; 2021b), purportedly aiming at “keep Sweden together” against “division and segregation” (2014), Åkesson disparages those “who are not part of Sweden” (ibid., 2021b). He highlights the “social, cultural, and economic burden” they represent for the nation’s health (2021a) and dog-

whistles them as rapists and sexual predators (“Most immigrants are not rapists, but most rapists are immigrants”, 2021c).

Other SD parliamentarians engage in the caustic and hateful rhetoric that Åkesson rarely uses directly, maintaining his respectability while funnelling the grievance-infused rhetoric that unconsciously situates them as “authentic” interlocutors. Richard Jomshof, former chairman of the Justice Committee, has equated “the left”, Islam, and Muslims to violent Islamism (2024a); characterised Islamophobia as an Islamic plot (2024b); and argued that Islam is “incompatible with the democratic Western world” (2024c). Other SD politicians link “gang crime” to Islam (Söder, 2022a) and adapt international far-right discourses to the Swedish context. For instance, MP Björn Söder echoed Trump’s “Make America Great Again” in his 2022 campaign, urging voters to “Make Sweden Great Again” (2022b), while MEP Charlie Weimers mimicked nativist Braverman-like narratives, claiming youths are naïvely paranoid about racism while uncritical about immigration (2022).

The successful mainstreaming of the far-right on social media in Sweden is not solely due to SD politicians but also mainstream right-wing actors who mimic, platform, and even befriend these actors and discourses. For instance, MEP Sara Skytvedal (former Christian Democrats)⁵ has tweeted about limiting multiculturalism due to Islam’s “proclamation” over Swedish cities (2018) and blamed Sweden’s “weakening” on Social Democrats and “Stalinists” (2022a, 2022b). She also weaponised technical language to justify harsher immigration, asylum, and refugee rules within the EU, whitewashing xenophobia with neoliberal rhetoric (2020). MP Jan Ericson (Moderate party, M) has virtue-signalled the alliance between mainstream right-wing parties and SD while urging them to “direct the anger towards the left” (2022b). This camaraderie is evident on social media, with SD MP Björn Söder tweeting that Ericson should “take it as a compliment! :)” to be blocked on the platform by former Social Democratic MP Annika Strandhäll (2022c). The white-washing of SD by mainstream parties is also seen in Liberal MPs like Robert Hannah, who “proudly” celebrated and defended their alliance with SD against left-wing criticism (2022)⁶.

⁵ Until January 2024, member of the Christian Democrats (*Kristdemokraterna*, KD).

⁶ This criticism focused on how purported protectors of LGBTQI causes and people (i.e., the Liberals) ally themselves with the “traditional family values”, genderphobic SD (Hennig, 2018; Lagerman, 2024).

The complex process embedded in these tweets showcases how technosocial affordances, far-right normalisation, and the ontological (in)securitisation of identities are intertwined. A “simple” tweet carries a discursive assemblage shaping and shaped by convoluted narratives and emotions that constitute the conditions of antagonism framing social identities, i.e., *the political* (Mouffe, 2005). This “simplicity” is misleading since it is marked by the complex interaction of algorithmic affordances in homophilic social media (Chun, 2018), e.g., content curation, choice architectures, and recommendation systems. These affordances govern the exposure to supremacist content and rhetoric and shape sociocultural belonging through naturalising exclusionary *othering*. Our co-constituted techno-mediatic and psycho-political paradigms under neoliberalism enrich these connections, making them intractable and affecting our ability to discern how identities and their borders are politically shaped. Critical political developments in Europe and the US like the Charlottesville riots (2017), the US Capitol Hill storming (2021), Brexit (2016-), the 2022 Swedish general elections, and the 2024 far-right surge in the EU elections (Chastand & Malingre, 2024) are increasingly tied to the expansion of social media. Its sophistication through artificial intelligence (AI) affects electoral legitimacy (Hall et al., 2018), debates in the public sphere (Fuchs, 2021), and broadly, the affective appeal of liberal democratic systems and values. The global perseverance, proliferation, and complexification of these technosocial processes underscore their increased embeddedness into processes of identity formation and produce and reveal the ontological insecurity of liberal modernity. Thus, this dissertation seeks to explore these intricate dynamics by analysing the psycho-political and techno-mediatic processes co-facilitating the normalisation of the far-right amid the retreat of the liberal modern order. In the following subsection, I elaborate on this framework and present the research problem of this dissertation.

1.1. **Research problem**

Throughout the so-called Western hemisphere and beyond, mainstream political actors have begun tolerating, supporting, and front-lining far-right practices and discourses that undermine liberal democracies. From the United States to Sweden, Israel, the Philippines, and Argentina, this rightward shift and increased tolerance for erstwhile-shunned ideologies of exclusion challenge the weakened modern liberal order and signify its limitations as the symbolic authority of modernity. In this thesis, the *modern liberal order*

constitutes both the “Western”-led, post-WW2 global governance superstructure of late modernity (Scholte, 2020) and, from a Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective, the Symbolic authority conditioning the political (Maher, 2023; Wilson, 2017). Stemming from this understanding of the modern liberal order, *liberal democracy* entails two co-constituted dimensions. First, it is an institutional set of principles and values – free elections, capitalism, the rule of law, freedom of speech and press, and division of powers – organising the rawness of the political (Gaus, 2015; Katz, 1997; Mouffe, 2005). Second, from a Lacanian ontological security approach, liberal democracy is an empty signifier or narrative providing a sense of belonging, stability, and continuity to the subject (Browning, 2019; Kinnvall, 2018). A third key contextualising element is *neoliberalism*. Like in the case of liberal democracy, neoliberalism entails two intertwined dimensions: an institutional one, focused on modes of governance and organisation of the political (e.g., in international development, investment, and finance institutions, policies, agreements and integration processes); and an affective one, as an ideology shaping our symbolic commitments with the political. As discussed in [sections 2 and 3](#), neoliberalism is the predominant ideological offshoot of classical liberalism, focused on the tenets of individual freedom, deregulation, market fundamentalism, privatisation, and the dismantling of welfare systems (Wilson, 2017; Davidson & Saull, 2017). The co-constituted ideological and institutional impact of neoliberalism can also be attested in the development of post-political rationale for influencing, governing, and conducting political processes. The post-political refers to fundamentalist neoliberal criteria of “efficiency”, “neutrality” and “apolitical” governance, technocracy, and “rational consensus” aimed at reducing the political to a depoliticised, antagonism-free environment ideal for enforcing its fundamentalist market principles (Mouffe, 2005; Wilson & Swyngedow, 2014; see also Jutel, 2020). Neoliberalism’s predominance resides in the subsumption and repurposing of liberal democratic values as self-legitimising discourses and in its centrality within the modern liberal order – indeed, reshaping the latter’s Symbolic authority into neoliberalism’s own image (ibid.; see also Brown, 2018; Wilson, 2015). This fundamental and constantly-mutating relationship constitutes the contextual cornerstone moulding the interplay between far-right normalisation, identity formation, and hybrid media massification.

In this context, the normalisation of the far-right transcends rhetorical mimicry from mainstream parties, instead manifesting in the adoption and enactment of exclusionary frameworks that debilitate liberal democratic

practices (e.g., voting suppression in the 2020 US general elections), principles (e.g., attacks on refugees and asylum seekers' rights in Sweden and the UK), and institutions (e.g., Viktor Orbán's attack on the Court of Justice of the European Union) (Sveriges Radio, 2017; Trilling, 2023). More insidiously, the normalisation of the far-right encompasses disturbing processes of identity (re)formation in a context of "permanent crisis" (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023).

In anxiety-inducing contexts, subjects seek reassurances and security not only in material terms but in fantasies of the self, groups, nations, and civilisations that compose their senses of identity, belonging, and continuity – i.e., fantasies of *ontological security* (Browning, 2018). The far-right, enabled by mainstream actors (parties, governments, media, think tanks, grassroots organisations), increasingly fills the affective gaps that articulate these fantasies. Far-right leaders promise to address present-day threats to the continuity of "the people" and build anxiety-free futures by "returning" to idyllic pasts of ethnocultural wholeness, law and order, and "natural", stabilising social hierarchies (Kinnvall, 2018). The production and appeal of these fantasies are relational processes relying on our mediatic framework. Hybrid media – the interplay between traditional and social media (Chadwick, 2017) – shapes our possibilities of knowing and feeling the political and, thus, is central to normalising far-right fantasies and regimes of belonging. Following the market imperatives and algorithmic affordances of the attention economy – the system articulating human attention as modernity's commodity (Lewandowski et al., 2020, p. 4) –, social media mainstreams far-right content, weaving it into our experience of the political, shaping our (inter-)subjectivities, ontologies, and spaces (Merrill & Åkerlund, 2018; Norocel, 2022). The embeddedness of social media within neoliberalism highlights this system's enabling of the far-right and their perverse co-constitution (Fuchs, 2021; Gantt Shafer, 2017). Thus, the preeminence of the "techno-mediatic" underscores the multidimensionality of far-right normalisation and its crucial, yet underexplored, interplay with fantasy, identity, enjoyment, and anxiety.

As detailed in [section 2 \(Literature review\)](#), diverse studies have examined the normalisation of the far-right, focusing on the dire implications of its proliferation for democratic institutions, progressive causes, and social cohesion. This phenomenon has been addressed in terms of its relationship with mainstream parties, actors, and systems. Scholars highlight how the far-right has streamlined their self-presentations and rhetoric to widen their appeal (Åkerlund, 2020; Lamour, 2024; Mondon & Winter, 2020) while

electorally benefiting from the tolerance, mimicry, and camaraderie of mainstream parties (Cammaerts, 2020; Jupskås, 2021; Wodak, 2020). Other scholars focus on the consequences of an ongoing global crisis composed of economic debacles, the rise in material and affective insecurity, the return of nationalism, and the proliferation of political grievances (Salmela & Capelos, 2021). The far-right has profited by scapegoating immigration, domestic “betrayers” (e.g., feminists, liberals, socialists), and “globalist elites” (Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021; Mudde, 2022; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). While the normalisation of the far-right is a multi-dimensional research problem transcending these structural explanations, this dissertation is chiefly concerned with its *psycho-political* and *techno-mediatic* dimensions.

The *psycho-political* dimension of far-right normalisation includes varied and oftentimes contradictory literatures and approaches like behaviouralism, group dynamics, political cognition, and the politics of emotion (discussed in [section 2](#)). I focus instead on the background of the far-right provided by the main subfield and theory of this thesis: Lacanian psychoanalysis and Lacanian ontological security studies (LOSS). *Lacanian* accounts examine how the interplay between anxiety and socially-transgressive enjoyment (*jouissance*) influences far-right politics by translating into powerful, unconscious emotional bonds through racist and exclusionary fantasies of belonging (Hook, 2017; Kølvråa, 2018; McGowan, 2021). Whiteness is seen as an unconscious symbolic formation that can be emotionally manipulated by the far-right to (re)produce regimes of belonging that pre-legitimise violence against the “threatening” Other (Chebrolu, 2021; Mandelbaum, 2023; Untalan, 2023).

Meanwhile, LOSS literature emphasises that, during crises, the anxious drive towards constituting a stable sense of identity and belonging caters to far-right fantasies of recaptured wholeness (Eberle, 2019; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Far-right discourses promise to eliminate threats from internal (e.g., the liberals, socialists, feminists, immigrants) and external sources (e.g., the EU, the UN, globalists). These promises constitute narratives of cleansing, restoration, and securitisation crystallised in the projection of nostalgic pasts into enjoyment-infused futures foreclosed against “unbecoming” Others (Kinnvall, 2004, 2018; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). LOSS accounts indicate that the far-right exploits ontological insecurities by converting experiences of socioeconomic and ethnocultural marginalisation into compelling narratives of control and belonging, which can sediment rather than diffuse social grievances (Browning, 2018, 2019; cf. Mandelbaum, 2020, 2023).

The *techno-mediatic* dimension of far-right normalisation has been prominently analysed, particularly concerning the rise and massification of social media. Scholars underscore that the far-right has asymmetrically benefited from this massification process under the neoliberal structure of the attention economy (Fuchs, 2021). In their ubiquity, celerity, ambiguity, and ordinariness (Lindgren, 2020), social media are technosocially unprecedented in their capacity to exploit attention spans, manipulate preferences via algorithms, and reinforce political biases (Areni, 2019; Fuchs, 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2020). Far-right discourses resonate with the perverse incentives and imperatives of this mediatic-economic system (Fuchs, 2021; Krzyżanowski, 2020). These affordances enable the far-right to shift political discourses by recontextualising, gradating (i.e., diffusing and amplifying), and *normalising* them as common-sense (Krzyżanowski, 2020a, pp. 508–509). Social media aid in far-right normalisation by i) enabling leaders to sidestep traditional media safeguards, fostering direct and “authentic” communications (Cammaerts, 2020); ii) repurposing criticism or dissent into popularity and visibility (Zhang et al., 2018); iii) appropriating floating signifiers like “criminality” by negatively associating them to exclusionary characterisations of immigration and diversity (Ekström et al., 2023); and iv) enabling leaders to delegate aggressive rhetoric to their followers, allowing them to appeal to moderate audiences while retaining their radical base (Åkerlund, 2020).

Despite extensive research (see [section 2](#)), far-right normalisation lacks a comprehensive approach that problematises its multidimensionality beyond predominant structural accounts (cf. K. Brown et al., 2023). This is not to say that the existing literatures do not address this phenomenon by integrating key analytical intersections like the discursive and epistemic (Wodak, 2020), international and structural (Anievas & Saull, 2023), gender and ideological (Sauer, 2020), structural and technological (Fuchs, 2021), mediatic and discursive (Krzyżanowski, 2020a), and structural and institutional (Mondon & Winter, 2020). Rather, they favour, to varying degrees, foci on agency, materiality, traditional actors (e.g., parties, leaders, nations), rationality, cognition, and behaviour.

While the literature on the politics of emotion addresses some of these issues by analysing the affective undercurrents of the far-right, they under-theorise the process of normalisation (for exceptions, see Wodak, 2020; Capelos & Demertzis, 2022). This literature often reduces political emotions to symbolic

power mechanisms, such as manipulation or mobilisation (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Zulianello, 2021). Its focus on reflexivity and agency (Leser & Spissinger, 2020; Sijstermans & Favero, 2022) overlooks how the crucial interplay between the unconscious, fantasy, identity, enjoyment, and ideology shapes and animates political phenomena (Howarth, 2013; Stavrakakis, 2007). This underexplored interplay, experienced in the anxiety-inducing encounter with the crisis of global symbolic authority, substantially affects the interdependent (re)formation of political identities, ontologies, and spaces.

Lacanian and Lacanian ontological security (LOSS) scholars have partially integrated these elements into far-right studies from a multidimensional perspective. However, the phenomenon of the far-right's *normalisation* remains underexplored or tangential in LOSS accounts, which focus on their affective appeal (see, e.g., Browning, 2018; Kinnvall, 2018; Mandelbaum, 2023; McGowan, 2021). While LOSS includes the role of positive emotions like joy and pride in far-right fantasies of ontological security, transgressive enjoyment or *jouissance* remains peripheral in analysing the interdependence between far-right normalisation and interpellation⁷. Moreover, LOSS accounts often overlook the role of technology and media in their analyses of the far-right. The subfield of psychoanalytical media studies contributes to bridging this divide (Flisfeder, 2021; Johanssen & Krüger, 2022); however, the dialectic between LOSS and critical media studies is still in an embryonic stage. Furthermore, while the normalisation of the far-right has been studied from critical media perspectives (Cammaerts, 2020; M. Ekström et al., 2020; Merrill, 2020), its problematisation from a hybridity and impermanence framework beyond the scope of liberal politics (Knüpfer et al., 2024) remains underdeveloped⁸. This issue is particularly evident when examined from a LOSS perspective.

In summary, while existing literature provides valuable insights into the normalisation of the far right, it often overlooks the complex interplay of unconscious, ideological, and affective processes, as well as the crucial roles of technology and media. Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, addressing these limitations through a LOSS approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional nature of far-right normalisation.

⁷ For non-OSS Lacanian accounts developing this link, see Chebrolu (2021); Hook (2017; 2021); Mandelbaum (2020); and McGowan (2021).

⁸ For an exception, see Zhang et al. (2018).

Given these unbridged divides, there is a pressing need to explore the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions, and their interplay, in depth. Thus, this dissertation investigates how these dimensions contribute to the normalisation of the far-right through a LOSS approach. Addressing this research problem is crucial for understanding the mechanisms underpinning the continuum of the far-right's appeal, persistence, and normalisation in liberal democracies (Brown et al., 2023). LOSS is uniquely suited to analyse the interplay between the far-right's exploitation of affects and the unconscious processes that jointly generate a sense of stability and belonging that sustains exclusionary and supremacist ideologies in a context of multi-pronged crises.

Lacanian ontological security allows us to analyse how crises and anxieties about “Western” civilisation and identities are transformed into compelling affective bonds embedded in (in)securitising fantasies of supremacy and exclusion, mediated through hybrid media systems. This approach facilitates the examination of how modern subjects *enjoy* their interpellation into this technosocially-afforded regime of nativist belonging. LOSS allows us to comprehensively address the multidimensional phenomenon of far-right normalisation by articulating the production of political fantasies to their unconscious conditioning by the symbolic-structuring medium. Crucially, this phenomenon encompasses seven interdependent analytical dimensions⁹ articulated by its *psycho-political* and *techno-mediatic* iterations. The interaction between these dimensions signifies an unprecedented and hyper-mediatised continuum of dislocation and fantasmatic reconfiguration. This process reshapes political identities (e.g., Swedish, foreigner), ontologies (e.g., citizen, refugee), and spaces (e.g., online networks, national borders), reflecting the co-constitution of far-right normalisation and the decline of the modern liberal order.

Technologies have been historically co-constituted with the formation of our ideologies, civilisations, and identities (Ellul, 1967; Feenberg, 2002), influencing changes in political subjectivities, ontologies, and spaces. The relationship between the psycho-political and techno-mediatic is prominent given i) the appeal and ordinariness of normalised far-right discourses, ii) the occlusion of far-right regimes of belonging within neoliberal structures (Davidson & Saull, 2017), and iii) the sophistication, ubiquity, and celerity of media technologies (Lindgren, 2020) sustaining this political architecture

⁹ The structural-systemic, the historical-international, the ideological-discursive, the institutional-epistemic, the gender-postcolonial, the psycho-political, and the techno-mediatic.

(Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). This dissertation mobilises LOSS to examine the effects of hybrid media affordances on the (re)drawing of far-right discourses, rhetoric, and identities *into* regimes of normality. The (re)drawing of identities is understood as a (re)negotiation process co-constituted with the ontological (in)securitisation of the everyday through fantasies safeguarding against the traumatic retreat of the modern liberal order or the *fall* of Empire.

Understanding the multidimensional phenomenon of far-right normalisation through a Lacanian ontological security perspective is crucial for expanding the field of ontological security studies and enhancing our comprehension of its impact on democratic regimes and our political identities. In this sense, the contributions of this dissertation are mainly concerned with enriching and widening the scope of the subfield of LOSS by problematising and complexifying the normalisation of the far-right as an algorithmically-mediated fantasy of ontological (in)security. Hence, the first key contribution is that of foregrounding and centralising the phenomenon of far-right normalisation from a LOSS approach. I pursue this by dialoguing with complementary analytical dimensions and literatures engaged with this phenomenon's international, ideological, institutional, structural, gender, and postcolonial analytical facets. Furthermore, LOSS literature has engaged with all but one dimension of the normalisation of the far-right: the *techno-mediatic*¹⁰. This dissertation also dedicates LOSS to analysing the normalisation of the far-right as a phenomenon both producing and stemming from a context of "permanent crisis" affectively perpetuated and experienced through complicit hybrid media technologies, spaces, and logics¹¹. From this perspective, social media constitute arenas where far-right and neoliberal ideologies emotionally circulate (cf. Koschut, 2019), engage in performative antagonisms, and propagate the unconscious renewal of their tense, intertwined existence as modernity's dominant regimes of belonging.

More specifically, I aim to contribute in five ways to the LOSS scholarship. These contributions open a dialogue between inquiries on the retreat of the modern liberal order, the enabling role of hybrid media affordances, and the role of enjoyment of mainstream actors in normalising the far-right.

First, I analyse the relationship between *White supremacy and deglobalisation* as the macro, historical and psycho-political framework driving the far-right's

¹⁰ For contributions from *non*-Lacanian OSS, see Areni (2019); Areni et al. (2022); McDonnell et al. (2023).

¹¹ See [section 3](#) for a discussion on the context of "crises" and its relation with far-right normalisation.

advancement globally, nationally, and subjectively. Deglobalisation is a landscape of far-right grievances, resentments, and anxieties but also of joy, hopes, and aspirations. While White supremacy opposes specific facets of globalisation (e.g., socio-ethnic demographic shifts), it benefits from others, like the rise of an international far-right support network via social media. Second, I examine how hybrid media affordances condition and enable the normalisation of far-right discourses and the emotional governance of their leaders in liberal societies. Third, I analyse the role of mainstream right-wing enjoyment (*jouissance*) in the normalisation of the far-right, which highlights the centrality of far-right discourses within the modern liberal order. The analysis of enjoyment provides insights into the tensions between mainstream identity and status, and on the affective underpinnings of liberalism as an ideology that enables and *enjoys* (with) the far-right. Fourth, I analyse the normalisation of the far-right as an *algorithmic spectacle* sustained by and sustaining neoliberalism. I focus on the affordances and spatial characteristics of social media from a LOSS perspective, examining how antagonisms between liberal and far-right subjects constitute an unconscious spectacle sustaining the former's identities while hindering liberal democracy via nurturing and normalising the far-right.

Finally, this dissertation explores the moment of political *victory* as an *enjoyment*-infused, unconscious upheaval or “crisis” in the context of far-right normalisation. Inspired by the work of Slavoj Žižek (2002a), Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis (2008), and Derek Hook (2017), I aim to advance the conceptualisation of LOSS by linking enjoyment, far-right studies, and critical media studies. I highlight the libidinal and perverse facets of ontological security as manifested in moments of victory. The continuous production of far-right fantasies of civilisational collapse on social media reflects the dual collective enjoyment of reclaiming lost *jouissance* and brutalising¹² its alleged “thief”. This technosocial architecture of belonging materialises in victorious “festivals of excess”, acting as a political paradox with damaging real-life effects. It sustains social hierarchies and regimes of normality (i.e., power) while deteriorating, cannibalising, and grafting them into far-right architectures of supremacy and exclusion, vying to inherit the ever-mutating mantle of neoliberalism.

¹² *Brutalisation* in this thesis refers to “a form of violence that is embodied or expressed in language that is intended to hurt, harm or to damage, such as hate speech, text, or what Bourdieu calls ‘symbolic violence’” deriving from “force, savagery, violence and cruelty”. (Apata, 2025; see also Mbembe, 2024).

Furthermore, as developed in-depth in [section 4 \(Methodological considerations\)](#), the analysis of far-right normalisation is illustrated via cases in Western “bastions” of liberal modernity, most notably Sweden and the US. The examined cases in this dissertation follow this exploratory approach. First, I focus on the historical and discursive development of the US’ far-right and the Sweden Democrats amid the 2022 national elections using, as my empirical site, academic publications, international and national newspaper articles, and website articles. Second, I examine mainstream media outlets and right-wing parties in Sweden towards the 2022 national elections through Twitter/X, official reports for political summits (Almedalen 2022), mainstream media newspaper and website articles (tabloids, newspapers, web-based reporting), and academic publications. Third, I focus on Swedish right-wing politicians’ posts on Twitter/X amid the 2022 right-wing triumph in the national elections. Fourth, I analyse prominent US Republican and Democratic politicians and media pundits’ declarations amidst the 2021 Capitol Hill insurrection and the 2024 electoral victory of Donald Trump, respectively, using web-based news reports, magazine articles, blogs, and Twitter/X.

As also discussed in [section 4](#), these cases and empirical sites constitute valuable platforms or windows to examine the global phenomenon of far-right normalisation for three reasons. First, Sweden and the US constitute distinct exemplars of Western liberalism operating under a mantle of civilisational exceptionalism (e.g., cultural, economic, military, moral), which mainstream politicians, media, and influentials have gradually eroded. Second, the empirical context focuses on political *crises* – instances of societal dislocation, where fantasy breaks down (see [section 3](#)) – and their constant overlap, manifesting with diverse intensities and shaping a sense of chronic turmoil (see [subsection 1.2](#)). For instance, both the 2022 Swedish national elections and the 2021 US Capitol Hill storming are considered crises that exacerbate the Western-liberal experience of the far-right’s rise and normalisation. These crises fundamentally affect psycho-political processes like identity formation yet vary significantly in their intensity, experience, and reception. The psycho-political impact and development of crises in these democratic “bastions” reveal how the intertwining of emotions, identities, and ideology produces and is produced by far-right normalisation. Third, these empirical sites are focused on hybrid media and, in particular, social media as techno-political spaces with an unprecedented capacity to provide real-time data on crises, convey first-hand perspectives of subjects, and shape political identities, norms, and emotions.

1.2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to – through a Lacanian ontological security (LOSS) lens – investigate how the interplay between psycho-political processes and techno-mediatic dynamics contributes to far-right normalisation amid the crisis-plagued retreat of the modern liberal order. This aim is operationalised in four interdependent analytical levels broadly corresponding to each article by grounding and dissecting the abovementioned interplay. Together, these levels provide the framework to explore, synthesise, and theoretically reflect on the normalisation of the far-right.

First, the *international* level focuses on far-right normalisation as historically embedded in White supremacy discourses and co-constituted with the retreat of the modern liberal order. This level leads to the **first research question**, concerning how anti-globalisation, reactionary discourses constitute fantasies of ontological security defending against feelings of sociocultural dislocation or “replacement”: *How does the relationship between White supremacy and neoliberal (de)globalisation shape and reinforce the (re)production of far-right fantasies of recapturing long-lost wholeness?*¹³

Second, the *mediatic* level addresses this international context within the architecture, culture, and performances of hybrid media as spaces and catalysts enabling far-right normalisation. This analytical level concerns the **second research question**, focused on how attention-based “old” and “new” mediatic practices and performances legitimise the far-right’s standing as a provider of ontological security: *How does the hybrid media system enable the far-right’s emotional governance of ontological insecurities?*¹⁴

Third, the *subjective* level interrogates the discursive and emotional dynamics shaping identities, desires, and fantasies of supremacy hampering liberal democracies and stemming from the mediatic symbiosis of the far-right and the mainstream right-wing. This level composes the **third research question**, concerning how far-right normalisation is co-constituted with the identity reshaping of mainstream right-wing actors and experienced in the

¹³ This research question is chiefly addressed in [article 1](#): “Deglobalization and the Political Psychology of White Supremacy” (2023, Journal: *Theory & Psychology*).

¹⁴ This research question is chiefly addressed in [article 2](#): “Governing Emotions: Hybrid Media, Ontological Insecurity and the Normalisation of Far-Right Fantasies” (2023, Journal: *Alternatives*).

latter's transgressive and surreptitious enjoyment of supremacist fantasies: *What does the enjoyment (jouissance) of mainstream right-wing parties during victories reveal about the normalisation of the far-right?*¹⁵

Fourth, the *technosocial* level focuses on how the process of far-right normalisation reinforces political identities, constituting a fantasy of ontological (in)security constrained and sustained by social media affordances and driven by market imperatives. The **fourth research question** examines how identity-forming antagonisms between liberal and far-right subjects ontologically securitise exclusionary othering through the comfort of belonging or “love for the same” in social media. This process weakens the modern liberal order while driving the transmutation of neoliberalism *as* and *within* far-right civilisational projects: *How does the co-constitution between social media and the neoliberal Symbolic Order generate the normalisation of the far-right as a fantasy of ontological (in)security?*¹⁶

This aim, and the analytical levels that operationalise it, are situated in a particular context: that of the crisis-plagued retreat of the modern liberal order. This context is understood in two interdependent dimensions inextricable from the encroachment of neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology underpinning the modern liberal order and, thus, pervading our experience of the political (W. Brown, 2018; Davidson & Saull, 2017; Dean, 2009; Wilson, 2017). First, it entails the overlap of structural crises affecting national and international arenas (e.g., climate change, the war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza, the COVID-19 pandemic), which shape a sense of permanent crisis permeating our political *zeitgeist* (Henig & Knight, 2023; Lawrence et al., 2024; Žižek, 2002b)¹⁷. Second, this context entails a backsliding or retreat of the modern liberal order as a symbolic authority, most prominently experienced in the erosion of liberal democracies, the rise in authoritarianism, and the normalisation of the far-right (Kriesi, 2020; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023; Saull, 2015).

Considering the background, research shortcomings, contributions, and aim, these research questions co-address the research problem of this dissertation. While these questions broadly correspond to each article of this thesis, they

¹⁵ This research question is chiefly addressed in [article 3](#): “The role of right-wing enjoyment in the normalisation of the far-right” (2025, Journal: *Review of International Studies*).

¹⁶ This research question is chiefly addressed in [article 4](#): “*Liebesraum*: The Ontologically-(in)Securitising Spectacle of Far-Right Normalisation” (draft manuscript).

¹⁷ See [sections 2 \(Literature review\)](#) and [3 \(Theoretical framework\)](#) for a more in-depth discussion of the relation between crisis, far-right normalisation, and modernity.

overlap across them. These overlaps – which are examined in each article as well as more detailed in [subsection 6.2](#) – involve examining the questions and analytical levels with different theories, concepts, and methods.

1.3. Appended articles and thesis outline

This kappa – the “binder” of this compilation thesis – structures the dissertation, presenting and developing the aim and articulating it through the four articles. These manuscripts are:

- **Article 1:** Kinnvall, C. & Kisić-Merino, P. (2023). Deglobalization and the political psychology of white supremacy. *Theory & Psychology*, 33(2), 227–248.¹⁸
- **Article 2:** Kisić-Merino, P. & Kinnvall, C. (2023). Governing Emotions: Hybrid media, Ontological Insecurity and the Normalisation of Far-Right Fantasies. *Alternatives*, 48(1), 54–73.¹⁹
- **Article 3:** Kisić-Merino, P. (2025). The role of right-wing enjoyment in the normalisation of the far-right. *Review of International Studies*, 1-23.
- **Article 4:** Kisić-Merino, P. *Liebesraum: The Ontologically-(In)Securitising Spectacle of Far-Right Normalisation* [draft manuscript].

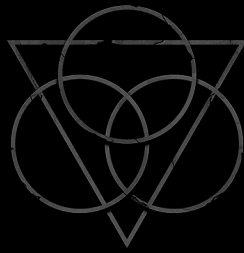
These manuscripts address the multifaceted research problem and highlight the epistemic challenge of expanding the subfield of Lacanian ontological security by cross-pollinating it with international relations and critical media studies. This epistemic bridge has been tested and developed in the articles, and constitutes the overarching structure of inquiry for this dissertation.

The structure of the rest of this “kappa” or is as follows. First, I provide an extended literature review of the core issue of this dissertation: the normalisation of the far-right. This section discusses this phenomenon’s context and expands on the existing contributions and limitations in its

¹⁸ This article was part of the Special Issue “Theorizing the psychology of deglobalization” (33:2).

¹⁹ This article was part of the Special Issue “Governing and Navigating Subjects in the Age of ‘Permanent Anxieties’: National, Regional, and Global Perspectives” (48:1).

psycho-political and *techno-mediatic* dimensions while incorporating a detailed overview of five complementary dimensions: the structural, the international-historical, the ideological-discursive, the institutional-epistemic, and the gender-postcolonial. Second, I present the theoretical framework of this dissertation, focused on Lacanian ontological security. Third, I detail the methodological approaches, including the treatment of materials, sampling methods, and ethical considerations. Fourth, I summarise the four articles. Finally, I discuss their findings in connection to the research problem and aim, highlighting my contributions to the study of far-right normalisation and the subfield of Lacanian ontological security. A brief overview of future research avenues follows this closing discussion.



II. Literature Review

2. Literature review

The global phenomenon of far-right normalisation is conceptualised by Ruth Wodak (2020), Cas Mudde (2017b, 2019), Michał Krzyżanowski (2020), and Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter (2020) as the encroachment of erstwhile-peripheral far-right ideologies, subjects, and practices into “mainstream” political discourses, milieus, and norms (see also K. Brown et al., 2023). Throughout the so-called Western hemisphere and beyond, mainstream political actors increasingly tolerate and support far-right discourses that undermine democratic institutions, particularly in their liberal iterations. The resurgence and normalisation of the far-right challenge the civilisational project of democratic liberalism, underscoring its moral, emotional, and material decline alongside that of the modern international order. Thus, the normalisation of the far-right operates as a crucial epistemic, emotional, and material signifier of the fall of Empire (MacDonald, 2015). For Cammaerts (2020) and Wodak (2020), the normalisation of the far-right involves its simultaneous acceptance by mainstream subjects in public spaces and strategic rhetorical mimicry and/or sanitised adoption. These rightward shifts are co-constituted with the strategic de-radicalisation of far-right leaders’ performances and rhetoric (Åkerlund, 2020; Lamour, 2024; Mondon & Winter, 2020) and with the enactment of “double-speech” or “dog-whistles” to appeal to diverse audiences (Åkerlund, 2021a; Sijstermans & Favero, 2022; Wodak, 2020). These shifts by right-wing, centrist (H. Ekström et al., 2023; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2020), and even social-democratic (Bale et al., 2010; Lindekilde, 2014) subjects – i.e., those signified as *mainstream* (Brown et al., 2023, pp. 166-167) – have thus normalised exclusionary, supremacist, and authoritarian politics in the public sphere.

Predominant structural explanations for this phenomenon focus on the post-2008 global economic crisis and the rise in economic insecurity (Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Saull, 2015); the socioeconomic, cultural, and identity “threats” to “advanced” polities during and after the so-called 2014 European “immigration crisis” (Auer & Schaub, 2024; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Önnersfors, 2020); and the enabling role of mainstream parties that attempted to capitalise on these “threats” to mask their political failures (Ausserladscheider, 2019; Casal Bértoa & Rama, 2021; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). At the party-system level, scholarship on the normalisation of the far-right highlights the formation of governing right-wing blocs *reliant on* the far-

right, like in Sweden, Finland, Austria, and Italy (Ausserladscheider, 2024; K. Brown & Newth, 2024; Salojärvi et al., 2023; Widfeldt, 2023); and the discursive shift towards exclusionary politics by traditional liberal-democratic and conservative parties in the UK and US (G. Evans et al., 2023; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Mudde, 2022). These far-right normalising dynamics are also evident in the resilience and growth of radical, decentralised, and online-dependent movements like the Nordic Resistance Movement, the Proud Boys, and Generation Identity (Askanius, 2019; Nissen, 2020; Stern, 2019). The normalisation process is further showcased in proposing and enacting performatively cruel, materially damaging, and Human Rights-defying policies and laws (Nettelblatt, 2023; Tetrault, 2024).

The normalisation of the far-right is not limited to the aforementioned party- and political-system facets but rather is contingent on constantly-shifting multidimensional configurations. This complex phenomenon has been studied from different interdisciplinary fields, including critical media studies (Chadwick, 2017; Fuchs, 2021; Krzyżanowski, 2020a), political psychology (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018; Chernobrov, 2016; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022), and politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2014; Capelos & Demertzis, 2022; Homolar & Scholz, 2019), as well as sub-fields like technosocial studies (Åkerlund, 2021b; Areni, 2019; Hall et al., 2018). This phenomenon involves the intricate interplay of oftentimes unbridged analytical dimensions: the *psycho-political* (Capelos & Demertzis, 2022; Kinnvall, 2018; McGowan, 2021); *techno-mediatic* (Cammaerts, 2020; Fuchs, 2021; Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019); the *international and historical* (Anievas & Saull, 2023; Champion & Poynting, 2021; Campos, 2023); *ideological and discursive* (K. Brown et al., 2023; Krzyżanowski, 2020a; Wodak, 2020); *institutional and epistemic* (Benkler et al., 2018; Richards, 2018; Wodak et al., 2021); and *gender and postcolonial* (Agius et al., 2020; R. L. Allen, 2001; Sauer, 2020). This dimensional interplay transcends a richness and complexity embedded in analytical complementarity. Instead, it signifies the *continuum* of change, dislocation, and fantasmatic re-affixing of political subjectivities, ontologies, and spaces in a context of “permanent crisis” (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023; Žižek, 2002b) symbolised in the decline of Western liberal democracy (Kornprobst & Paul, 2021; Saull, 2015; Trubowitz & Burgoon, 2022).

Considering the complexity of studying the far-right, and after addressing its *structural* dimension, this literature review is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the context of far-right normalisation to organise the literature

review, specifically regarding the key relationship between far-right normalisation, White supremacy, neoliberalism, and the modern liberal order. Second, I explore and discuss the centrality of the two core analytical dimensions of far-right normalisation: the *psycho-political* and the *techno-mediatic*. Third, I briefly examine four complementary dimensions: *international-historical*, *ideological-discursive*, *institutional-epistemic*, and *gender-postcolonial*. In the *psycho-political* dimension, I highlight the role of Lacanian ontological security – the central subfield and theory of this dissertation – in analysing far-right normalisation. Afterwards, I examine the *techno-mediatic* dimension, focusing on how media conditions the far-right’s influence over political experiences of identity and supremacist belonging. Finally, I bind the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions to the literature focused on how international contexts and systems, discursive practices, epistemic structures, and gender and postcolonial dynamics collectively shape far-right normalisation, underscoring its interdependency and multidimensionality.

2.1. Contextualising far-right normalisation

In this subsection, I expand on the complexity of the interplay between the modern liberal order, the far-right, liberalism, and neoliberalism. This relationship significantly conditions how so-called Western societies experience the rise and normalisation of the far-right.

Since the 15th century, White supremacy has composed the core of the civilisational projects of Empire. It remains at the ideological root not only of contemporary discourses in the far-right continuum (Norocel, 2022, 2024) – the amalgamation of right-wing subject types, e.g., “alt-”, “extreme-”, “radical-”, and “far-” – but of the modern liberal order itself. Thus, far-right narratives (e.g., America First), policies (e.g., the proposed “snitch law” in Sweden; Kassam, 2024), performances (e.g., the 2021 storming of the US Capitol), and enabling technosocial affordances (e.g., algorithmic curation) should be investigated as embedded within the modern liberal order rather than peripheral to it. As seen in [subsection 3.2.2](#), this structure is also fundamental to understanding the production and paradoxical sustainment of crises of liberal modernity, which feed off and pave the way for far-right normalisation.

Liberalism represents a broad epistemic tradition stemming from the Enlightenment era followed by (yet oftentimes opposing) critical frameworks like critical theory, post-colonial theory, gender studies, and post-Marxism (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002); and anti-capitalist ideologies like democratic socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, and communism. In this line, the relationship between liberalism and, e.g., socialism and other critical perspectives and ideologies becomes more convoluted when addressing the former's relation with conservatism (McManus, 2021). While the latter focuses on the preservation, expansion, and sustainment of traditional hierarchies, order, and justification systems (e.g., nationalism, nativism, "family values"; Kekes, 2015), liberalism emphasises equality under the law, merit, personal and religious freedom, and individual rights (Gaus, 2015; Katz, 1997; Phelan & Dawes, 2018). Hence, at least originally, liberalism – in its distinct configurations (Gaus, 2015) – was a cohesive response to conservatism and acted as the ontological basis for major reshuffles in political structures throughout the so-called Western hemisphere (Jameson, 2002). Critical perspectives, as ideologies and/or theories (e.g., socialism or critical theory), do not oppose individual rights, freedoms and equality under the law but rather scrutinise and criticise liberalism's and liberal democracy's subsumption of their principles under the yoke of capitalism, and later, neoliberalism – i.e., socioeconomic and ideological structures reproducing the inequalities, brutalities, and hierarchies central to reactionary discourses (Saul, 2015).

In this dissertation, when critically engaging with liberalism, I refer to its iteration as a political, civilisational, and ultimately imperial capitalist project, most prominently seen in the ontic, ontological, and epistemic advent and ubiquity of *neoliberalism*. Whereas the modern liberal order is the global governance superstructure of late modernity (Lawson & Zarakol, 2023; Lowy, 1998; Scholte, 2020), neoliberalism represents its dominant ideological framework, emphasising deregulation, market fundamentalism, privatisation, and the dismantling of welfare systems (Wilson, 2017; Davidson & Saul, 2017). The modern liberal order underpinned by neoliberalism²⁰ provides the discursive breeding ground for the techno-mediatic conglomerates, spaces, oligarchs, and cultures (e.g., Silicon Valley, Twitter/X, Meta, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg) that simultaneously weaken liberal democracy and enable the far-

²⁰ To simplify this thesis' reading, the inextricable relationship between the modern liberal order and neoliberalism – explained here and in [section 3](#) – will be henceforth referred to as the "modern liberal order". However, in [article 4](#), the use of the prefix "(neo)" in front of "liberal" is a wordplay that signifies the degenerative relationship between neoliberalism and the modern liberal order.

right globally (Durand, 2024; Pasquinelli, 2023). Although neoliberalism and the modern liberal order are deeply intertwined, with neoliberalism appropriating the foundational principles and legitimacy of liberalism (Ausserladscheider, 2019; Wilson, 2017; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014), they are not identical. While the liberal order's authority is declining, neoliberalism can be seen as an obscene – that is, an excessive, underlying, and transgressive – distortion of liberalism²¹.

In this context, neoliberalism is not retreating but rather *mutating* towards the core of right-wing civilisational projects (Durand, 2024; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Perry & Schleifer, 2023; Varoufakis, 2023). Neoliberalism is superficially receding alongside its symbolic “dead father” (to speak with Lacan), i.e., liberalism. It has transcended liberalism by absorbing it, which is evidenced in its capacity to mutate, adapt, appropriate, and survive in far-right projects it has helped produce, popularise, sustain and normalise. Neoliberalism has commodified the liberal order as modernity's imaginary of ontological security, a fantasy which is gradually losing its authority or ideological grip on the modern subject (Glynos, 2001). Thus, the retreat of the latter should not be confused or conflated with the weakening or decline of the former, but rather as enabling and signifying its mutation and obscene “shambling-on” (W. Brown, 2018; Wilson, 2017) within far-right discourses. Critically, this contiguous process of liberal dislocation and neurotic neoliberal apprehension is addressed in this dissertation as i) central for the successful normalisation of the far-right; and ii) is accelerated and becomes invisible and common-sense to the subject through entertainment-based content enacted by AI-fuelled social media affordances, performances, and spaces (Durand, 2024; Pasquinelli, 2023).

Having established the general context relating the modern liberal order to neoliberalism and far-right normalisation, I will discuss the main theoretical contributions to each dimension of the latter phenomenon.

2.2. **Psycho-political dimension**

Following Brown et al. (2023), the complex relational structure of far-right normalisation requires articulating the abovementioned seven dimensions

²¹ See [subsection 2.4](#) for an extended discussion on the relationship between the far-right and neoliberalism; see also Brown (2015) and Wilson (2017).

around an ontological and epistemic ordinance. This ordinance comprises two key dimensions: the *psycho-political* and the *techno-mediatic*. Their synergy forms the foundation of this dissertation's inquiry into – and contribution to studying – the normalisation of the far-right. In what follows, I discuss the most prominent literature on these dimensions, highlighting how, despite their contributions, they have underexplored the *normalisation* of the far-right. This overlooked facet concerns the relation between i) far-right normalisation and ii) the unconscious²² interplay between fantasy, anxiety, enjoyment, identity, desire, and (in)security, i.e., Lacanian ontological security.

The psycho-political dimension of far-right normalisation encompasses diverse, intersecting, and oftentimes contradictory approaches, theories, and literatures, including attitudes and behaviours (Kitschelt & McGann, 1997; Kruglanski et al., 2021; Mudde, 2019), social identity (Bliuc et al., 2019; Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Kucharzewski & Nicola, 2021), political cognition (Erisen & Vasilopoulou, 2022; Lönnqvist et al., 2019; Rasmussen & Ludeke, 2022), group dynamics (Caiani & della Porta, 2018; Hoerst & Drury, 2023; Van Assche et al., 2019), radicalisation and terrorism (Doosje et al., 2016; Jasko et al., 2017; Kisić-Merino et al., 2021; Malthaner, 2017), memory politics (Couperus et al., 2023; Rumelili, 2018; Wodak & Forchtner, 2014), and populism and authoritarianism studies (Altemeyer, 1981, 2004; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). The psycho-political dimension is fundamental for understanding the normalisation of the far-right since it highlights how the interplay between psychological mechanisms and sociopolitical dynamics contributes to this democracy-threatening process. Examining this dimension reveals how political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours relate to emotional dynamics, the formation of realities or “horizons” of intelligibility, and the co-shaping of identities and societal antagonisms – i.e., the political (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014; Mouffe, 2005).

While some approaches, theories, and subfields complement my research focus due to their interpretive and critical foci (e.g., Rumelili, 2018; Kinnvall & Capelos, 2021; Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019), most are epistemologically contradictory due to their positivistic and behaviouralist bent; their focus on reflexivity/consciousness, fixity, individuation or the *ego*, and agency; or their lack of intersectional scrutiny over issues of supremacy, exclusion, race,

²² For Lacan, the *unconscious* does not refer to an “inner” or “hidden” self but instead to the operation of the Symbolic Order through (and shaping) the subject (D. Evans, 2006, p. 220; Fink, 1995, pp. 9–10; Lacan, 2006, pp. 6, 25).

gender, class, and Whiteness²³. In contrast, and in line with critical scholars mobilising Lacanian psychoanalysis to understand exclusionary and supremacist politics²⁴, I focus the psycho-political dimension of the far-right on the field of the politics of emotion, more broadly, and Lacanian ontological security, more specifically²⁵. First, I examine how the field of the politics of emotion has treated the normalisation of the far-right, and second, I elaborate on the contributions of Lacanian ontological security (LOSS) for understanding this phenomenon. A note to the reader is that the latter body of theory will be more thoroughly discussed in [section 3 \(Theoretical framework\)](#).

2.2.1. *Politics of Emotion*

The far-right – and, to a vaguer degree, its normalisation – has been addressed from the multidisciplinary field of the *politics of emotion* (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 2014; Steele, 2008). This field examines the generation, manipulation, and governance of moral emotions like shame, anger, hatred, resentment, *ressentiment*, and self-righteousness, and how this governance aids in normalising the far-right (Capelos & Demertzis, 2022; Leser & Spissinger, 2020; Wodak, 2020). Other authors integrate the roles of more “positive” emotions – like elation, pride, and joy – with powerful experiences and feelings like nostalgia and melancholia for an idyllic past and hopeful *future* (Bauman, 2017; Homolar & Scholz, 2019; Oesteraas, 2022). Furthermore, this literature increasingly questions positivistic-infused dualistic approaches to emotions in politics, recasting “positive” and “negative” emotions as inextricable and fluid within the political sphere (Leser & Spissinger, 2020; Luger, 2022, 2023).

Ruth Wodak (2020) examines how the far-right mobilises negative *moral emotions* like nostalgia, anger, resentment, and shame to facilitate its normalisation by generating a “sense” of permanent crisis (see also Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). Moral emotions are tied to perceived societal interests rather than self-preservation (Wodak, 2020; see also Leser &

²³ For instance, see Caiani & della Porta (2018); Altemeyer (2004); Vasilopoulos et al. (2019); Jost (2019); Doosje et al. (2016); Hoerst & Drury (2023); Rasmussen & Ludeke (2022); for an overview on criticisms see Castelli Gattinara (2020); Mondon (2023).

²⁴ See Barratt (2021); Browning (2018, 2019); Chebroly (2021); Glynos (2001); Hook (2017, 2021); Hook & George (2021); Kinnvall (2004, 2017, 2018); Kinnvall & Svensson (2022); Kølvråa (2018, 2019); Leeb (2018); McGowan (2021); Untalan (2023); Vieira (2018); Zevnik (2017, 2023).

²⁵ While ontological security studies is an independent research subfield, in broad terms, it is epistemologically embedded in the interstice of the politics of emotion and international relations (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020; see also Steele, 2008). Subsequently, Lacanian ontological security studies incorporate Lacanian psychoanalysis into this multidisciplinary subfield (Browning, 2018; Eberle, 2019; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020).

Spissinger, 2020; Rai et al., 2017). These emotions are classified as “other-condemning” (e.g., anger, contempt) or “self-conscious” (e.g., embarrassment, shame, guilt), collectively influencing the (de)formation of identities and belonging against the “other”. Wodak contends that these negative moral emotions are harnessed by the far-right as a primary mode of political experience. They offer a coping mechanism of resentful “othering” in response to the “recognition gap” – i.e., disparities in (self-)worth and cultural membership – produced by “Western” liberal modernity (2020, p. 48). This phenomenon is evident in “calculated ambivalence” practices, where far-right leaders use de-shaming narratives that remain ambiguous to the general public, which can also be attested in tactics like “double-speak” (Sijstermans & Favero, 2022) and “dog-whistling” (Åkerlund, 2021a; Bhat & Klein, 2020).

The far-right’s strategy of targeting “the other” to foster belonging during crises – through negative “sticky associations”, like framing refugees as “invaders” (Ahmed, 2014; Sauer, 2020) – is explored in the context of nostalgia. Alexandra Homolar and Ronny Scholz (2019) argue that nostalgia is more complex than emotions such as resentment, anger, or shame, as it encompasses both joy from a cherished past and pain from its loss (see also Hochschild, 2018). Following Hook (2017, 2021) and Kølvråa (2018), this affect resembles the paradoxical structure of Lacan’s concept of enjoyment or *jouissance* (Lacan, 1992, p. 15, 2006, pp. 53, 208) – a painful enjoyment marked by social transgression and longing for long-lost wholeness²⁶. For Hook (2012), Bahar Rumelili (2018), and Homolar and Scholz (2019), nostalgia serves as a crucial affective mechanism for far-right normalisation since it allows us to select and “calcify” idealised moments of lost wholeness, re-articulating them as fixed identities to defend against an anxiety-inducing future.

Understanding the far-right’s normalisation requires conceptualising the emotions and affects it mobilises beyond “negative” manifestations like anger, fear, hatred, and *ressentiment* (Capelos & Demertzis, 2022; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Schuman & Krysan, 1996). “Positive” emotions like elation, pride, and joy also generate identitarian fantasies of belonging and are deeply co-constituted with their negative counterparts (Busher et al., 2018). From a digital organisational approach, Mattia Zulianello (2021) examines the role of joy in the far-right’s mainstreaming, analysing how positive emotions in celebrations and camaraderie within “inner circles” are perceived as rewards

²⁶ See [section 3](#) for a more detailed explanation of *jouissance* as a political factor and its role in far-right politics.

for emotionally investing in “the cause” despite negative societal repercussions (cf. Barbeito Iglesias & Iglesias Alonso, 2021). Meanwhile, Jason Luger (2022, 2023) investigates how masculinised spaces, lifestyles, and political celebrations interact within MAGA politics. For Luger, seemingly benign conservative celebratory patriotism – associated with glee, joy, and pride – can swiftly transform into environments of radical exclusion, White supremacy, and toxic masculinities, thereby facilitating the far-right’s normalisation (see also Barratt, 2021; Sullivan, 2014). Similarly, Julia Leser and Florian Spissinger (2020) analyse the German party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) from an affect theory perspective. The authors argue that rather than manipulating negative emotions to “seduce” people, AfD produces “safe spaces” for sharing exclusionary and supremacist views, transforming them into unspectacular, ordinary affects.

2.2.2. Lacanian approaches to the study of the far-right

While the politics of emotion literature contributes to studying the normalisation of the far-right, it tends to overlook, under-theorise, or neglect the relationship between the unconscious, fantasy, enjoyment, ideology, desire, and *the political*. This oversight leaves unbridged divides within the general literature of the politics of emotion and between the previously discussed analytical dimensions of far-right normalisation. The subfield of Lacanian ontological security studies (LOSS) offers a comprehensive theoretical and epistemic basis to bridge these divides – most notably concerning the *international* and *techno-mediatic* dimensions of this phenomenon. However, the *Lacanian* dimension of ontological security, distinct from the broader scope of ontological security studies, remains underexplored in this dissertation. Thus, before discussing the LOSS literature, I discuss how key Lacanian scholarship accounts have engaged with the far-right and (less directly) its normalisation.

Cristoffer Kølvråa (2018) mobilises the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* (enjoyment)²⁷ to analyse European identity formation as a “sacrifice” of

²⁷ *Jouissance* is “an enjoyment intermingled with suffering; it is a type of painful arousal poised on the verge of the traumatic” (Hook, 2017, p. 607). Enjoyment is a crucial political factor underpinning the co-constitution of ideological adherence and identity formation. It reveals how deep-seated desires and libidinal investments (i.e., investments associated with the desire for excessive enjoyment, see Zevnik, 2022) shape sociosymbolic structures and influence practices, beliefs, and performances (see also Glynos 2001; Žižek, 2009). In other words, *jouissance* evidences how power is withheld *by* and waged *through* the subject’s ideological investments.

national identities for a promise of later “transgressive” national enjoyment. This European “sacrifice” is justified and underpinned by the desiring gaze of the non-European Other, opening the door to far-right discourses of reclamation of lost *jouissance*, reified in Eurosceptic/phobic “border-fetishism” (ibid., p. 1413). Similarly, Derek Hook (2017), Moran Mandelbaum (2023), and Todd McGowan (2021) argue that enjoyment is central to the development, tolerance, and normalisation of exclusionary and supremacist ideologies. For Hook, the racist *jouissance* characterising the far-right involves transgressing social acceptability through, e.g., openly racist rhetoric against “alien” and “contaminating” forms of “black” enjoyment (2017, p. 615 – 616). In this sense, McGowan (2021) emphasises that racism persists despite legal and normative remedies because the (White) supremacist fantasies and *jouissance* that sustain it retain a powerful emotional hold on subjects.

Lacanian scholars also highlight how the far-right exploits the unconscious symbolic function of Whiteness, transforming it into a socio-affective bond that reinforces supremacist ideologies and belonging through pre-legitimised violence and exclusion. E. Chebrolu (2021) critiques ego-centric psychological approaches (Lacan, 2006, pp. 365-365, 730), emphasising the unconscious processes in constructing White nationalist fantasies like the “Great Replacement”. The author rejects liberal and ego-centric accounts that “decouple white nationalism from whiteness”, arguing that White nationalism is inextricable from the “Symbolic function of whiteness” rooted in historical White supremacy (2021, p. 66). Similarly to Carmina Untalan (2023), Chebrolu argues that sustaining White supremacy lies at the core of the liberal modern order by opposing blackness or non-Whiteness, which becomes a metonym for submission, inhumanness, and incapacity. Kølvråa (2019) also analyses the formation of supremacist identity fantasies in European White nationalist online milieus, focusing on the hyper-masculine Viking as an empty signifier. This supremacist imaginary co-constitutes identities with promises of harmonious societies based on long-lost idyllic pasts, emotionally binding supporters around a utopian “pan-Nordic racial ideology” (ibid., p. 273).

Other accounts integrate critical psychoanalytical approaches to examining how the far-right exploits the continuum between anxiety and desire for wholeness under neoliberalism, scapegoating the “threatening” Other to generate fantasies of stability. Claudia Leeb (2018) discusses the rise of the far-right through Lacan and Marx, indicating that the desire for wholeness and the anxiety over *non*-wholeness are critical stabilisers for the subject (cf. Bilgic &

Pilcher, 2023; Vulović & Ejodus, 2024). The “money fetish” serves as an unconscious fantasy object, allowing subjects to cope with the fundamental *lack* in their subjectivity, obscuring their exploitation under capitalism (2018, pp. 238-239; see also Zevnik, 2022). Neoliberalism heightens both the desire for wholeness *and* the anxiety over non-wholeness, producing and withholding the longed-for fetish (cf. Wilson, 2014, 2017). In this context, the far-right redirects the (White) working class’s anxieties *away* from neoliberalism and *against* the scapegoated “threatening Other” to construct the stabilising fantasy of “nation” (cf. Mandelbaum, 2018, 2021; McGowan, 2021).

2.2.3. *Lacanian Ontological Security (LOSS)*

The subfield and theory of Lacanian ontological security engage with and further develop Lacanian scholarship on the far-right, highlighting the roles of – and the interplay between – (in)security, identity formation, fantasy, and political belonging. This theory and its history will be more thoroughly discussed in [section 3 \(Theoretical framework\)](#).

Catarina Kinnvall explores the link between globalisation, ontological insecurity, nationalism, and religion as fantasmatic coping mechanisms (2004; 2006); the sociocultural effects of multiculturalism, immigration, and globalisation for Muslims in the West (with Paul Nesbitt-Larking, 2011); the relationship between gender, trauma, and securitisation (2017, 2023); far-right narratives exploiting nationalistic and postcolonial insecurities (2018); the link between nationalism, postcolonial state formation, and the Lacanian notion of misrecognition (with Ted Svensson, 2018, 2024); the appeal of far-right populism concerning the ontological insecurity caused by globalisation (with Ted Svensson, 2022); and the nationalistic responses to the ontological insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (with Ted Svensson, 2023). Kinnvall argues that the far-right’s ideology centres on restoring an idealised, homogenous national identity by excluding the “other” and its cultural manifestations. These exclusionary politics are inextricable from gender-normative, colonial, and anti-establishment narratives, portraying political “elites” as betraying the authentic interests of “the people” and the nation (see also Bilgic, 2024). This “betrayal” is rooted in nostalgia and melancholia for an idyllic past, which far-right leaders exploit to appeal to anxious audiences (Kinnvall, 2004; 2018). The melancholia of lost Empire shapes nostalgic nation-building, which is marked by unattainable *jouissance* and, thus, by the

dissatisfaction that becomes attributed *to* and politically securitised *against* the threatening Other.

Furthermore, Kinnvall and Svensson (2022) examine how the far-right manipulates ontological insecurities by intertwining racial and gendered dynamics with nostalgic fantasies of homogenous pasts. For instance, the far-right uses social media to normalise exclusionary behaviours, reinforcing polarised identities tied to signifiers of national belonging stemming from structural power asymmetries (see also Browning, 2018). Thus, the authors argue that the far-right's appeal mirrors and bolsters institutionalised inequalities (see also Mondon & Winter, 2020).

The far-right leverages ontological insecurities by transforming feelings of cultural and socioeconomic marginalisation into powerful narratives of control and belonging. These narratives are paradoxically reinforced by failed promises, deepening grievance-induced fantasies. Christopher Browning (2018, 2019) underscores how Brexit was shaped by a broad sense of ontological insecurity among Leave supporters, particularly those feeling culturally and socioeconomically marginalised. The Leave campaign, propelled by far-right and British supremacist discourses, tapped into feelings of ontological insecurity associated with “control”, sociocultural displacement, and longing for national relevance (2019, pp. 235-236; see also Mandelbaum, 2023). Browning argues that the Leave campaign turned these anxieties into fantasmatic promises of “control”, crystallising them in signifiers like sovereignty, belonging, and “British identity” around the master signifier “Brexit” (ibid., pp. 234, 239-240; see also “nation branding”, Browning, 2015). Brexit's failure to deliver control (Hampshire, 2024; Manners, 2024) has translated into a fantasy of betrayal and “theft” by the UK political establishment, reinforcing grievance-induced positions (Browning, 2019).

Additional Lacanian ontological security literature has addressed the far-right and its normalisation, albeit in a more illustrative or tangential fashion. For instance, Ali Bilgic and Jordan Pilcher (2023) argue that status-seeking postcolonial states pursue ontological security through fantasies of a stable identity within racialised, gendered, and classed hierarchies (see also Untalan, 2020). This pursuit is intertwined with historical anxieties, humiliations, and the desire to overcome the structure of subordination against perceived global hegemony like the Bretton Woods institutions. In postcolonial settings, this manifests in the reinforcement of hierarchical, supremacist discourses and

exclusionary policies based on class, gender, and race (see also Vieira, 2018). Examining anti-immigration discourses, Eberle (2019) argues that the perpetual possibility of loss of national wholeness transcends material security, instead being co-constituted with our identities, thus reinforcing frameworks of exclusion embedded in fantasies of future unity (ibid., p. 254). Meanwhile, Moran Mandelbaum (2023) examines how nationalist discourses use fantasmatic narratives to construct national “projects of belonging” through interpellating feelings of “*we-ness*” that characterise *jouissance*. Brexit campaigners, for instance, invoked the fantasy of sovereign, “great” Britain while demonising immigrants and the “destabilising” Brussels/EU.

2.3. The techno-mediatic dimension

These invaluable LOSS analyses and theoretical approaches add complexity to and highlight the importance of addressing the normalisation of the far-right from a multi-disciplinary, multidimensional, post-structuralist approach. In this dissertation, LOSS integrates the aforementioned dimensions²⁸ under the core *psycho-political* dimension. However, an absent analytical ingredient is the *medium* – the frames, affordances, and technologies that condition our conscious and unconscious experiencing of the antagonistic formation of identities and discourses, i.e., of *the political* (Dean, 2010; Flisfeder, 2021; Johanssen & Krüger, 2022). The *techno-mediatic* dimension of the normalisation of the far-right engages with the mediation of our interactions and perceptions, influencing the interplay between political participation, identity construction, emotional governance, and discursive (re)affixing. In [section 3](#), this dimension is brought into direct conversation with LOSS, since their interplay is central to analysing the normalisation of the far-right amid the retreat of the modern liberal order.

The interdependence between far-right normalisation and AI-fuelled media systems presents a multidimensional challenge to liberal democracies. While far-right subjects decry the censorship on social media (Hughson & Dragoş, 2024), scholarship examines how these subjects have asymmetrically benefited from AI-fuelled technologies and the attention economy (Fuchs, 2021; Fuchs & Mosco, 2016; Lewandowsky et al., 2020). From a critical media approach, Vincent Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard (2019) conceptualise the attention

²⁸ The structural, the international-historical, the ideological-discursive, the institutional-epistemic, and the gender-postcolonial.

economy as the neoliberal landscape where *attention* is a scarce resource converted into power, influence, and profit (see also Dean et al., 2019; Han, 2017)²⁹. This economy thrives on capturing attention at the expense of facticity, veracity, and truth (Cosentino, 2020), generating “political bubbles” where issues harness disproportionate attention (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019, pp. 44-46). The political economy of social media has led to the proliferation of mis- and dis-information thriving on sensational content, aiding the normalisation of far-right politics globally (ibid., pp. 30-31).

Neoliberalism’s complicity with the far-right can be attested in how hybrid media aids in simultaneously *de*-politicising society by reducing antagonisms to technocratic and “rational” solutionism (Mouffe, 2005) while foregrounding the consumption of anxiety-inducing (i.e., *re*-politicising) content. In a context of permanent crises (see Krzyżanowski et al., 2023; Žižek, 2002), social media exploit and generate these anxiety-inducing technosocial pathologies: the shortening of attention spans, algorithmic-based preference manipulation, engagement with spectacular content, and immediate and ubiquitous bias-confirming spaces and contents (Areni, 2019; Fuchs, 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2020). For Christian Fuchs (2021), social media manufacture *crises as commodities* (cf. Debord, 1983; see also Hartle, 2016) and cyclically reinforce the performances and discourses that inform the functioning of these technologies and platforms (see also Chun, 2018; Dean, 2009). In this context, the far-right has been widely welcomed and integrated into traditional centrist circles (Krzyżanowski, 2020a; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Mudde, 2017b; Wodak, 2020) and into the core of liberal milieus (Ausserladscheider, 2024; Cooper, 2021; Davidson & Saull, 2017). Their discourses and rhetoric positively resonate with the perverse incentives and imperatives of the algorithmic-based attention economy (cf. Han, 2017).

Following their attention-seeking imperatives, social media algorithms play a significant role in normalising the far-right by enabling its leaders to bypass traditional gatekeeping regimes, generating controversial content, and amplifying their reach by engaging even adversarial subjects. From a normative media theory perspective, Bart Cammaerts (2020) argues that social media and its algorithms are vital in the normalisation of neo-fascism. Neo-fascist leaders

²⁹ In their policy report for the European Commission on the relationship between technology and democracy, Stephan Lewandowsky and colleagues describe the *attention economy* in these terms: “human behaviour unfolds online in an economy in which human attention is the predominant commodity. The digital sphere is designed so that people give their valuable resources of time, attention and data without considering the costs — for themselves and others.” (2020, pp. 4-5).

self-mediate and disintermediate, bypassing media gatekeepers, and use a “politics of provocation” (see also “scandalisation”, Wodak, 2020) to generate outrageous content amplified by hybrid media. The AI-based global economy of social media, which prioritises targeted advertising (Dean et al., 2019; Fuchs, 2021, pp. 85-87), enables the far-right to reach targeted populations with exclusionary rhetoric by paying for it (Cammaerts, 2020, p. 250). Similarly, Yini Zhang and colleagues (2018) explore how social media enable the far-right by analysing the amplification³⁰ of Donald Trump’s tweets and relevance during the 2016 US Presidential election. Trump’s algorithmic amplification resulted from the engagement of supporters, “apathetic” citizens (via “liking” and/or “retweeting” on Twitter/X), and ironically, liberal detractors, who “quoted” Trump to criticise him (p. 3174).

Far-right leaders employ different media strategies to shape narratives and regimes of national and ethnocultural belonging. While some present a moderated and mainstream semblance³¹, others adopt more caustic and aggressive reactionary styles. These strategies converge on appealing to the “true native” while opposing them to the “elite”. Christian Lamour (2024) argues that grassroots-oriented hybrid media methods grounded on sociocultural norms binding leaders and followers are crucial for the normalisation of the far-right. Analysing French far-right leaders Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, Lamour underscores how they use different social media strategies to compete for legitimacy over the (re)construction of “French-ness”. While their media strategies vary, Le Pen (“moderate”) and Zemmour (“conspiratorial”) overlap in their grassroots normalisation schemes by i) appealing to gendered stereotypes via embodying the “White French native” (cf. Berg & Valaskivi, 2023); ii) self-presenting as embedded in the “native” cultural practices of the “commonfolk” in opposition to the out-of-touch liberal “elite”; and iii) using “common-sense”, informal communications with followers (e.g., impromptu chit-chatting, tweeting/replying).

Mainstream parties have normalised the far-right by embedding nativist, supremacist, and exclusionary discourses within broader socio-mediatic narratives like criminality. Social media have enabled the spread of these agendas, producing spaces and networks of political support, effectively

³⁰ “Amplification” is the oftentimes unintentional escalation of attention and perceived relevance of a subject or message (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 3162-63).

³¹ Semblance refers to the deceptive *image* (of the phantasm of an “autonomous self”) that yet constitutes the ego in an attempt at fixing a coherent (yet ultimately illusory) sense of self that is projected *into* and presented *to* society (Evans, 2006, p. 178; Lacan, 1998; Žižek, 2009; see also Silverman, 2013).

amplifying far-right moral panics as the “new normal” (see Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). For instance, the Swedish context – the main analytical case in this dissertation – is explored concerning the fabrication of far-right “normality” under this media-discursive framework. From a critical discourse analysis approach, Hugo Ekström, Michał Krzyżanowski, and David Johnson (2023) analyse how mainstream parties normalise the far-right by mainstreaming the latter’s anti-immigration and anti-diversity discourses on social media. These parties have instrumentalised “criminality” in Sweden, repurposing it as a proxy discourse embedding those of immigration and diversity to pre-legitimise and normalise the far-right’s nativist politics³². The authors argue that the far-right Sweden Democrats (SD) engage with a mix of mainstream (e.g., MPs, mainstream media, political parties) and “hyperpartisan” sources (e.g., far-right YouTube channels like *Riks* and online newspapers like *Samtiden*) on social media to spread its far-right agenda and develop support networks (see also Åkerlund, 2021a; Sijstermans & Favero, 2022). Simultaneously, mainstream right-wing parties have amplified the nativist discourse of “criminal threat” by mimicking SD on social media, generating and diffusing moral panics, effectively pre-legitimising erstwhile-shunned cooperation with SD and bolstering the discourse of Swedish securitisation (Ekström et al., 2023, pp. 18-19).

Media dynamics influence the relationship between epistemic crises, institutional trust, and far-right normalisation. For Richards (2018), public mis/distrust is an emotional state fostering far-right fantasies through media, appealing to the subject’s need for ontological security (see also Areni, 2019; Areni et al., 2022; McDonnell et al., 2023). Stephen Cushion and Justin Lewis (2017), and Elizabeth Dubois and Devin Gaffney (2014) examine how media’s engagement of partisans and sensational content exacerbates political polarisation and institutional mis/distrust, aiding in normalising the far-right. Meanwhile, Katherine Allen (2016) and Peter Dahlgren (2018) link the acceptability of far-right discourses to AI-driven echo chambers, and declining trust in democratic institutions (see also Lewandowsky et al., 2020).

Social media platforms facilitate the spread and normalisation of far-right discourses by enabling the unregulated dissemination of exclusionary rhetoric, leveraging technosocial affordances – mechanisms for organising social traffic – to legitimise leaders and discourses, producing spaces for “authentic”

³² For a broader view on the complicity of mainstream Swedish parties in normalising the far-right, see Widfeldt (2018, 2023).

anonymous political participation. Mathilda Åkerlund (2020, 2021a) argues that Twitter/X enables the spread of far-right discourses by allowing the comprehensive and unfiltered dissemination of their discourses. The author explores how content dissemination on social media varies in its rhetorical strategies (see also Merrill, 2020). While highly influential far-right actors tend to avoid using hateful language to ensure platforming, low-profile and anonymous supporters can enact rhetorical extremism in their stead (2020, pp. 622-623; see also Funk & Speakman, 2022). This mediatic oscillation allows the former to simultaneously access the mainstream while keeping their radical base (see also Lamour, 2024).

Artificial Intelligence (AI), often developed within highly securitised and techno-libertarian and techno-feudal settings (Durand, 2024), has significantly impacted the amplification and normalisation of far-right discourses, rhetoric, and even violence by prioritising attention-hoarding and extremist content in social media. From a securitisation theory approach, Joe Burton (2023) examines how the securitisation of AI contributes to the normalisation of far-right violence. He argues that AI and algorithms are not just “neutral” tools but can contribute to normalising far-right discourses. This interplay results from AI being framed as an existential threat (i.e., *securitised*) and developed in securitised contexts without sufficient consideration of racial bias and ethical impacts on society (ibid., pp. 3-4; see also Berg & Valaskivi, 2023). Critical media scholarship highlights how algorithms from opaque corporate and national security settings amplify extreme narratives, benefiting from targeted advertisement systems and lack of regulation, fuelling radicalisation and political violence. Jesse Daniels (2018) examines how AI-fuelled technologies in the tech industry’s cyberlibertarian culture have enabled the rise of the far-right, directing users to racist content and spreading White nationalist memes (cf. Durand, 2024). These processes manifest in social media platforms like YouTube, whose algorithm is unexplainably biased towards attention-hoarding right-leaning content, generating a radicalising far-right filter bubble (Bryant, 2020). Meanwhile, and examining this normalising effect of social media amplification, Zhang and colleagues (2018) underscore how algorithms influence the political media landscape by prioritising engaging (with) far-right content. Algorithms incentivise amplification tactics by users like engaging with controversial content by rewarding them with increased followership and/or interactions – even when adversarial (cf. “influencers”, see Abidin, 2016; Maly, 2020).

2.4. The international-historical dimension

Analyses of far-right normalisation in its *international-historical* dimension underscore multiple ontological interpretations and epistemic debates. These include the predominance of “Western”-centric accounts, the role of “the international” in far-right politics, the co-constitution of the modern liberal order and the far-right, and the far-right’s paradoxical inter/trans-nationalisation. This literature situates the rise of the far-right within global power shifts, transcending yet intimately connected to national and political identities. White supremacy has been historically internalised in White and non-White subjects as a system and discourse of (non-)belonging, reverberating in political configurations domestically and internationally, and sustaining power beyond material conditions (Dixit, 2022; Lowndes, 2021). The international-historical dimension reveals the ideological roots and grasp of the technosocial architecture of the media system that produces algorithmically-curated far-right fantasies of belonging. While “normalisation” is not always directly scrutinised, these accounts provide insights into the rise and integration of the far-right ideologies globally.

The intricate connection between White supremacy, contemporary far-right politics, and the modern liberal modern order has been assessed from critical IR approaches. Alexander Anievas and Richard Saull (2023) explore the far-right as an international phenomenon saturating and conditioning world politics, requiring its examination across national and ideological variations. They argue that the global advance of the far-right signifies an unprecedented post-WW2 shift in modern international power configurations (2023, p. 716). Anievas and Saull stress the urgency for a global, multidimensional analysis of this phenomenon as the existing window of analysis – the European interwar period (1919-1938) – offers a limited historical context. International-historical accounts have been dominated by comparativist and positivist epistemologies (see Mudde, 2007; Norris & Inglehart, 2019) that artificially split the international from the domestic, failing to address the far-right’s complexity as “interconnected and co-constituted in time and space” (Anievas & Saull, 2023, p. 716; see also Norocel, 2024). Anievas and Saull critique these epistemologies, centralising the study of the far-right *within* the paradoxically enabling architecture of the modern liberal order rather than as *anomic* to it. They argue that the far-right is shaped by this order’s structure and crises, evidenced in the latter’s exclusionary ideological core. The far-right fixates on material and imaginary signifiers of otherness located *in* and originating *from*

the international as a “permanent source of existential threat to the spatial and racial integrity of the ‘homeland’” (2023, pp. 719-720). This system of insecurity allows for the formation of national identities and belonging via material and imaginary borders – discursive structures negotiating the “us vs. them” dichotomy –, which become increasingly governed by the far-right as “safeguards” of national autonomy.

The international dimension of far-right normalisation is also evident in its paradoxical internationalisation, where far-right organisations, leaders, and supporters co-develop support networks, practices, and camaraderie despite their ultra-nationalist ideology. Krysty Campion and Scott Poynting (2021) analyse how shared far-right values and practices have become highly transferable across geographically disparate networks. Similarly to Mattias Ekman (2022), they argue that the widespread adoption of their conspiracy theories across different contexts, platforms (e.g., Parliaments, social media), and actors (e.g., Elon Musk, Viktor Orbán, and the Christchurch mass murderer) underscores the value of transferability in normalising far-right discourses. The transnationalisation of the far-right is also examined by Timo Koch (2024), who looks at how exclusionary organisations mobilise the patriarchal and heteronormative concept of “family” internationally to promote their agendas. By integrating decentralised, exclusionary movements and networks into “mainstream” milieus, far-right organisations merge with purportedly more “moderate” subjects like right-wing conservatives and the Christian right. Koch explores how these transnational amalgamations produce new forms of exclusion centred on the tension between the metonym “family” and the threatening Other. These platforms enable far-right organisations to coordinate supportive actors from different contexts to share and refine resources, ideas, strategies, and knowledge.

2.5. The ideological-discursive dimension

The normalisation of the far-right has also been examined in its ideological-discursive dimension, particularly in how far-right ideologies integrate into liberal regimes of normality. These ideologies, often disseminated through conspiracy theories like the “Great Replacement” and “White Genocide”, are discursively shaped, sanitised, and adopted within the political mainstream. At the core of this ideological-discursive dimension lies the far-right’s historical interplay with White supremacy, liberal democracy, and neoliberalism as

ontological coordinates of mutual identification and antagonism (see Brown et al., 2023). This literature examines how power is wielded and contested through the (re)formation of norms, meanings, and identities in the political. These processes are shaped by the technosocial affordances and economic imperatives of the hybrid media system, which, in turn, is ideologically conditioned to perpetuate, amplify, and normalise far-right discourses. Prominent contributions by Katy Brown, Aurelien Mondon, and Aaron Winter (2023), Michał Krzyżanowski (2020a), and Krzyżanowski et al. (2023) to this dimension will be more thoroughly addressed in [section 3](#).

The normalisation of the far-right is intertwined with the modern liberal order. From a critical discourse perspective, Ruth Wodak (2020) examines how the far-right leverages discursive ambivalence and liberal-democratic principles like freedom of expression and electoral legitimacy. “Democracy” becomes a discursive means of sanitising and legitimising the far-right’s agenda (Oja & Mral, 2013), reducing it to an “electocracy” appealing to liberal sensibilities via respectability politics. Wodak (2020) and Brown and colleagues (2023) argue that the far-right masks their assaults on liberal democracy by targeting its core values (e.g., cultural tolerance, gender equality) and advocates rather than “democracy” itself as an empty signifier which they can claim to be defending (Hellström & Nilsson, 2010). For Mudde (2017b), Niklasson and Hølleland (2018), and O’Brien (2014), the ultranationalism and nativism that define the far-right lies at the heart of this covert maligning, underscoring its contradictions with “Western” democracy: its Europhobia, anti-globalism, and belief in oxymoronic “European” White supremacy. Wodak argues that the far-right distorts liberal principles around the metonym of “the people” (2020, p. 33), discursively enacting regimes of belonging and threat³³.

Ideologically, the far-right and its normalisation operate relationally, co-constituted with the purported counter-hegemonic structure of liberal democracy. Neil Davidson and Richard Saull (2017) examine the close yet oftentimes contradictory relationship between neoliberalism and the far-right. From a critical IR perspective, they analyse neoliberalism’s governance over political, economic, and sociocultural issues and horizons of “normality” (i.e., its ideological grasp; Glynos, 2001). This media-afforded “neoliberal redrawing

³³ For instance, the “viralisation” of the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory (Ekman, 2022; Goetz, 2021) is interdependent with the far-right’s “defence of democracy”, signifying the far-right as defenders of “true democracy” (Mondon & Winter, 2020; Pelinka, 2017), positioning the White “West” as against non-White (read: un-democratic) counterparts (Cosentino, 2020; Goetz, 2021).

of the political” (Davidson & Saull, 2017, p. 708) responds to the intrinsic political-economical requirements and pathologies of the neoliberal project, which drives the resilience of the far-right. Davidson and Saull exemplify this issue by showing that while the far-right opposes EU politics on immigration, it perversely reinforces neoliberalism by securitising the immigrant Other. This securitisation serves the neoliberal demand for cheap, under-protected labour, signifying the perverse embrace between these ideologies (ibid.).

2.6. The institutional-epistemic dimension

The normalisation of the far-right has been prominently experienced as a disruptive psycho-political phenomenon pronouncing institutional mis- and distrust, epistemic relativisation, and post-truth politics. The literature on the institutional-epistemic dimension addresses the (re)generation of regimes of trust, legitimacy, normality, and “truth”, which increasingly stem from the highly engaging antagonism between far-right and liberal discourses. This literature is deeply connected to both the psycho-political – e.g., in generating fantasies of ontological (in)security fostering (dis)trust in public institutions – and techno-mediatic, which underscores the role of social media technologies in amplifying and normalising these fantasies and regimes of (ab)normality.

Wodak, Culpeper, and Semino (2021) take a critical discursive approach to examine this phenomenon as stemming from two interdependent processes: epistemic relativisation (e.g., post-truth narratives) and decreased trust in democratic institutions. The far-right catalyses political ontologies, claiming ownership over contentious narratives which signify the tension between distrust, epistemological relativism, and power. Mudde argues that the success and normalisation of the far-right, often misread as a pathology, should be understood as a pathological normalcy³⁴ or the “radicalisation of mainstream views” (2017a, p. 432). This situates the far-right’s rise within a political structure possessing dormant enabling conditions for exploiting epistemic relativisation, media complicitness, and distrust in democracy.

The enactment of post-truth strategies is connected with far-right normalisation and the heightened mistrust in liberal democratic institutions. Richards (2018) examines how far-right leaders garner support through post-

³⁴ Similarly, Jessie Daniels (2018) categorises the far-right as a systemic “feature” rather than a “bug”.

truth strategies. Their supporters interpret facts based on their utility in advancing personal agendas or reinforcing pre-existing beliefs. This involves producing falsehoods for political advantage, perceived as necessary for achieving a “greater good” (ibid). It also involves delusions. The delusional subject does not reject facticity, but its beliefs are anchored in paranoid fantasies that shape perceptions unconsciously. Far-right leaders’ fantasies may trigger paranoid delusions in followers, thus streamlining post-truth thinking (ibid.). These tactics converge in an “indifference to logic”, where the subject deflects any potential contradictions with their delusional fantasy, weakening the legitimacy of liberal modernity’s ideal ego³⁵.

2.7. The gender-postcolonial dimension

Far-right normalisation transcends “Western” contexts. This phenomenon is historically and structurally linked to broader forms of exclusion and supremacy. This involves the ontological (in)security emanating from the “threatening” Other. The *gender* and *postcolonial* dimensions of far-right normalisation are co-articulated within White supremacy narratives, conditioning the far-right’s contestations of belonging. This literature highlights how gender, class, race, and colonial regimes intersect as core identity signifiers in far-right discourses, underpinning their nationalistic, exclusionary agendas. Social media mobilises these identities, appealing to aggrieved White “Western” males, providing “safe spaces” for experiencing fantasies of wholeness and re-establishing “righteous” social hierarchies.

White supremacy is the ideological cornerstone of the processes of European imperialism and colonialism since the 15th century (R. L. Allen, 2001). Colonialism and globalisation are understood under this framework as co-constituted processes inextricably tainted by White supremacy (Ahmed, 2012; R. L. Allen, 2001). Neoliberal discourses reinforce and sustain the White supremacist processes of dominance and radical othering (Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre, 2020). From a postcolonial approach, Allen (2001) examines the relationship between global White supremacy and the standardisation of reified “Europeanness” through colonisation. In it, civilisation, knowledge, belonging, and intersubjectivity are subordinated to White European

³⁵ I.e., as “reasonable”, “compliant”, “rational”, and “truthful”. For Barry Richards, this helps to explain the failures of liberalism in addressing far-right normalisation (2018, p. 405).

imperatives transcending borders, generations, and affects that become transfigured into contemporary neoliberalism.

The gendered construction of the nation under neoliberal-sustained White supremacy is inextricable from the essentialisation and emotional governance over desired and threatening bodies. From a critical gender perspective, Agius, Rosamond, and Kinnvall (2020) examine the nation and the “people” as gendered narratives co-produced in supremacist fantasies. Far-right politics reshape national narratives by associating anti-feminist and gendered constructions of the nation to an ideal, nostalgic-infused state and to distrust in liberal democracy. These narratives are mobilised as masculinised ontological security fantasies of ownership, protection, and defence against “national decline” catering to “disenfranchised” and aggrieved White men by scapegoating the threatening Other and their enablers (ibid., pp. 433-434).

Sauer (2020) explores the link between masculinist identitarian discourses and the far-right, analysing the role of affects in their co-constitution. The far-right is understood as a gendered phenomenon merging masculinist politics with issues of religion, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (2020, p. 23). The spread of these discourses relates to broader European gender regimes under neoliberal capitalism. Sauer argues that neoliberalism’s dismantling of welfare states and weakening of egalitarian values has produced precarious material and affective conditions exploited by the far-right (cf. Norocel, 2024; Stewart, 2020). This far-right backlash involves reactionary, anti-feminist rhetoric against “gender” as a signifier of social mobilisation against fantasies of “endangered masculinity” (Sauer, 2020). These masculinist siege fantasies mobilise affects like anger, fear, and “love” in relation to the “White nation”³⁶. This masculinised far-right vision seeks to restore traditional gender regimes around values like “strength”, authoritarianism, “natural inequality”, and exclusion (ibid., p. 34).

This overview of the literature on the far-right and its normalisation showcases not only its multifaceted character – transcending the relevant yet bloated and oversimplistic scopes of party politics and political science – but also the intricate ontological and epistemic *interplay* between these dimensions.

³⁶ Sauer (2020) argues that the mobilisation of these affects against the empty signifier “gender” agglomerates the gamut of maladies informing far-right masculinist grievances – e.g., “weakness”, “indecisiveness”, “progressiveness”, and “multiculturalism” – and signifies the far-right’s “vision” in direct opposition.

2.8. Far-right normalisation: Multidimensional conundrum

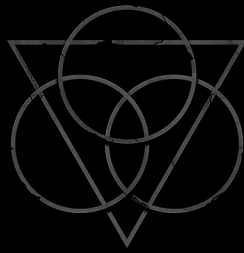
This literature review underscores the urgency of analysing far-right normalisation's *psycho-political* and *techno-mediatic* dimensions from a Lacanian ontological security (LOSS) perspective. The interplay between these dimensions guides this research, articulating the other dimensions³⁷ ontologically and epistemologically. This is a nascent approach, particularly from a LOSS perspective. While psychoanalytical media studies³⁸, inspired by Slavoj Žižek (1997, 1998, 1998), have integrated the role of media's impact on political and sociocultural developments in late capitalism³⁹, the *normalisation* of the far-right remains underexplored. Even when addressing the far-right *continuum* in different ideological and organisational manifestations⁴⁰, the efforts to address this phenomenon present vital shortcomings. They either explore the far-right as excarnated from its *continuum* (i.e., misrepresenting its multidimensional complexity) or bypass a comprehensive problematisation and analysis of the process of normalisation. While LOSS attends to the former issue, the latter has been examined by critical media, IR, and discourse theory scholars. However, far-right normalisation has been chiefly developed from accounts emphasising reflexivity and agency, mediatic-political strategies and tactics, and materiality. These approaches fail to integrate the role of the unconscious, ideology, fantasy, desire, enjoyment and subjectivity into their analyses. While these facets are essential to consider in the study of far-right normalisation, they also signify the cliff's edge of this divide. This dissertation initially landed on this edge, and subsequently manifested in the development of its four articles. This thesis aims to contribute to this urgent bridging by merging LOSS with the techno-mediatic.

³⁷ Structural, international-historical, ideological-discursive, gender-postcolonial, and institutional-epistemic.

³⁸ De Vos (2021); Flisfeder (2021); Flisfeder & Willis (2014); Johanssen (2018, 2021); Johanssen & Krüger (2022); Krüger (2024); Özdoyran (2019).

³⁹ See Carroll (2022); Jameson (1992); Mandel & Durand (2024).

⁴⁰ e.g., Parties, movements, think tanks, decentralised online communities, persons; White nationalism, the alt-right, right-wing populism, right-wing radicalism; neo-fascism; Christian nationalism; techno-libertarianism.



III. Theoretical Framework

3. Theoretical framework

This section presents the theoretical framework for this dissertation, centred on *Lacanian ontological security*. Given the research problem's focus on the interplay between the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions of far-right normalisation, this framework is supported by borrowing key concepts from other subfields: normalisation (from discourse analysis; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2020) and hybrid media (from critical media studies; Chadwick, 2017). The multidimensionality of this phenomenon poses a research challenge that also constitutes a contribution of this dissertation to the field of ontological security studies. Some of these supporting concepts and theories stem from fields and traditions that hold some incompatibilities with the epistemic backbone of Lacanian ontological security, *Lacanian psychoanalysis*. Despite these differences – acknowledged in the closing subsection – they also possess valuable supportive qualities that enrich this theoretical framework and convey its pluralist structure (Feyerabend, 2010, pp. 13–15).

Lacanian ontological security sediments and organises the deployment and interaction between the aforementioned supporting concepts. This theory provides the affective structure that conditions the formation of meaning and identity that manifest techno-politically and socioculturally in phenomena directly covered by the supporting concepts. Throughout this dissertation, ontological security embodies the red thread, both as an analytical lens and object of inquiry. I critically engage in the dual dimension of this theory and discuss limitations and potential areas of expansion concerning the (under)developed integration of far-right normalisation, the role of AI-fuelled social media, and the crucial role of enjoyment (*jouissance*). While widely applied to diverse areas of political research⁴¹, Lacanian ontological security is still to more directly grasp the phenomenon of far-right normalisation, and, in particular, its techno-mediatic dimension⁴². The supporting concepts are mobilised to both address these shortcomings and strengthen Lacanian ontological security as a theory and generative space for pluralistic inquiry.

⁴¹ See section 1 (Introduction) and section 2 (Literature review).

⁴² For non-Lacanian OSS accounts addressing the role of social media on politics, see Areni (2019); Areni et al. (2022); and McDonnell et al. (2023).

This section is developed as follows. First, I engage with *ontological security* as the spinal cord of this theoretical framework, emphasising its Lacanian backbone and core analytical concepts, as well as justifying its choice and centrality in this dissertation. Further, I mobilise this theory to discuss and analyse the key contextual relationship conditioning far-right normalisation: that of liberal democracy, neoliberalism, and the modern liberal order. Second, I present and discuss the supporting concepts, emphasising their suitability *for* and contributions *to* the multidimensional study of far-right normalisation, as well as their epistemic synergies with Lacanian ontological security. The mobilisation of these supporting concepts aims to represent the real-world complexity of far-right normalisation. First, the concept of *normalisation* guides the deployment of ontological security into the main research problem by addressing the anxiety-producing relationship between crisis, modernity, and liberal democracy. This discussion includes a LOSS theoretical reflection on the crucial interplay between crisis, liberal democracy, modernity, and normalisation. Second, *hybrid media* informs ontological security with the technosocial organisational dynamics of contemporary political communications – i.e., the fluid interplay between “old” and “new” media logics that condition the emotional governance of ontological (in)security. I close this section by offering a general reflection on the synergies, contradictions, and flawed generativity of this theoretical framework.

3.1. Lacanian ontological security

“In 2016, I declared: I am your voice [...] Today, I add: I am your warrior. I am your justice. And for those who have been wronged and betrayed: I am your retribution”⁴³

– **Donald J. Trump** (in D. Smith, 2023).

Trump’s message at the 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference encapsulates the unending oscillation between civilisational dislocation and the promise of salvation in a discursive nutshell governed by a “righteous” leader (himself) and temporality (the past). These horrific and beatific futures (Eberle, 2019) and their reductive governance into an authoritative figure signified in heroic archetypes (“warrior”, “voice”, “justice”, “retribution”) respond to our imperative to attain a sense of stability or continuity in the world

⁴³ Speech at CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference), Maryland, 4 March 2023 (D. Smith, 2023).

– i.e., to concoct a fantasy of *ontological security*. “Fantasies” do not refer to mere illusions, but to the stabilising narratives that structure our sense of reality – e.g., world orders, nationality, group belonging, and ultimately, identity (Fink, 1995, pp. 59–60; Lacan, 2006, p. 122). Far-right discourses mobilise these fantasies and emotional governance structures, signifying *what* should be desired (e.g., “Make America Great Again”), *who* threatens our wholeness (e.g., immigrants, the leftists, the feminists), *how* to enjoy this quest, *when* loss occurred (e.g., immigration “crises”), and *where* it is situated (i.e., idyllic, homogeneous pasts). Emotional governance refers to emotional regimes and discourses that (de)construct the feeling rules (Koschut, 2019) of social acceptability (Richards, 2007; Solomon, 2015).

Ontological security studies (OSS) is a multidisciplinary field originating from Robert Laing’s (1965) psychoanalytic and Anthony Giddens’ (1990, 1991) sociologic explorations of modernity’s effects on the subject’s sense of (in)security, forming the concept of ontological security. Situated at the intersection of international relations and politics of emotion (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020), OSS also includes psychology, *psychoanalysis*, sociology, gender studies, and post-colonial theory (Bilgic & Pilcher, 2023; Eberle, 2019; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2017; Kirke & Steele, 2023). Ontological security can be understood as a fantasy of categorical closure, providing stability and continuity (i.e., identity) to the subject in an anxiety-inducing context of uncertainty (Cash, 2020; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Laing and Giddens understood the subject as fixed or able to attain ontological security, a self-experience of “fulfilment” via practices, rituals, and traditions (Steele, 2008).

Concerning nation-building, ontological security differs from yet is closely related to the material security provided by prominent actors like the state. According to Jelena Subotić (2016), states construct “autobiographical narratives” to cope with crises and threats, linking policies of physical (in)security (e.g., terrorism, criminality, war) to ontological security narratives of “continuity, [...], routine, familiarity, and calm” (ibid., pp. 611-612)⁴⁴. These stabilising fantasies are politically efficient insofar as they resonate with the subject’s inherent anxiety about mortality, lack of control, meaning, and purpose (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020, p. 245). The state provides ontological security to its subjects through narratives of unity, belonging, and pride, while also seeking ontological security itself (ibid.). However, Brent Steele and Jelena

⁴⁴ Cf. “nation branding” (Browning, 2015, 2023).

Subotić (2024) argue that these securitising narratives are not entirely in control of states given their relational structure. Instead, they can challenge and disrupt states and the identities they seek to shape – i.e., generate ontological *insecurity*⁴⁵.

Furthermore, ontological security involves constructing political temporalities linking shared pasts to desired (yet anxiety-inducing) futures. Alexandra Homolar and Ronny Scholz (2019) argue that politicising this link via *nostalgia* constitutes a key ontological (in)securitising strategy of the far-right. When encountering crises, subjects resort to nostalgic narratives as coping mechanisms, essentialising the “positiveness” of the longed-for past to construct present-day securitising “notions of belonging, inclusion and continuity” (ibid., p. 358). This nostalgia is embedded with supremacist affects and narratives of “neglected forms of ‘original’ social organisation”, which far-right leaders mobilise to shape restorative, exclusionary future imaginaries (ibid., pp. 349-350). Jenniffer Mitzen (2006) argues that these narratives are efficient if subjects can mobilise them to self-perpetuate over time, highlighting “identity” as inherently dynamic, co-constituted with movement-through-time (ibid., p. 344). Andrew Hom and Brent Steele (2020) interrogate the anxious nature of the international realm as an intricate “system, society, community, or inhabitable space beyond and between [individual] and [state] relations” (cf. the modern liberal order, ibid., p. 322). The ontological security sought through an orderly sense of time and coherent self-narratives paradoxically signifies the anxiety-inducing *possibility* of temporal disarray in the space of the international due to the ambiguity, multiplicity, and antagonism of its ordering practices (cf. Rumelili, 2020). The pervasiveness of the international conditions the experience of crises, triggering and perpetuating anxieties, distorting subjects’ co-constituted senses of self and time similar to personal or local dislocations (Hom & Steele, 2020, p. 335).

Giddens’ notion of the security of “being” – to experience oneself as a “whole person” through time – is both foundational and a point of divergence in this theory (Cash, 2020; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Later scholarship, adopting a Lacanian approach, criticised the idea of the (in)security of *being* as a stable state (Kinnvall, 2004). This perspective views the “self” as never fully realised,

⁴⁵ For instance, national “icons” – i.e., highly influential and visible persons in society – are crucial elements for the ontological security of the nation by providing a sense of identity and status. However, in challenging securitising narratives (e.g., via political activism), they can become sources of ontological *insecurity* to the illusory stability of the nation pursued by the state (Steele & Subotić, 2024, pp. 148-152).

perpetually negotiating roles-identities due to clashes between their desires, enjoyment, and fantasies (Browning, 2019; Eberle, 2019; see also Glynos, 2001). The “self” is instead bound to a perennial process of *becoming* (Kinnvall, 2017) inscribed in a brittle narrative that closes categorical identifications (e.g., nationality, ethnicity) to procure a sense of stability embedded in anxiety-inducing imaginaries⁴⁶. These imaginaries and the proliferation of crisis narratives (Chernobrov, 2016; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023) push the subject towards the Symbolic Order – language, culture, law, norms – to reinforce their sense of belonging by fixing the stranger-Other as a signifier of insecurity (Kinnvall, 2004). Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020) problematise Giddens’ approach to existential anxiety as something that can be managed through routines, practices, and rituals. They emphasise that ontological anxiety represents an ungraspable, unsolvable *lack* bequeathing the subject membership within the sociosymbolic realm – moreover, anxiety is the “moment of subjectivity” itself (Burgess, 2017). This lack is temporarily alleviated through fickle fantasies of wholeness and agency, recasting anxiety as a productive rather than solely distressing force in the subject (see Stavrakakis, 1999).

The incessant proliferation of material and ontological *crises* since the post-9/11 period and our experience of them as inescapable and ubiquitous via hybrid media – i.e., crisis becoming constitutive of our identities rather than extrinsic – position Lacanian ontological security as a crucial framework for this dissertation. Ontological (in)security constitutes both a cause and consequence of overlapping crises – e.g., of democracy, masculinities, the environment, the economy, migration (cf. Connell, 2014; Harvey, 2007; Norocel, 2022) – framing and enabling the normalisation of the far-right and its experience amid liberal democratic decline. This experience links crisis and “normality” to specific affects and nostalgic temporalities⁴⁷ that help constitute the far-right’s dystopian/horrific and utopian/beatific fantasies of ontological (in)security (Eberle, 2019; Homolar & Scholz, 2019; Mitzen, 2006).

Ontological security interrogates identity formation as performances and enactments concerning the edification *of* and flux *between* national and international regimes of power and belonging/othering. It examines how the interplay between deep-seated anxieties and enjoyment around long-lost object-causes of desire, like the “united nation” (cf. Vulović & Ejodus, 2024), manifest *in* and affectively appeal *through* exclusionary civilisational fantasies.

⁴⁶ E.g., the “feared future” of a non-White Sweden (Krzyżanowski, 2020).

⁴⁷ E.g., glorious pasts v. anxiety-inducing futures.

Steele and Subotić (2024) argue that ontological security helps to address the frictional nature of identity formation by integrating different layers of analysis: the personal, the national, and the international (ibid., pp. 144-145). OSS concerns not only the subject's sense of ontological security but also its societal enactment and performance (ibid.), particularly through the neoliberal affordances of hybrid media. By conceptualising states and the international system as *subjects* of analysis (Kinnvall, 2004), ontological security allows for investigating far-right normalisation as a signifier of deeper identity (re)formation processes affecting our relationship with liberal democratic modernity – rather than as a phenomenon *extrinsic* to the subject. This framework allows for analysing how these deep-seated exclusionary and supremacist desires and anxieties transcend radical milieus and, instead, are inextricable from the “institutionalised and normalised inequalities of everyday power structures” (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022, p. 538).

The integration, expansion, and centrality of the concept of (*in*)security within Lacanian accounts concerning the co-generation of (in)stability and identity underscores the suitability of ontological security for studying the far-right and its normalisation (Houde, 2024; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). This framework allows us to examine how the far-right leverages social anxieties and desires by generating stabilising narratives of a secure, wholesome, and orderly future relying on illusory signifiers of social identification, particularly those tied to idyllic pasts (Browning, 2019; Hook, 2012). These discourses signify the Other as a permanent source of insecurity, stretching the emotional context of belonging and exclusion beyond crises and into the “mundane” everyday (Browning, 2018, 2019; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). Ontological security provides a unique and critical lens to analyse the normalisation of the far-right as a process of (re)producing supremacist regimes of belonging. These regimes, enabled and mimicked by moderate and liberal counterparts (Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2020), oscillate between securitising and insecurity-inducing subjectivities; between emotional contexts of crisis and the mundane “everyday”; and between longed-for idyllic pasts and anxiety-inducing futures.

Considering these discussions on ontological security, its Lacanian iteration, and suitability for the research problem of this dissertation, in the following subsection, I will further develop the theoretical structure of *Lacanian* ontological security. In this subsection, I do not intend nor pretend to cover the

considerable array and complexity of Lacan's theory of subjectivity⁴⁸, but rather mobilise and discuss those that have shaped the subfield and concept of ontological security. While the contributions of this subfield to the study of the far-right (and, to a lesser degree, its normalisation) have been discussed in the [literature review](#), I nonetheless orient and illustrate the discussion of this framework in relation to the main problem of this thesis.

3.1.1. *Lacanian psychoanalysis: Addressing the subject of ontological (in)security*

Ontological security provides a valuable departure point for discussing the analytical array of Lacanian psychoanalysis and orienting it towards the phenomenon of far-right normalisation by focusing on *the subject*⁴⁹ immersed in this fantasy. Contrary to common misunderstandings and misreadings, Lacanian psychoanalysis does not deal with the subject as pertaining to an individual but instead as *lack* – as a void bereft of essence – dependent or *subjectified* by and to the Symbolic Order (Lacan, 1998, pp. 77–78; Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 36–37; Van Haute, 2001, pp. 159–161). Lacan views the subject (usually departing from the figure of an infant) as emerging through its entry into the Symbolic Order – this is, its entry into the realm of language, culture, and law (2006, pp. 12, 227; see also Van Haute, 2001, p. 10). This entry is marked by a traumatic *split*, where the now-subject loses its pre-sociolinguistic wholeness, generating a constitutive *lack* built around an ultimately unattainable *object-cause of desire*. Lacan understands this split as the moment of subjectivity itself, where the “I” is divided into *ego* or false/illusory self – the mask with which we traverse sociosymbolic space – and the *unconscious* – the Symbolic's machination through/as the subject (Evans, 2006; pp. 197-198; Lacan, 1998, p. 26). Contrary to misconceptions stemming from psychological, behaviourist, and critical theory approaches, the unconscious is not some “inner world” holding the “true essence” of the individual, but rather the structuring machination of the Symbolic Order through the subject (Fink, 1995, pp. 7–9; C. Jones, 2020; Lacan, 1998, p. 77). The split subject is not reduced to what is commonly conceptualised as an individual or “self” but rather encompasses more complex assemblages of

⁴⁸ The characterisation of “the subject” represents much of the lifeworks of prominent Lacanian scholars like Alenka Zupančič; Bruce Fink, Jacques-Alain Miller, Yannis Stavrakakis, Julia Kristeva, and Slavoj Žižek.

⁴⁹ The concept of “user” will be occasionally used to refer to subjects operating on social media platforms.

existence, like groups, families, nations, political systems, and even technologies (see C. Jones, 2020; Millar, 2021; Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 3–4).

The subject is, thus, not an innate or universal human condition or entity but a *possibility* structured as sheer lack and conditioned by the process of signification on whatever ontological assemblage it encompasses. The subject is created upon the entity's entry into the Symbolic realm, which is irredeemably signified in language (e.g., "I am a Swede / Father / Protestant / Patriot"). The subject does not exist in a traditional sense but is a naturalised *façade*. This mask does not cover a "real truth" or fixity (Lacan, 1998, p. 48, 2006, p. 153), but rather is the operation of the unconscious through the illusion of the self. In short, "the subject is nothing but [its] split" (Fink, 1995, p. 45; see also Lacan, 2006, pp. 286, 436), and it is experienced as a structuring fantasy of ontological security. Simultaneously, the split's residual fantasy, the ego, is the stabilising fantasy of the "self" and thus governs the illusion of a "conscious sense of agency" (Evans, 2006, pp. 197-198). The identification with this self-image, through what Lacan labels the infant's "mirror stage", as "whole" and coherent represents the subject's inextricable misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) since the ego's formation through the *split* with the unconscious can never be fully reintegrated nor grasped (Evans, 2006, p. 11; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022; Lacan, 2006, pp. 808-809). This misrecognition, paradoxically, is what enables the subject's sense or experience of agency. Agency is both "possible" and ultimately illusory as it resides in the subject's inescapable misrecognition, and thus, it is curtailed by the unassailable current of the unconscious via the Symbolic order (cf. Ruti, 2014; Sheikh, 2017). This paradoxical and anti-essentialist quality of the subject acts as a departure point, signifying the value of the post-clinical adaptation of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the study of political phenomena (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 36).

For Lacan, the condition and function of the subject are organised in the interdependence and interplay of the three psychic realms: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The *Symbolic* Order, the "linguistically-constituted social order" (Pohl & Swyngedouw, 2023, p. 3), governs intersubjectivity and shapes reality by providing the coordinates for the production of fantasies like ontological security (see also Fink, 1995, p. 56). This Order plays a crucial and paradoxical role in the subject's psyche. It structures the possibility of pursuing desires through fantasies (Hoens, 2020, p. 48), yet this perpetually effectuates the lack and anxiety stemming from the subject's entry into the sociosymbolic realm (Glynos, 2001). In other words, the Symbolically-organised pursuit of

desire involves perpetuating the anxiety-inducing lack that, in turn, mobilises the subject towards the relentless yet ultimately fruitless attempts at satisfying desire (Van Haute, 2001, pp. 106-107; see also Glynos, 2001; Hook, 2017). For Lacanian ontological security scholars, this anxiety-induced (and infusing) yet incessant motion towards our desire is what marks the subject as “becoming” rather than “being” (Kinnvall, 2017). Lacan argues that *desire* is withheld or arrested by the figure of the Other, which is both “other” persons (i.e., experienced in our desire for their *recognition* to produce stable identifications) and the “big Other”: the manifestation of the Symbolic authority, the “space containing the signifiers that precede and undermine any subjectivity” (Hoens, 2020, p. 48). Thus, desire is the politically mobilising, socially conditioned possibility of both filling the subject’s lack and perpetuating it (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 44; Lacan, 2006, pp. 450-451).

Meanwhile, the *Imaginary* Order governs our identities and fantasies, which are shaped by the Symbolic structure or chain of signification. It provides meaning and narratives to the otherwise abstract and ungraspable structure of the Symbolic, allowing it to work through and *as us* (Hook, 2017; Žižek, 2009). The Imaginary is the domain where the subject’s ego – the inherently unstable narrative of the self (Homer, 2020, p. 99) – is formed through imaginary identifications with images, and thus, where constitutive and differentiating fantasies about the self and Others are constructed (Lacan, 2006, p. 40-41; Machin, 2020; Mouffe, 2005). It is through the Imaginary that “the symbolic takes hold in even the deepest recesses of the human organism” (Lacan, 2006, p. 6). Given its vast complexity, the Symbolic Order cannot be fully grasped by the subject but rather is encountered in, or partially accessed through, historically-contingent, imaginary articulations like “modernity”, “late capitalism”, the liberal international order, or “the nation” (Machin, 2020; Walkerdine, 2020; Wilson, 2017) – i.e., “imaginary impregnations [acting as] partializations of the symbolic alternative that give the signifying chain its appearance” and meaning (Lacan, 2006, p. 6). Fantasies of ontological security are thus powerful “symbolic partializations” that shape the Symbolic order of liberal modernity – i.e., the modern liberal order under neoliberalism (Walkerdine, 2020; Wilson, 2017). These ideologically interpellate its subjects (cf. Žižek, 2009, pp. 15-16), conditioning the affective normalisation of the far-right (Kisić-Merino & Kinnvall, 2023).

The final and most complex component of the Lacanian Borromean knot, *the Real*, is the order of the un-signifiable and traumatic, what exists prior to and

beyond language. The Real is not *reality* – the subjective experience shaped by fantasies in pursuit of stabilising pleasure (Lacan, 2006, p. 324; Evans, 2006, p. 164) – but the realm of the inassimilable, which resists symbolisation and is manifested and experienced in fantasmatic and symbolic dislocation (Evans, 2006, p. 162). The Symbolic Order and the fantasies that give it meaning are inherently incomplete and limited due to the limitations of its signifiers (language and, broadly speaking, law) since they exist negating or in opposition to other articulations (Glynos, 2001). The *Real* is a structure encountered when Symbolic identifications and imaginary concoctions fail. However, for Lacan, this process of the Real is what, paradoxically, also supports fantasy as much as the latter “protects the real” (1998, p. 41). The Real’s indifference to and transcendence of the Symbolic Order implies its equal disregard for the subject and its pleasure. The Real triggers anxiety and trauma by submerging fantasmatically-articulated reality into overwhelming (im)possibility (Lacan, 2006, p. 324), which, in turn, mobilises the (re)generation of fantasy as a defence mechanism. Bruce Fink argues that the Real is what precedes language, what constitutes the “blissful” pre-sociosymbolic state of the (future) split subject where its lack and (thus) desire have not been developed (1995, p. 24; see also Homer, 2020, pp. 98-99). Lacan’s statement that “the lack of the lack makes the real, which emerges only there as a cork” (1998, p. ix) attends to the Real’s “blockage” of the motion of desire resulting from “lacking lack”, which leads to sociosymbolic dislocations caused by (and experienced as) anxiety. For Yannis Stavrakakis, the renovation of lack through anxiety implies the renovation of desire in the form of new political articulations. In other words, the encounter with the Real is a quintessential moment of political and historical movement since it leads to “the antagonistic articulation of different discourses that attempt to symbolise [the Real’s] traumatic nature, to suture the lack it creates” (1999, p. 74; see also Burgess, 2017). In turn, *discourse* is the articulation of signifiers that shape intersubjectivity against the Real, mediated by fantasmatic meanings, and regulated by the Symbolic’s demands, i.e., “a social bond, founded in language” (D. Evans, 2006, p. 45; Lacan, 1999, p. 17).

The multifaceted and complex interaction between Lacan’s three orders of existence points to the crucial role of the interplay between fantasy, desire (and its *object-cause*), and anxiety for the analysis of political dislocation – i.e., the generation of crisis – embedded in phenomena like far-right normalisation. For Lacan, the subject is fundamentally void, perpetually changing and reconstituting its identity and symbolic attachments according to the demands

of the Symbolic Order (2006, p. 84). This subject constantly attempts to stabilise itself against its constitutive lack – the void that binds it to unrealisable desires and prospects of fulfilment – via ontological security fantasies (Browning, 2018; Eberle, 2019). These fantasies should not be understood as an abstraction but rather as stabilising responses to our inescapable lack and otherwise overwhelming Symbolic commitments (Lacan, 2006, pp. 84-85). Fantasies like ontological security constitute what we interpret as political, social, cultural, and affective reality (Evans, 2006, p. 164). Fantasy is a “narrative that structures our experience of reality, organizing our pursuit of desire” (Maher, 2023, p. 2), and thus, it constitutes a core analytical and ontological ordinance of antagonistic political reality (Sharpe & Turner, 2020; Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 108–109). For Slavoj Žižek, the political kernel of fantasy can be prominently attested in how *ideology* operates through the subject, shaping its desire. For Žižek, ideology is a form of fantasy that transcends knowledge and instead is found in the structure of the unconscious. The subject becomes sociopolitically bound due to its misrecognition not of social reality but rather of the *illusion* that structures said reality – i.e., the *ideological fantasy* (2009, pp. 29-30; see also Hook, 2017).

The ontological security fantasy is a compelling illusion that politically organises (i.e., ideologically *interpellates*; Mandelbaum, 2023) the subject around the unconscious desire to quench lack or recapture primordial fullness (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). In the so-called Western hemisphere, this “quest” can be attested in the conveyance and appeal of far-right discourses as vessels of White, “Western” civilisational anxiety, which effectuate belonging through positioning the “threatening” Other (Le Monde, 2023; PA Media, 2023; Schultheis, 2018) as, e.g., “poisoning the blood of our nation” (Michael, 2023). In Lacanian terms, the subject’s quest or desire for ontological security is oriented by the *object-cause of desire* (or *objet petit a*; Lacan, 2006, p. 571). This object-cause is the remnant or surplus from the subject’s entrance into the sociosymbolic realm – it is what simultaneously *pulls* and *causes* desire yet cannot be fully re-integrated into the Symbolic (Glynos, 2001). The position of the object-cause of desire at “the centre of the symbolic framework of the [subject’s] self-understanding causes us to desire it” (Vulović & Ejodus, 2024, p. 126), which evidences a “push-and-pull dynamic between the agent and the object” (ibid.). Desire manifests in insatiably seeking fulfilment via the object-cause of desire, a “longing to retrieve [the] primordial bliss” (*jouissance*) lost in our painful entry to the Symbolic Order, manifested politically in, e.g., an ethnically homogeneous and purportedly harmonious past (Pohl &

Swyngedouw, 2023, p. 3). Ontological security recasts *security as fantasmatic fullness*, a promise of recapturing the longed-for *objet petit a* that simultaneously forces the encounter with its *loss* and, thus, with overwhelming (yet politically-mobilising) anxiety (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 82; Van Haute, 2001, pp. 115-116). Vulović and Ejodus argue that anxiety is about the lost object-cause of desire around which fantasy is structured. Thus, anxiety is a way to sustain desire when its object-cause is absent, which conversely makes desire – through fantasy – a “remedy for anxiety” (Evans, 2006, p. 11).

In this thesis, the interplay between fantasy, desire, and anxiety mobilises the affective economy of the subject (Burgess, 2017), which, in turn, organises the analysis of far-right normalisation. In particular, the manifestation of this interplay in far-right normalisation dynamics is addressed in relation to the central concept of *jouissance* or enjoyment. *Jouissance* is not an emotion nor affect but an excessive intensity that is simultaneously enjoyable and painful in going beyond the stability of pleasure (Hook, 2017). It is *opposed* to stabilising pleasure itself and rather constitutes a “pleasure of the ‘paradoxical satisfaction which is found in pursuing an eternally unsatisfied desire’” (Evans, 1998, p. 5; in Machin, 2020, p. 290). *Jouissance* is the surplus enjoyment produced by the encounter with the Real of our split – i.e., it is “the lack of a pre-symbolic, real enjoyment which is always posited in something lost, as a lost fullness, the part of ourselves that is sacrificed/castrated when we enter the symbolic system of language and social relations” (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 43). Thus, *Jouissance* is intimately connected to both the symbolic authority that effectuated our traumatic split or entry into the Symbolic – i.e., the big Other – and to imaginary others that withhold our desire and, hence, stand suspect of stealing our enjoyment (Hook, 2017; Žižek, 2002a, pp. 30–31). Enjoyment manifests in emotions and affects like gloated mockery, sadism, self-righteousness and derision against these imaginary *others* that we prejudge as having stolen or imperilled our “sacrosanct” *jouissance* (Hook, 2017; 2021). Not only the ethnocultural Other is suspect of “theft”, but their own *jouissance* – manifested in their “libidinal” enjoyment of, e.g., jazz music, drugs, sex, and “ethnic” celebrations (Hook, 2017) – is imperilling to our *jouissance*, and thus, to the stability of Symbolic law and norms (Chebrolu, 2021; George, 2021; Hook, 2021). *Jouissance*, therefore, is inextricable from both the role of the threatening/thieving imaginary other and the big Other:

“...the *jouissance* of which the subject is thus deprived is transferred to the imaginary other who assumes it like the *jouissance* of a spectacle: namely, the spectacle offered

by the subject [...] in which [...] he pursues the [symbolically-demanded] prowess [...] by which he proves that he is alive.” (Lacan, 2006, p. 378)

This painful proof and reminder of existence *against* imaginary others and *towards* the big Other reveals the intimate connection between *jouissance* and anxiety since “the most intimate part of our being [i.e., *jouissance*] is experienced as something lost” (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 42). *Jouissance* is a critical political factor since the subject’s relationship with ideology is not limited to conscious values, beliefs, and morals but rather is embedded in its libidinal dimension – i.e., in how ideology and our attachments to it are *enjoyed* through and against the Other (Mandelbaum, 2021; McGowan, 2021; Žižek, 2002a, pp. xc–xci, 115–116). The extreme emotions and affects manifesting *jouissance* involve an intimate dimension of existence that is enclosed in the desire-sequestering Other, but are also the law-reaffirming, symbolic rewards for the unconscious upholding of Symbolic authority. Derek Hook (2017) argues that enjoyment is central to the functionality of the Symbolic Order as, despite its transgressive nature, *jouissance* embeds the conditions in which symbolic rewards and obligations can be affectively experienced in said order. We enjoy ideology in part due to the “unsaid” symbolic promise: our subordination is tied to the promise of reward or “libidinal bribery [...] offered to those who remain loyal to a given structure of power” (Hook, 2017, p. 610). It is the Symbolic manifest in the big Other, after all, who partially withholds the subject’s *jouissance* and, indeed, “enjoys in our stead” (Fink, 1995, p. 99). Using the figure of incest, Stavrakakis argues that *jouissance* is efficient insofar as it is marked by prohibition and disavowal: “the trick of the Law is that it creates desire as a result of the lack imposed by the prohibition of incest. In that sense [...] it is the prohibition itself, the performative institution of the symbolic Law, that makes possible the desire to ‘recapture’ this impossible [incestuous, primordial, “returning”] *jouissance*.” (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 42; see also Karlsson, 2024; Žižek, 2002, p. 30).

Jouissance is inextricable from the Symbolic Order and its reinforcement, as “the making of the [social] laws produces the very conditions of possibility for enjoyment” (Hook, 2017, p. 619). In the context of far-right normalisation – as seen in the 2022 Swedish night of right-wing victory – *jouissance* can be understood as a perversely reactionary intensity rewarding transgressive, exclusionary affective commitments to the Symbolic authority. Enjoyment is a crucial political factor in exclusionary and supremacist politics since “the libidinal component of ideology – that which is most enjoyed in an ideology –

occurs *in spite of* what the subject claims to know or believe, in ways that contradict what he or she would ordinarily assert as a rational or morally defensive position” (Hook, 2017, p. 605; see also McGowan, 2021). Ontological security comes into play in this context, as *fantasy* partially sustains the Symbolic fabric of the social order, its demands (e.g., for “patriotism” or “law-abidingness”), and the *jouissance* it withholds (Browning, 2018; Eberle, 2019). This perverse effectuation of the big Other’s demand crystallises in ontological-insecuritising discourses of historical, ethnocultural, class, and gender-based otherness by partaking in the *jouissance* of dislocating and reshaping the horizon of the acceptable – and thus, our fantasmatic regimes of normality and belonging. Moreover, *jouissance* is a symbolically-transgressive intensity throwing fantasies into disarray (i.e., perpetuating the insatisfaction of desire) as much as needing them in order to interpellate the desiring subject ideologically. On this paradox, Jason Glynos argues that:

“[The impossibility of fantasy] is the paradox fantasy is designed to sustain, a paradox that also accounts for the *stabilizing* function of fantasy. It *sustains* the subject as *desiring* subject by providing it with a way of enjoying, a mode of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the enjoyment a subject experiences in sustaining his or her desire. And since sustaining desire ultimately involves sustaining desire as *unsatisfied*, this *jouissance* is often experienced as a suffering.” (2001, pp. 201–202, italics in original).

Fantasies like ontological (in)security organise where and how (“our”) *jouissance* is threatened and by whom. These incessant fantasmatic threats animate the demand for libidinal rewards, i.e., they mobilise *jouissance* as the affective kernel of the political. The exploration of fantasies and the manner of their production are crucial for understanding how different modes of *jouissance* emerge in these contradictions since fantasies organise how we enjoy (Glynos, 2001; Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 41–42). The affective manifestations of transgressive *jouissance* within the ideological “rules” of the Symbolic elucidate how seemingly anathematic far-right elements have been entrenched within liberal social orders and their ontological-securitising fantasies as well as in public spaces through hybrid media affordances.

For instance, Andreja Zevnik and Juliet Rogers (2017) argue that the 2016 US electoral victory of Donald Trump triggered the *elation* of his supporters, which constituted a redeeming moment for their exclusionary and supremacist “beliefs and values” (“community”, i.e., racism; “patriotism”, i.e., xenophobia; “traditional families”, i.e., misogyny and genderphobia) against those of the “left”. This structure of “MAGA” *jouissance* can be traced to the transgressive,

highly-mediatised affective space enacted during Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, more viscerally incarnated in the "festival of excess" of the Maddison Square Garden rally on 27 October 2024 (Gabbatt & Pilkington, 2024; Lee Hill et al., 2024). During this campaign, the "threat to democracy" was one of the core concerns of Republican and Trump supporters (Boak & Sanders, 2024; Helmore, 2024), which became metonymised in the MAGA-updated slogan "TAKE AMERICA BACK". This campaign and the "festival" of Maddison Square Garden acted as an avowing, White supremacist symbolic space to experience a ubiquitous barrage of racist *jouissance* (Chebrolu, 2021) – e.g., in the elation, self-righteousness, and gloating against the "enemy from within" and framing Puerto Rico as an "island of garbage". This metonym mobilised latent and overt affective commitments to symbolically "recalibrate" the nation back from "the brink" at the hands of thieving, threatening others.

In short, *jouissance* signifies not only how to experience the ideological kernel of the Symbolic Order but also its co-constitution with the anxiety-inducing threat *towards jouissance* and *of* (the others') *jouissance*. I argue that ontological security is the fantasy that both promises to protect against the pain of *jouissance* yet sustains the libidinal satisfaction of its experience by producing *insecurity*. Ontological security *is* and *generates* "beatific" and "horrific" fantasies simultaneously (Eberle, 2019), which effectively sustain the sociosymbolic edifice by interpellating the subject ideologically, unconsciously establishing the perverse structure oscillating between "disavowal and prohibition" and "avowal and rewarding" (see Hook, 2017).

Crucially, the elements of Lacanian psychoanalysis mobilised in this section also frame how far-right normalisation relates to neoliberalism and the declining modern liberal order. The modern liberal order should be understood not only as the hegemonic political system or superstructure organising power globally (Scholte, 2020) but simultaneously as the graspable manifestation of modernity's Symbolic Order – i.e., in its *institutional* and *affective* dimensions. Since the Symbolic Order is only partly accessible by the subject due to the intrinsic limitation of language and norms, the modern liberal order plays a major role in this partial yet fundamental experience which produces reality-structuring fantasies. However, this order is not monolithic but a living structure shaping and granted meaning by competing and oftentimes antagonistic ideologies vying to become hegemonic discourses or fantasies (cf. Laclau & Mouffe, 2013). Among them, the most influential ideology governing the libidinal rewards securing *jouissance* to the political – and thus embodying

the current ideological framework of the modern international order – is neoliberalism (Wilson, 2017; Zevnik, 2022; Žižek, 2002a)⁵⁰. Therefore, neoliberalism significantly shapes the structure of the modern liberal order, which is occasionally referred to as the “neoliberal Symbolic Order” in this thesis (see also Wilson & Swyngedow, 2014). This term does not aim to simplify the complex Symbolic Order or equate it entirely with neoliberalism; instead, it highlights neoliberalism’s central position within the modern liberal order (Wilson, 2017). Neoliberalism’s enabling of far-right *jouissance* through social media paradoxically strengthens itself, as apparently transgressive, exclusionary emotional expressions can only be generated from neoliberalism’s symbolic authority as the withholding governor over the rules of enjoyment.

While Lacanian ontological security constitutes the core component of this theoretical framework, it is supported by concepts and theories that help ground it analytically. In the following subsection, I discuss how the conceptualisation of *far-right normalisation* complements Lacanian ontological security and articulates the ontologies of liberal democracy, crisis, and modernity.

3.2. Far-right normalisation

“Exactly like that. We moderates have good relations with both SD, L and KD, and are able to stitch together agreements with all three. And all three trust us and know that we respect them and keep our promises. It's a good foundation. Direct the anger towards the left side instead.”

– **Jan Ericson** (2022b, author’s translation)

The reply tweet above was posted by Jan Ericson (Swedish MP for the Moderate Party) concerning the alliance of mainstream right-wing parties in Sweden (Moderates, Liberals, Christian Democrats) with the far-right party SD (Ericson, 2022). This tweet, a part of a larger conversation conditioned by the affordances of Twitter/X, provides a glimpse into the casual yet “rational” way in which right-wing parliamentarians have shifted their erstwhile rejection of the far-right into a Chamberlain-esque prospect of alliance-through-pacification. Not only is this alliance framed as logical, rational, and productive in this tweet. It also signifies the relevance of mainstream right-wing parties as

⁵⁰ See [section 2.1](#) for a discussion on neoliberalism and the modern international order.

“controlling” the far-right amid the former’s electoral freefall and the harmfulness of the centre-left coalition, a subject rightfully scorned or hated. This example showcases the complexity of the process of far-right normalisation on hybrid media: it is a co-constituted continuum composed of a rational authority (i.e., the traditional right-wing), a threatening Other (i.e., the left), and a “righteous” yet undomesticated struggler (i.e., the far-right).

Inspired by the work and psychoanalytical insights of Derek Hook (2017), Yannis Stavrakakis (1999), Japhy Wilson (2017), Jason Glynos (2001), and Slavoj Žižek (2002a), the normalisation of the far-right gradually turned from being solely the core object of study to an *analytical lens* opened through the mobilisation of enjoyment (or *jouissance*) as a political factor. The analysis of *jouissance* in the context of the normalisation of the far-right helps to address not only the process and consequences of the fall of the modern liberal order. The analysis of enjoyment also elucidates how anxious subjects *enjoy* this fall and emotionally cope with their trudging through our late capitalist dystopia. Furthermore, far-right normalisation as an analytical lens requires problematising the notion of normalisation related to those of “crisis”, liberal democracy, and modernity. While some of these approaches were discussed in [section 2](#), in this subsection, I focus on understanding what their interplay conveys for addressing the relationship between far-right normalisation, identity (re)formation, and the technosocial enabling of the hybrid media system. Therefore, I first discuss how the *far-right* is understood in this thesis, and second, I explore what the process of its *normalisation* entails.

3.2.1. The far-right: From diverging typologies to a continuum

While the issues with the definition of the *far-right* from a political studies perspective are well documented (Ashe et al., 2021; Meyer, 2021), I operationalise the term to discuss the contemporary far-right. I merge yet expand on the approaches of Miller-Idriss (2018), Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking (2011), Mudde (2017b) and Ignazi (2003) into a working definition: The far-right can be understood as political ideologies characterised by the interplay of discourses of nativism, authoritarianism, genderphobia, exclusionary populism, and (ultra)nationalism aimed at reshaping the fabric of society. Furthermore, the contemporary far-right is marked, like its historical fascist and Nazi predecessors, by their media savviness – i.e., their proficient

weaponisation of hybrid media logics⁵¹ to perpetuate their material and emotional capacity of governance – and their reliance on charismatic, “strong” leaders to appeal to aggrieved subjects. According to Ignazi (2003) and Mudde (2017b), the far-right can be distinguished by its emphasis on discourses of radical, exclusionary *othering*. Different configurations of these characteristics (e.g., nationalism and nativism) summed to exclusionary populist ones (e.g., “anti-elite” and “anti-urban” features) can also be seen in more traditional right-wing parties that are increasingly aligned with far-right discourses, like the Moderates in Sweden, or the Republicans in the US. While these features are considered common denominators of the systemic dimension of the far-right, additional approaches have substantially expanded the debates about the nature and consequences of the advance of this form of political radicalism. Scholars like Miller-Idriss (2017, 2018) and Agius and colleagues (2020) integrate features of hegemonic masculinities, biopower, and gendered nationalism. Further, the far-right has been problematised by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) and Stavrakakis (2017), who consider *exclusionary* populism as its core contemporary feature. These authors contrast right-wing populism to their inclusionary counterparts, which are overwhelmingly typical of left-wing politics (cf. Mouffe, 2005; Stavrakakis, 1999).

While analytically sound, the aforementioned definition of the far-right cannot fully capture the mutating complexity of this phenomenon, given the incessant variations between specific ideological standpoints, organisational types, and geographic scopes. Instead, the far-right needs to be situated historically and structurally as inextricable from key forms of exclusion and supremacy or as dealing with the ontological (in)security emanating from “threatening” others. In this sense, the topology of a *continuum*, rather than strict or robust categorisations, offers a more nuanced approach to understanding the far-right and its normalisation. Ov Christian Norocel (2024) contributes to understanding the far-right by addressing its composition, i.e., the specific types of subjects and discourses that populate this “family”. Rather than being delimited to fixed categories, the far-right can be understood as a *continuum* “reuniting parties, [labelled] as either populist radical right parties [...], radical right parties [...], extreme right parties [...], or contemporary fascist and neo-Nazi parties [...], as well as extreme right social movements, paramilitary organisations, loosely organised networks and subcultures [...]” (Norocel, 2024, p. 289).

⁵¹ *Logics* are “...technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organisational forms” (Chadwick, 2017, p. 4) that respond to and constitute systems of media power.

In this thesis, Norocel’s concept of continuum allows us to simultaneously differentiate and bind different strands of right-wing families (e.g., “far-right” from “moderate right”) and the subordinate classifications of the far-right (i.e., “populist radical right” and “extreme right”). This concept adds a necessary level of complexity to the inquiry of the normalisation of the far-right since it entangles this large macro-category with other right-wing (i.e., enabling) sub-categories of subjects and discourses. Hence, I argue that the far-right continuum allows the examination of how these categories, sub-categories, and parallel right-wing subjects interact, as well as how this interaction conditions the normalisation of the far-right. For instance, within the far-right continuum, Christian Nationalism in the US mixes the highly conservative Christian values regarding family, gender roles, and societal norms with White supremacy and a “god-given” right to (White) expansion through an authoritative leader (Armaly et al., 2022). This far-right ideology – glaringly close to core Nazi discourses like *lebensraum* (W. D. Smith, 1980) – differs from more libertarian strands of the far-right, which are mainly detached from the religious-zealotry component, rather focusing on (near) absolute freedom from the state combined with a *laissez-faire* reproduction of power hierarchies in the private sphere (Cooper, 2021; Davidson & Saull, 2017). In the Swedish context, the concept of continuum helps to examine how different far-right organisations, like the Sweden Democrats (SD) and the Nordic Resistance Movement, co-mobilise grievances by excarnating civilisational narratives – like *folkhem* – away from their Social Democratic origin and into exclusionary milieus.

These complexly assembled far-right organisational forms, discourses, and performances centre on *radical othering* (antagonisation; Mouffe, 2005; Stavrakakis, 1999; Žižek, 2009), a mechanism for sustaining an ultimately illusory stable sense of collective identity and belonging. The far-right distinguishes its logic of antagonisation by propelling a sense of “true” authority and identification with the White and “Western” nation, people, and culture. This sense of belonging is attached to specific configurations of race, class, space, values, ethnicity, and often creed (Ignazi, 2003; Nesbitt-Larking et al., 2014). The self-situatedness of far-right followers as victims of globalisation further ignites the process of radical othering and systemic exclusion. It generates a complex network of signifiers (e.g., “wokeness”, “feminism”, “race traitors”) around the affective ordinance of antagonism: “us” v “them” (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). This process of psychological attrition or grievance production that characterises

the far-right can also be appreciated in the reactionary support for authoritarian performances, practices, and figures (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018).

The discursive characteristics and definitional topology of the far-right – i.e., a *continuum* – provide the analytical basis for interrogating its process of normalisation from the multidimensional approach⁵² that structures this research problem. In the next subsection, I discuss what this process entails and how it is analytically operationalised in the research articles by articulating it with the crisis of the modern liberal order.

3.2.2. Far-right normalisation: Crisis, democracy, and modernity

As discussed in the [literature review](#), the core notion behind the concept of “normalisation” implies the *movement* or *shift* of the far-right into constantly mutating yet identifiable liberal ecosystems. While the specific configurations, directions, and speeds of this process vary in the literature (K. Brown et al., 2023; Krzyżanowski, 2020a; Wodak, 2020), they coincide concerning its dynamic, distressing, and ultimately dislocating impact on liberal democracies. These discursive, structural, techno-mediatic, and ideological shifts also involve deeper affective processes of social identity (re)formation. Far-right normalisation implies the development, contestation, and adoption of ontological security fantasies to cope with or make sense of the retreat of the modern liberal order – i.e., of perceived “Western” civilisational collapse or dislocation. Far-right leaders and discourses in the continuum both fuel the (re)production of civilisational crisis and vie for filling in the affective, discursive, and material gaps left by the weakened body of liberal democracy.

First, the normalisation of the far-right needs to be understood in relation to the notion and governance of *crises* as processes and mediating imaginaries between the far-right, liberal democracy, and modernity. Michał Krzyżanowski and colleagues (2023) question the discursive formation of the “new normal” – i.e., the quest for establishing a regime of “normality” – as triggered by crises (*ibid.*, pp. 418-419). Crises are a core signifier of modernity, constantly and fluidly redefining the role, prevalence, and centrality of its hegemonic

⁵² Integrating the psycho-political, techno-mediatic, structural, international-historical, ideological-discursive, institutional-epistemic, and gender-postcolonial. See [Introduction](#) and [Literature review](#) for further details.

organising discourse, liberal democracy (ibid., p. 423; see also Kallis, 2015; Kriesi, 2020). This process entails “returning” to contexts of liberal “normality” (e.g., the periods previous to the Trump years in the US, the invasion of Ukraine, and the “Immigration Crisis” in Sweden) or, more ominously, the “acceptance of (prolonged) crisis situations as apparently normal” (ibid., p. 416). Like the Lacanian “reality”, “normality” can be understood as a collection of fantasies structured by, and providing meaning *to*, the Symbolic authority, which is contemporarily manifested in the modern neoliberal order. Normalising discourses and practices are inextricable from the traumatic experience of crisis, which historically have been coped with through anti-democratic ideologies, policies, and practices of exclusion and supremacy. The “new normal” functions as a promise of renewal (cf. *jouissance*) justifying, fuelling, rationalising, and ultimately normalising “authoritarian politics of violence, exclusion and even genocide [...] in a post-crisis manner, not only as necessary, but also acceptable” (Krzyżanowski, 2020b, in Krzyżanowski et al., 2023, p. 416).

For Krzyżanowski and colleagues (2023), the discourses and practices of manufacturing normality – what I label *regimes of normality* – enable influential actors to justify and gain legitimacy from acting decisively against anxiety-inducing crises (cf. ontological security). The authors posit that this process is intimately tied to the identification of threatening others to sustain a state of prolonged crisis. In other words, the edification of new regimes of normality implies the “symbolic and structural exclusion of the other” (2023, p. 417; see also Winter, 2019; Wodak, 2020). The critical function of the other is multifaceted, since blame can be assigned to very different subjects – e.g., feminists, refugees, or “woke” leftists – in various ways – e.g., as “betraying” the nation, “invading” the homeland, or “polluting” its blood (see Mondon & Winter, 2020, p. 37). The governance of crises lies at the kernel of far-right normalisation since it fosters the institution of regimes of belonging anathematic with democratic values “such as the rule of law, equality, and various freedoms of speech, media and movement” (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023, p. 418; cf. Katz, 1997).

The normalisation of the far-right is not limited to the manufacturing of the “new normal” perpetrated by overtly radical *anti*-democratic actors, discourses, and rhetoric. Instead, it is enabled by far-right performances and practices *alongside* “mainstream” actors *within* the general “rules” of liberal democracy (Mondon & Winter, 2020, p. 379). In this sense, Krzyżanowski and

colleagues look closely at *post-democratic* action (Crouch, 2004), i.e., “political activity which is *formally* located within the realm of democratic procedures yet effectively – and often progressively – undermines liberal democracy’s key values by normalizing uncivil, illiberal thinking and action in the wider socio-political domain” (ibid., my emphasis; see also Mondon & Winter, 2020; Davidson & Saull, 2017). The concept of post-democratic action grounds the complex relationship between the far-right and liberal democracy. It highlights not only the increased difficulty in separating *anti-* from *post-*democratic discourses (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023) but also the increased hollowing and reduction of democracy to a legitimization and platforming *tool* devoid of normativity (see “conceptual flipsiding”, Krzyżanowski & Krzyżanowska, 2022 see also; Oja & Mral, 2013; Wodak, 2020, p. 33). Under this framework, Krzyżanowski and colleagues argue, *crises* are understood not solely as broad experiences of societal dislocation (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014), moments of paradigm-shifting transitions (Koselleck, 2006), or overlapping, agglomerating phenomena (Lawrence et al., 2024). Instead, crises are conceptualised as “periods/times when acceleration of post-democratic thinking – and acting – occurs” (Krzyżanowski et al, 2023, p. 423). In line with Lacanian ontological security scholarship, and following Sheldon Wolin (2016), crises are also seen by Krzyżanowski and colleagues as a “form of imaginary” (cf. fantasy) enabling the weaving of idyllic pasts and precarious presents with projections of utopic or “beatific” futures (ibid., see also Browning, 2018; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022).

Furthermore, the successful encroachment of post-democratic logics stemming from the exploitation of crises is inextricable from the technosocial affordances provided by the hybrid media system and the partaking of mainstream political actors (Fuchs, 2021; Krzyżanowski, 2023, p. 420; see also Mondon & Winter, 2020, p. 63). Following Marlene Laruelle (2022) and Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter (2020), Krzyżanowski and colleagues underscore the crucial role of the processes of *mediatisation and digitalisation* in, more generally, disrupting the functioning of the public sphere (cf. Fuchs, 2021) and, more specifically, normalising the far-right:

“[The processes of mediatisation and digitalisation of the (semi)public sphere] eventually constituted the fuel for a post-democratic logic whereby the new exclusionary discourse about society, politics and the economy – once reserved for extreme and radical parts of the spectrum – piggybacked the ‘new normal’ logic to become mainstreamed or normalized, indeed paradoxically *within* – and *not outside* democratic processes, rules and procedures” (2023, p. 420, my emphases).

Besides being structured by the interplay between crises and liberal democracy, the normalisation of the far-right also constitutes a *process* which has been prominently conceptualised by critical discourse scholars like Ruth Wodak (2020) and Michał Krzyżanowski (2020). For instance, Krzyżanowski (2020a, pp. 508–509) proposes that the far-right becomes normalised in a sequence of “enactment” (introduction of recontextualised discourses), “gradation” (diffusion, settling, and reinforcement of arguments), and finally “normalisation” (new forms of accepted public expression). Wodak (2020), Krzyżanowski (2016), and Brown and colleagues (2023) argue that this process mainstreams radical tenets while dislocating or *decontextualising* (Krzyżanowski, 2016) the liberal hegemon’s capacity to affix key signifiers like freedom, justice, and nation. Krzyżanowski (2020) contends that “normalisation” represents the end-point or final stage of discursive shifts signifying substantial changes in expression and acceptability mobilised through racist moral panics. He argues that the far-right recontextualises⁵³ legitimate social concerns about, e.g., economic insecurity, criminality, and welfare into anti-immigratory and racist frameworks peddled by the media.

In this dissertation, however, I expand on these approaches by borrowing from the work of Katy Brown, Aurelien Mondon, and Aaron Winter (2023), who propose a holistic and interdependent structure of “mainstreaming”. The authors diverge from accounts essentialising a norm-loaded “democratic centre” from which the “extremes” can be extrapolated, and instead argue for understanding these as contingent, fluid, and interdependent (2023, pp. 164–166). In this sense, the mainstream (or the “normal”) is understood as a floating signifier and interpellation device heavily shaped by liberal normative frameworks (e.g., around signifiers like “reason”, “moderation”, or “freedom”) that condition the equally-contingent formulation of the “extreme”: “What is mainstream or extreme at one point in time does not have to be, nor remain, so. [Furthermore,] *the mainstream is not essentially good, rational or moderate.*” (ibid., p. 166, original emphases). In short, mainstreaming implies moving from these fluid fringes to equally-mutable central positions in the public sphere, which implies shifting “what is deemed to be acceptable or legitimate in political, media and public circles and contexts” (ibid., p. 170).

⁵³ *Recontextualisation* is the strategical adaptation and transformation of narrative elements of mainstream discourses into far-right agendas aimed at gaining and sustaining ideological dominance (Krzyżanowski, 2016).

In line with Davidson and Saull (2017) and Mondon and Winter (2020), Brown and colleagues' anti-essentialist approach allows us to examine the far-right as embedded in, rather than extrinsic from, the modern liberal order. For the authors, the mainstreaming process entails a “discursive normalisation” constituting a fundamental yet highly dynamic phase rather than an end-point. This understanding of discourse – that which contingently generates meaning or constructs reality – allows us to scrutinise far-right normalisation far beyond the context of electoral success, and as an *ongoing process* that evades analytical and policy affixing (ibid., p. 172). In this framework, discursive normalisation becomes interdependent with the fluid roles of prominent actors (in particular, political parties), electoral processes, and the electorate or public opinion. Furthermore, the process of normalisation involves both “fringe” (e.g., far-right) actors and, most importantly, the role of mainstream ones in producing the conditions for the increased acceptability of the former. This mirrors Seymour's (2024) argument that far-right normalisation involves not only (perceived) “bottom-up” demands from aggrieved populations linked to structural maladies with contemporary liberalism. Most importantly, it requires examining the “top-down”, influential roles and positions of powerful social actors that shape the structure of the mainstream and, thus, enable the far-right (Brown et al., 2023, p. 171). In understanding far-right normalisation, it is crucial to consider the context and ontology of elections. Brown et al. (ibid., p. 173) suggest that electoral outcomes alone do not accurately reflect the strength or depth of far-right normalisation. Rather than serving as definitive indicators, electoral successes or failures (cf. “moment of victory”; Kisić-Merino, 2025) can obscure the extent to which these movements are embedded within liberal societies and mainstream milieus. Additionally, the electoral moment itself plays a significant role in this normalisation process. For Brown et al., celebrating electoral losses of far-right candidates may help overlook how their normalisation extends beyond electoral politics while presenting them as legitimate democratic alternatives can further entrench their social acceptance.

Similarly, Brown and colleagues posit that the *treatment* (generation, interpretation, and conveyance) of public opinion data beyond electoral contexts significantly impacts the normalisation of the far-right. The structure of (semi-)public mediation in this instance is crucial since the subject's capacity to know and experience political reality is greatly *influenced*, yet not necessarily determined, by powerful actors and discourses, in particular, those of media: “This does not mean that the media tells us what to think, but it can certainly impact on what we think *about*” (2023, p. 174, my emphasis). Moreover, the

normalisation of the far-right is significantly conditioned by how “the people” and their “will” become reified in public opinion polls and statistical studies, which provide an essentialist sense of legitimacy to overdetermined psychopolitical phenomena.

Lacanian ontological security contributes to these debates on far-right normalisation, focusing on the interplay between the fantasy of liberal democracy, the Symbolic Order of modernity, the traumatic kernel of crises, and the securitising promise of normalisation. Liberal democracy is not only a checklist or value system composed of principles and operations (cf. Dahl, 1972, 2008; Katz, 1997) but a stabilising fantasy of ontological security and an empty signifier of the modern liberal order. Besides its ideological production of meaning and affective commitments grounded in tangible institutional functions⁵⁴, the modernist fantasy of liberal democracy is closely associated with “post-material” values – civilisational signifiers antagonistic to, and generating the *jouissance* of, far-right discourses. This includes principles such as cosmopolitanism, environmentalism, gender equality, self-expression, human rights, tolerance, and trust in democracy (Welzel & Inglehart, 2007). In Lacanian terms, democratic fantasy can be closely associated with the pleasure principle, or the regulation of the pursuit of satisfaction via (paradoxically) perpetuating the unfulfillment of desire, in order to avoid encountering the traumatic excess of *jouissance* (Lacan, 1998, p. 31; 2006, p. 53). *Modernity*, on the other hand, is itself a vague term broadly providing a narrative sense to an otherwise undecidable epoch (Jameson, 2002), yet can also be understood from a Lacanian perspective as an empty signifier represented (and misrecognised) through the modern liberal order. Modernity is, hence, simultaneously a civilisational stage or category, a site of fantasmatic production (Hook, 2017), and the organising principle of the neoliberal Symbolic Order, which, in turn, is how we *experience* inscrutable modernity as a civilisational *promise*.

In summary, I mobilise “far-right normalisation” as an analytical concept by borrowing from the structural and procedural accounts developed by Michał Krzyżanowski and colleagues (2023) and Katy Brown, Aurelien Mondon, and Aaron Winter (2023). These authors problematise and build on the critical discourse approach advanced by Ruth Wodak (2013, 2020), Aristotle Kallis (2015), and Krzyżanowski (2016, 2020), integrating the crucial role of

⁵⁴ E.g., free elections, capitalism, the rule of law, freedom of speech, and division of powers (Gaus, 2015).

democracy and crises, as well as moving away from a linear perspective on “normalisation”. Following Mondon and Winter (2020) and Seymour (2024), and keenly aligned with Lacanian ontological security approaches, analysing the far-right’s normalisation requires looking to but also beyond “demand-side”, economic, and structural explanations. Instead, it requires carefully addressing the interplay between the role of power structures and subjects (cf. Symbolic Order), discursive articulations (cf. fantasy), and the influence of media in a non-linear fashion. Furthermore, in line with Stavrakakis (1999), I argue that critical discourse and Lacanian ontological security orbit around the question of how political promise is borne and how it relates to the formation of anxieties, enjoyment, identities and, more broadly, to the political.

Following the discussions on the core framework of Lacanian ontological security and the supporting far-right normalisation theory, in the next subsection, I develop the second and final supporting theory governing the understanding of the relationship between media, politics, and power: the hybrid media system.

3.3. The hybrid media system

“No, no, I’m not supporting the AfD. But this is a speech made in the Bundestag of real importance because it shows a German view of Brexit...I don’t think retweeting is an endorsement of things that other people stand for. It’s just pointing out that there’s something interesting that is worth watching.”

– **Jacob Rees-Mogg** (in Dallison, 2019)

The tweet above by Jacob Rees-Mogg (UK former MP, Conservative party) was a reply to LBC Radio’s host Nick Ferrari. Rees-Mogg retweeted a post by the German far-right party AfD (“Alternative for Germany”) on 31 March 2019, which was questioned by Ferrari on Twitter/X (Dallison, 2019). The hybrid and transnational nature of contemporary media can be grasped in this example: the interview with a British MP was video-broadcasted on a radio show addressing this retweet about a Parliamentary debate in the Bundestag (Germany). The hybrid faculties framing this interview have only become more streamlined since and remain largely unnoticed in their power to produce and govern our everyday. Hybrid media affordances propagate *normalising* practices and performances of far-right discourses, as seen in Rees-Mogg’s

conspicuously dispassionate, “rational”, liberal-like framing (i.e., asserting the blind value of “free speech” and “debate”) of his “sharing” of far-right content.

The second supporting component of this theoretical framework is that of *hybrid media systems* theory (HMS), developed by Andrew Chadwick (2017). According to the author, the hybrid media system intertwines “old” and “new” media *logics* of political communications. For Chadwick, *logics* are “...technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organisational forms” (2017, p. 4) that respond to and constitute systems of media power, for instance, erstwhile seen in the dominance of mass media corporations like AT&T and Sky Group; and contemporarily, in the ubiquity of social media empires like Alphabet (Google), X Corp (Twitter/X), ByteDance (TikTok), and Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp). Under HMS, traditional and new media are mutually shaped rather than outright dominating or replacing each other. An important caveat is that new media is a relational term, and it does not equate to “social media”. Rather, social media is a contemporary manifestation of “new media”, just like TV, when it gradually became a core and disruptive technology for the composition of the public sphere in the 1940s (ibid.).

Furthermore, in producing technosocial logics and spaces, the co-constitution of *old* and *new* media can be understood as a political continuum akin to the ontological security-seeking subject – i.e., they are perpetually *becoming*. Chadwick suggests that the configuration of power in the public sphere is deeply co-constituted with these structures of hybridity and impermanence, which foregrounds the contingency and adaptability of politics. HMS highlights the importance of applying the “lenses” of hybridity to the relationship between media and politics. In the context of this thesis, this approach informs how the relationship between social media and far-right normalisation involves convoluted practices, performances, and rituals that oscillate between negotiation (e.g., in enabling the far-right) and antagonism (e.g., in denouncing the far-right).

The concept of hybrid media supports Lacanian ontological security by providing an analytical window into the *techno-mediatic* dynamics conditioning the normalisation of the far-right. This window allows us to explore how highly-mediatised reactionary subjects and discourses, like that of “Make America Great Again”, have been efficient at exerting political influence over a sustained timeframe (Chadwick, 2017, pp. 240-242). Furthermore, this concept is entangled with that of far-right normalisation, involving the

structure that conditions the mediatisation of the contemporary public sphere by enabling disrupting practices and discourses. The hybrid media system influences how regimes of *normality* (and, thus, crises) are produced through increasingly digitalised spaces and practices (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023), as well as accelerates and blurs the *process* of normalisation (Brown et al., 2023) through its ubiquitous social media affordances. Prominent subjects and discourses in the public sphere operate with techniques that constantly oscillate between old (e.g., TV appearances, CPAC speeches) and new (e.g., Tweeting, sharing, pushing content) media logics. In the cases of the US, the UK, and the EU, these actors and discourses are intimately associated with organisations and discourses in the far-right *continuum*. Wodak (2020) argues that before the advent of social media, as well as the 2014 so-called “European immigration crisis”, many of these subjects and discourses were considered to hold peripheral or fringe positions. However, as Mudde (2017a) also argues, the advent of social media has enabled the far-right to transit closer towards the mainstream in the public sphere while also revealing the extent to which liberal societies have already incorporated their reactionary discourses.

Under HMS, “old” media logics are deemed to have severely influenced the design, deployment, and perception of “new” media counterparts, and vice versa. Van Dijck & Poell (2013) and Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2022) point to how, despite the faster, under-scrutinised dissemination of content in social media, the traditional logic of editing has mutated rather than being outright eliminated. This can be seen, for instance, in informal performances like gatekeeping and trolling in social media, which to a diverse degree, vie for the sustainment of social norms (Abidin, 2016), and more formal practices like influencers using frames, phrasing, and rhetoric inherited from old media frameworks (Langer & Gruber, 2020). HMS emphasises the increasingly blurred role of non-traditional media actors – e.g., politicians, ordinary users, influencers, and journalists – who construct and navigate these hybrid systems while being shaped by them (see Kisić-Merino & Kinnvall, 2023).

The unearthing or transition of the far-right from the fringes of political milieus to their “mainstream” is one of the consequences of the evolution of the cycle of hybrid media and political communications. Chadwick argues that the hybrid nature of the media system entails the weakening of the relative power of erstwhile hegemonic mediatic actors (e.g., cable news media, print media). The contemporary hybrid media ecosystem, marked by the advent of AI and social media, has gradually eroded the power of these established actors and

logics. The current system has gradually shifted the balance of power in favour of non-traditional subjects and discourses that can reap great sociopolitical benefits by concentrating attention and individually setting agendas. In this hybrid media ecosystem, the logic of competing for the attention of the audience or “users” is increasingly bent towards the demands and supply of the attention economy (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). This competition is waged between traditional and social media platforms, but also between traditional media and user-generated content, which are not bound by the editorial, financial, ethical, and/or legal constraints of the former. These non-traditional discourses and subjects can “...enter news production through timely interventions and sometimes direct, one-to-one, micro-level interactions with professional journalists.” (Chadwick, 2017, p. 6). This process of “atomisation” and mutation of media constraints – in terms of celerity, ambiguity, ubiquity, and ordinariness (Abidin, 2016; Lindgren, 2020) – lies at the heart of the process of far-right normalisation.

From a Lacanian ontological security perspective, hybrid media both *condition* and *resonate with* our illusory experience of constituting a continuous, stable subject – i.e., our fantasies of ontological security. Simultaneously, and similarly to the Lacanian subject, hybrid media are perennially inserted into a process of *becoming*, constantly oscillating and adapting to temporarily stabilise their rapidly mutating ontologies in an increasingly hectic technosocial context. The Symbolic structure underscored by hybrid media, after all, is the contemporary space where far-right fantasies are *produced*, *organised*, and *disseminated* in a contemporary information cycle and power structure perceived as chaotic and decentralised (see Chadwick, 2017, pp. 72-75). Hence, the hybrid media system is a constantly-shifting Symbolic structure that produces securitising fantasies from where the otherwise traumatic Real of *the political* can be “safely” experienced yet never fully contained – e.g., in the constant conveyance of civilisational crises and the proliferation of dystopian narratives in popular culture as commodities⁵⁵. The anxiety triggered by the encountered by this hyper-mediatised Real also mobilises this political system to “evolve” into new forms of Symbolic organisation. For instance, this involves rearticulating the roles of old media logics as comforting, even nostalgic frames of ontological security within new media frameworks that can adapt to and mainstream their reach and appeal.

⁵⁵ See “interpassivity” (Johanssen & Krüger, 2022, pp. 173–174; Žižek, 2002a).

In the context of this dissertation, HMS serves as a lens to understand the hybrid *logic* undergirding the relation between media, technology, and power rather than acting as an epistemic straightjacket forcing the incorporation of specific media outlets or forms. In this sense, this thesis is most prominently concerned with the role of AI-fuelled social media yet does not isolate these media from the broader context of hybridity. In the subsections that follow, I briefly complement HMS with two key concepts related to new media and its capacity to aid in the normalisation of the far-right: social media affordances and artificial intelligence.

3.3.1. *Social media affordances*

“Social media” is understood in two interlocked yet different ways. First, when referring to it in the plural, it refers to social media platforms, e.g., Twitter/X, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and their parent corporations (e.g., Meta, Alphabet, ByteDance). Second, when referring to it in singular form, it refers to the technosocial *phenomenon* of social media. Christian Fuchs (2021; see also Fuchs & Mosco, 2016) conceptualises social media not merely as a set of digital platforms for communication but as a complex system that reveals power relations and structures, with platforms like Twitter/X, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook forming its backbone. In a similar vein to Lindgren (2023) and Chun (2018), Fuchs sees these platforms not just as tools but as *spaces* where neoliberal imperatives and corporations enact power.

Chadwick further refines this definition by addressing social media as a hybrid system. In this system, power is not only held by corporations under neoliberalism but also by subjects who can skillfully navigate and blend the logics of older and newer media (2017, pp. 74-75, 100). These subjects, including individuals (e.g., Elon Musk), organisations (e.g., the Republican Party in the US), and even states (e.g., Russia), attempt to govern information and rhetoric to suit their political agendas. From a psychoanalytic media perspective, these attempts at governance or agency should be seen at best as extremely limited and, more generally, as illusory or fantasmatic in their production of a misrecognition that can perpetuate and occlude anti-democratic ideologies and practices (Flisfeder & Willis, 2014b; Johanssen & Krüger, 2022). From this approach, the power of social media resides in sustaining the neoliberal order (and thus, *itself*) by generating a *faux* sense of agency marked by affordances for transgression. For instance, “clandestine”

sociopolitical organising against authoritarian regimes, the use of codes or “dog-whistles” to hide racist meanings, and the use of *ad-hoc* searchable representations like hashtags to increase the visibility of posts and causes (cf. Chun, 2018; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Hence, social media is a hybrid system of digital platforms that reveals power relations and structures, generating affordances for subjects to fantasmatically create and manipulate information flows. This definition acknowledges the complexity and dynamism of social media, recognising it as a space where power is both exercised and contested as a means to perpetuate fantasies of ontological security that attempt to reinforce the neoliberal logic of political organisation.

A key concept tied to that of social media is that of *affordances* – i.e., the ways in which the subject experiences social media. I depart from Ov Christian Norocel’s discussion of social media affordances (2022) in the context of far-right normalisation, which I recast specifically to refer to modalities of governance of social traffic (emotions, performances, rhetoric, contents) in social media. Norocel understands technosocial affordances as “contextual relational properties, ‘which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object’ (Hutchby, 2001, p. 444) within a networked social environment.” (Ibid, p. 2). In this dissertation, technosocial affordances are specifically incarnated in AI-based technologies like algorithmic curation, recommendation algorithms, infinite scrolling, and choice architectures (Lewandowsky et al., 2020). The critical issue concerning these affordances is their relational nature – i.e., their capacity to govern social traffic (cf. van Dijck & Poell, 2013, “logics”) – and, thus, their capacity to shape identity and belonging in online spaces and beyond. However, as extensively discussed in [article 4](#), I differ from Norocel’s more agentic approach to affordances. Instead, I argue that the subject’s capacity to shape social media is not only unconsciously curtailed by the Symbolic neoliberal order, but this *agency* is generated as a perverse *fantasy* that ideologically binds the subject into this order (see Johanssen & Krüger, 2022, pp. 77-79).

3.3.2. *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

AI is an umbrella term that, from critical media and poststructuralist perspectives, is bereft of fixed meaning, as evidenced in its expansive conveyance as a technology and a sociopolitical discourse (see Bloom, 2023; Jobin & Katzenbach, 2023; Lindgren, 2023). AI refers to explicit and hidden

data-driven solutions and methods that automate processes through complex forms of learning and feedback (Nguyen & Hekman, 2024). AI, however, is not only a technical ontology, but is conditioned by political and media discourses that shape public perceptions, emotions, and knowledge (ibid.). From this critical perspective, AI cannot (and does not) have a fixed definition; instead, it conveys a general awareness related to technological automation, processing, and learning (Dignum, 2019; Lindgren, 2023).

This definitional broadness leads us to understand AI as an *empty signifier* – a construct simultaneously devoid of a fixed meaning yet constantly bequeathed with a partial sense stemming from competing subjects and discourses. Despite its intrinsic hollowness, the material relevance and socio-political influence of AI are emblazoned in debates about the increasingly tense relationship between society and technology. Just like “democracy” or “freedom”, the *emptiness* of AI as a concept and phenomenon reveals its crucial role in our lived experience since it triggers a contestation over what AI means in itself and for society at large. This sociopolitical contestation earmarks AI as a *locus of power*. Any attempts at affixing the meaning of AI (e.g., in the regulatory framework of the EU vs that of Alphabet or Meta) are invariably met with clashing narratives of resistance, support, or renewal. This fluid clash both blurs the ontology of AI and sediments its place at the core of anxiety-inducing debates about our current and future relationship with technology. Thus, from a dialogical approach entangling critical media studies and poststructuralism, AI is understood as a fluid, materially conditioned, non-neutral, and inherently political *discourse* that both shapes and is shaped by antagonisms in society. Simon Lindgren (2023) argues that, in the context of our corporate- and tech-led public debate, AI can be understood as a techno-solutionist *ideology* which is co-constituted with the materiality of algorithms, networks, and computational methods. Lindgren emphasises the pitfalls of pursuing a techno-solutionist approach to AI since – similarly to far-right normalisation – it actively occludes and “naturalises” the operation of power in and through these technologies, methods, and models:

“In AI ideology, we will often find relentless technological optimism, the belief that technological progress is an autonomous force and can save us all, and the tendency to delegate key decisions to opaque algorithms. One of the dangers of ideology is that once dominant views and priorities have been established, they can become naturalized, and therefore, appear legitimate and unquestionable.” (2023, p. 3).

While these dominant perspectives on AI focus on its technical and economic aspects (Lindgren, 2023), in this thesis, I am solely concerned with addressing the psychosocial and sociocultural dimensions of this concept and its properties. This approach hopes to highlight the present and potential dangers of this “naturalisation” stemming from the every-cryptic merger between neoliberalism and AI, as ominously experienced in *and mirroring* the phenomenon of far-right normalisation.

The interplay between old and new media logics is deeply affected by the prominence of AI in contemporary media politics. These technologies substantially affect the form, frequency, and quality of the discourses that gradually compose our sense of ontological (in)security and our larger collective horizons of intelligibility. For instance, algorithmic curation and filter bubbles co-personalise our media exposure based on individual and collective usage input, significantly shaping our sense of ontological (in)security and reinforcing prejudices around the production of highly-segregated homophilic spaces where exclusionary and supremacist politics flourish (Bryant, 2020; Chun, 2018; Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019). At the same time, these technologies are themselves reinforced by the biases that stem from our relationship with hegemonic and contesting discourses (see Feenberg, 2002). In turn, the pervasiveness of these technologies clings to their interplay with the hybrid nature of media logics (e.g., by incorporating “trusted” traditional news framing formats for political influencers) and the market incentives of the attention economy, which benefits from the generation, dissemination, and normalisation of controversial, outrage-inducing content pushed by the far-right.

3.4. **Outro: Theoretical tensions and bridging the divide**

As attested in the discussions above, the supporting concepts of far-right normalisation and hybrid media are not utilised in a vacuum but rather brought into dialogue with, and subordinated to, Lacanian ontological security. In other words, these approaches are integrated insofar as they *enrich* and *contribute* to Lacanian ontological security’s analysis of far-right normalisation. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that Lacanian psychoanalysis and the critical approaches that inform these concepts contain both complementarities and contradictions. In the context of this thesis, the most prominent contradictions between these research fields refer to agency

and historicism. While the objective of this dissertation is not to provide a wholesale solution to these contradictions – indeed, they have been subject to ongoing, decades-long debates (Butler et al., 2000; Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2004; Park, 2022) –, here I acknowledge them while highlighting the virtue of strategically cross-pollinating their theoretical baggage.

On the issue of agency and subjectivity, the critical accounts on the normalisation of the far-right emphasise the active role of individuals in shaping and resisting discourses to legitimise these extremist ideologies. In contrast, Lacanian psychoanalytical accounts are sceptical about the subject's capacity for agency, given the unconscious-level constraints experienced in pursuing desires and effectuated through the Symbolic Order. "Agency" is, under this view, never full or satisfied due to the subject's split and the intractability of the unconscious into the (re)formation of its identity and (in)actions. The figure of the unconscious obliterates claims to full agency, as we cannot entirely grasp or comprehend how the Symbolic Order structures our actions through fantasy. However, Lacanian approaches do not outright and fully oppose political agency (e.g., manifested in resistance, change, and revolution; see Stavrakakis, 1999). Instead, they invite us to contemplate the deeply entrenched *limitations* of such claims and approaches to understand better and unravel how power and ideology operate and become interdependent with the formation of our identities and political realities (Dean, 2010; Johanssen & Krüger, 2022, pp. 74–75; Žižek, 1997, 1998). Likewise, the concept of emotional governance (Koschut, 2019; Richards, 2007; Solomon, 2015) could initially appear incompatible with Lacanian ontological security due to the assumption of exerting agency (i.e., governance) over other subjects. However, like the critical discourse accounts developing the concept of far-right normalisation (Brown et al., 2023; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023; Wodak, 2020), emotional governance can be aligned with the Lacanian emphasis on the Symbolic Order's role in shaping the subject's desire and identity. In this sense, emotional governance can be seen as a manifestation or enactment of Symbolic authority, where the regulation of affect serves as a means of maintaining social cohesion and control through the successful mobilisation of fantasies (see Browning, 2018).

Meanwhile, hybrid media theory recognises the complex interplay between the influence of media producers and distributors, the participatory role of audiences (cf. "programmability"; van Dijck & Poell, 2013), and the power structure of neoliberalism that produces fantasies of agency. The notion of

“influence” signifies a point of divergence from agentic understandings of technosocial phenomena – i.e., accounts that argue in favour of the possibility of enacting agency over technosocial structures (Chun, 2018; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). While not denying the reality of hybrid media influence and its related ontologies (e.g., influencer culture), my reading of agency within these technosocial systems instead responds to the framework of *ideology* (Žižek, 2009). In this line, *agency* in hybrid media is understood as a semblance that signifies the ultimate power of neoliberal ideology. The experience and characterisation of influence as agency is a quintessential *ideological* formation. It provides the neoliberal subject with a naturalised and invisibilised possibility of independence, control, and uniqueness reinforced by, e.g., reconfigurations of mediatic power (Chadwick, 2017, pp. 74-75), i.e., a sense of ontological security. Thus, agency, experienced as “influence” in social media, is merely a perverse illusion that reinforces political subjectivities and provides a sense of ontological security under neoliberal capitalism.

The second key contradiction between critical accounts and Lacanian psychoanalysis is that of *historicism* – the theory that all sociocultural phenomena are conditioned by history, which emphasises the contextuality and contingency of knowledge and ideas (Jameson, 1981; Žižek & Hanlon, 2001). Lacanian accounts tend to be accused of a- or non-historicism due to the “trans-historical” predominance of the structure of the psyche – i.e., tying the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real as “constant” in human history. Instead, Lacan was keenly aware and wary of the analytical dangers of psychological reductionism and essentialism, rather perpetually and radically emphasising the social (and thus, historical) character of the subject (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 37). This concern is explicit in *Écrits*, where Lacan argues:

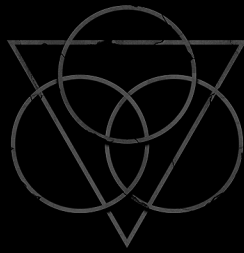
“For to say of psychoanalysis and of history that, qua sciences, they are both sciences of the particular, does not mean that the facts they deal with are purely accidental or even factitious, or that their ultimate value comes down to the brute aspect of trauma. Events are engendered in a primal historicization – in other words, history is already being made on the stage where it will be played out once it has been written down, both in one’s heart of hearts and outside.” (2006, p. 216).

Slavoj Žižek (with Judith Butler and Ernesto Laclau 2000; 2002a, 2009) attempts to bridge this divide rather than offering wholesale solutions or wishfully “filling in gaps”. Žižek’s core argument is centred on the role of the Lacanian *Real* and its relationship with the historic-specific Imaginary

manifestations and Symbolic (de)anchoring. For the author, history drastically affects and *stems from* this configuration in different epochs, which each have their own Real and are signified by the (in)capacity to foreclose it (Žižek & Hanlon, 2001, p. 16). Historical *movement* (and specificity) results from this relationship with the Real, in which the Symbolic Order's (e.g., manifested in neoliberal modernity) failure to foreclose a traumatic element of reality (e.g., capitalism, revolutions, wars) trigger wholesale social and political changes. Žižek moreover reverts the historicism critique of Lacan, arguing that "the ultimate mistake of *historicism* in which all historical content is 'relativized', made dependent on 'historical circumstances', – that is to say, of historicism as opposed to historicity – is that it evades the encounter with the Real" (2002a, p. 101, emphases in original). This paradoxical capacity of the inaccessible and indigestible (i.e., "non-historical") Real to mobilise history stems from the resulting articulation of Symbolic referents and networks to attend to this traumatic void through fantasy (Žižek, 2009, p. 150). While epistemologically on the critical-historical camp, Fredric Jameson also acknowledges the importance of the Lacanian Real in attempting to understand history and historical change, arguing that the political unconscious manifests in historical narratives precisely *through* the encounter with the Real:

“...history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (1981, p. 35, emphasis in original).

In short, Žižek proposes that the Lacanian framework, with its emphasis on the Real's "triggering" of sociosymbolic defences (and, thus, dialectical progression), offers a crucial account of historical movements that avoids the pitfalls of radical historical relativism (cf. Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 2-4). While flawed, the author's approach acknowledges the critical importance of historical contextualisation by considering the dynamic interplay between the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. This perspective offers a nuanced and critical understanding of historicisation that avoids full relativism or determinism, instead focusing on how the Real disrupts and reshapes the Symbolic, leading to transformative social and political shifts, such as the normalisation of the far-right.



IV: Methodological Considerations

4. Methodological considerations

This dissertation's methodological approach is inextricable from its theoretical framework, centred around the epistemic and ontological pillar of Lacanian ontological security (LOSS). This Lacanian-inspired poststructuralist approach (Howarth, 2013; see also Stavrakakis, 1999) has guided the development of the research questions and methodological choices.

At its core, a poststructuralist approach rejects and questions the configuration of ontological and epistemic essentialisations (Howarth, 2013, pp. 54-55; 73-74). Instead, it is a “living tradition” (ibid., p. 19) focusing on the contingent interplay between political phenomena and subjectivity, and the role of discourse and language in shaping them (ibid., p. 18, 152). As seen in [section 3](#), Lacanian psychoanalysis further emphasises the fundamental role of language and discourse (cf. Symbolic Order) over ever-changing human subjectivity and its consequences for political phenomena (ibid., p. 74, 93; see also Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 20-26). The *ontological assumptions* discussed in [sections 1 and 3](#) – e.g., about the far-right, normalisation, mainstreaming, AI, social media, modernity, and crises – are quintessential markers of a poststructuralist design. These characterisations, and the changing relations between them, demarcate how the research design and methods operate (Howarth, 2013, p. 91). Thus, this LOSS-infused poststructuralist approach resonates with the aim of this thesis: to investigate how the interplay between psycho-political processes and techno-mediatic dynamics contributes to far-right normalisation amid the crisis-plagued retreat of the modern liberal order. I analyse these dynamics and phenomena (far-right normalisation, social media massification, identity formation) as mutable *continuums* defying fixity, particularly by examining the interplay between discourse, emotions, ideology, and affects from a Lacanian perspective (Howarth, 2013, pp. 165-166, 174-176).

These dynamics are analysed through two flexible methods compatible with a post-structuralist approach (conceptual framework analysis and Lacanian narrative analysis) and a third derived directly from Lacanian psychoanalysis (analytics of enjoyment). As will be further discussed in their respective subsections, these methods are deployed consistently with the poststructuralist maxims of anti-essentialism and subjective-political constitution (ibid., pp. 9-10; see also Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 14-15). Poststructuralism is an ideal approach for this dissertation since it actively “break[s] down traditional

disciplinary boundaries in the human and social sciences” (Howarth, 2013, pp. vi, 5-6). This core principle aligns with this thesis’ entangling of both the seven analytical dimensions of far-right normalisation (in particular, the psychopolitical and techno-mediatic) and the different research fields and traditions involved in its study (e.g., political science, political theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, discourse theory, international relations, and critical media studies).

Furthermore, this general positioning under the poststructuralist tradition implies acknowledging and understanding myself as embedded in discourse and ideology, as well as producing them through this dissertation – i.e., I am not external to sociopolitical phenomena nor a fixed subject in their development (Holmes, 2020; Howarth, 2013, pp. 152, 184)⁵⁶. This framework shaped my interaction with the sampling process and chosen materials, and the shared understanding between myself and the content creators (e.g., tweets, news article writers) – i.e., my intersubjectivity (Granek, 2013; Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018; see also Howarth, 2013, p. 104). Intersubjectivity, in this context, also aligns with the classical political science approach, as articulated by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994), allowing for an understanding of my collection, sampling, and analysis processes for all sources, and their potential replicability. This approach also acknowledges that my subjective position influences the interpretation of data, thus bridging my general poststructuralist approach with reproducibility aims.

Under the LOSS-infused poststructuralist approach, intersubjectivity involved understanding how political identities are (re)formed through discursive interactions amid the normalisation of the far-right. This logic guided a careful examination of the political context in which these materials were produced (e.g., tweets, news articles; contexts of crisis) and the analysis of their discursive and emotional attachments (see e.g., ideological commitments to supremacist ethos revealed through *jouissance*; see [article 3](#)). Moreover, my intersubjectivity implied understanding crises – in their capacity to disrupt the Symbolic Order – as “locations of personal and cultural formation” (Mckenzie et al., 2010; 148). These “locations” allowed me to contextualise the analysed material as deeply intertwined with the subject (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018) and situated within a larger chain of political signification (i.e., far-right normalisation), affecting my performance and decisions as a researcher. This

⁵⁶ See also [subsection 3.1.1](#) for an in-depth account of my understanding of the subject and subjectivity, and its relation to ideology and power from a Lacanian psychoanalytical approach.

process implied a reflection on both the role of the medium and the interaction between myself and the content, which entailed a delicate yet critical interpretation according to the LOSS framework (Granek, 2013). Furthermore, this critical intersubjective approach connects with the purposive and snowballing sampling methods (subsection 4.2.2) since their objective is not generalisation but to improve conceptualisations through the careful and in-depth examination of specific discourses and/or actors.

Having discussed my general epistemological commitment to a LOSS-infused poststructuralist approach and my multi-faceted positioning as a researcher, I now turn to discuss the methodological choices stemming from this architecture. The methodological assemblages posited for each article respond to their topical foci (i.e., deglobalisation and white supremacy; emotional governance and hybrid media in far-right fantasies; enjoyment and the role of traditional right-wing subjects in the normalisation of the far-right; and the commodification of antagonism and the spectacularisation of far-right politics under neoliberalism) and levels of analysis (i.e., the political and ideological system at the *international level*; the *mediatic system level* manifested on the hybrid media-political interstice; the *subjective level*, in enjoyment or *jouissance* as a central form of experiencing the normalisation of the far-right and the formation of identities; and the *technosocial level*, seen in the relation between social media affordances and spaces and the normalisation of the far-right). The four articles integrate these foci and levels of analysis into the LOSS-infused poststructuralist framework that gradually merges theoretical scrutiny and case explorations with empirically-focused approaches. Each research question broadly corresponds to one publication of this dissertation, which altogether tackle the research problem and analytical shortcomings linking LOSS with critical media and technology studies.

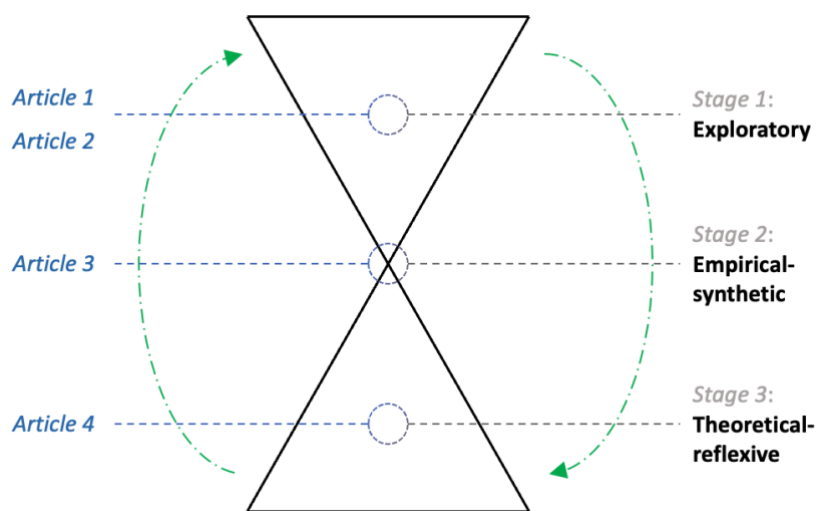
Stemming from this framework, the choice of methods corresponds to three stages of research during my PhD, in which the objectives or drivers of research differed yet worked towards the common goal of addressing the research problem: *exploratory*, *empirical-synthetic*, and *theoretical-reflexive*. Consequently, these stages are *not* fixed categories, nor do their labelling imply that the others do not include similar processes (e.g., reflection and synthesis). Rather, these are reference points to understand my methodological choices and applications, carefully responding to the dynamism of the analysed political ontologies and the co-constitution between researcher and “world” (Howarth, 2013, pp. 90-91). In other words, these stages should be understood

as co-constituted and fluid (ibid.), as their traits and enactments can be found throughout the four manuscripts as well as in this dissertation. I invite the reader to visualise these dialectic stages as a perpetually *self-flipping hourglass* (see [Schema 1](#)), in which the *exploratory* stage coalesces in an *empirical-synthetic* application that provides the framework to *reflect and theorise* on, which, in turn, mobilises and informs further theoretical, empirical, and methodological *exploration*. This structure was not explicitly present at the beginning of my PhD but rather represents an organic progression in addressing the research problem via LOSS. These stages follow a simple principle guiding this dissertation: LOSS is both the theoretical framework and analytical articulator of the methods and methodological elements that *support* this structure – conceptual framework analysis, narrative analysis, and analytics of enjoyment. In other words, the distinction between method and theory should be considered purposely blurry, as their articulation through LOSS permeates the hourglass’ stages. LOSS is not a straightforward method, however, and thus benefits from integrating these supporting approaches. For instance, this is salient in the *exploratory* stage ([articles 1 and 2](#)), as the umbrella method “narrative analysis” (Squire et al., 2013) was not explicitly deployed yet acted as an inspirational framework to identify political meta-narratives that then could be more closely examined via LOSS. In this sense, some of its elements informed and complemented LOSS in organising the analysis of narratives of White supremacy and media neutrality.

First, in the *exploratory stage*, I engaged in-depth with LOSS as a theory and analytical framework (Agius et al., 2020; Browning, 2019; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). I reflected on its suitability and scope to both address the research problem and inform the research questions, in particular, concerning its psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions of far-right normalisation. This exploratory stage was co-developed in [articles 1 and 2](#), allowing me to deploy LOSS to analyse key concepts and phenomena in these articles: White supremacy, deglobalisation, hybrid media, and emotional governance. Second, in the *empirical-synthetic* stage – especially seen in [article 3](#) – I deployed a methodology stemming from Lacanian psychoanalysis, “analytics of enjoyment” (Hook, 2017), to systematically examine tweets by Swedish politicians. This more grounded stage was significantly informed by the preceding one, mobilising a more nuanced and politically-contextualised understanding of ontological security and Lacanian psychoanalysis (i.e., on the retreat of the modern liberal order) into a systematic analysis of social media material. Third, in the *theoretical-reflexive* stage – broadly corresponding to

article 4 – I “re-opened” the research process in an experimental fashion. The mobilisation and problematisation of LOSS allowed me to develop a theory of normalisation and liberal retreat, focused on how social media affordances and spaces fantasmatically co-enact far-right normalisation with neoliberal subjectivity and agency. Thus, this theoretical reflection allowed me to “flip” the research structure and instigate a new process of *exploration* enshrined in this introductory thesis’s reflection. This process entails the re-imagining of far-right normalisation as an algorithmically-mediated fantasy of ontological (in)security, both fracturing and sustaining the structure of the modern liberal order.

Schema 1. *Self-flipping hourglass methodological visualisation* (source: author)



To summarise the following subsection, the more exploratory [articles 1](#) and [2](#) used a *Lacanian narrative analysis* (Squire et al., 2013; see also Kinnvall, 2018; Browning, 2019) approach to formulating early yet constitutive connections with the “international” and “mediatic” levels of analysis. Next, [article 3](#) mobilised their findings into a more grounded and application-specific context (2022 Swedish general election) and process (*analytics of enjoyment*; Hook, 2017), looking more closely at the (re)formation of identities or the “subjective” analytical level. Finally, [article 4](#) funnelled the stages of exploration and in-depth empirical analysis into a process of reflection and theoretical development organised via the “technosocial” analytical level via *conceptual framework analysis* (Jabareen, 2009).

The combination of these methods serves the LOSS theoretical perspective, which is focused on scrutinising the relationship between far-right

normalisation and social media massification from different angles or analytical levels⁵⁷. The gradual co-constitution between these angles and research stages informed the choice and deployment of these methods into each research article, shaping their specific utilisation under the LOSS approach. As developed in [sections 1 and 3](#), the research problem of this dissertation is highly dynamic, constantly incorporating new political and mediatic discourses, processes, and subjects. My anti-essentialist approach required epistemologically committing to a large degree of flexibility in choosing and applying these qualitative methods to each analytical level and topical foci⁵⁸. Considering this methodological and analytical scheme, below I present the methods of this dissertation, how they attend to the different demands of each stage and research question, and how they contribute to addressing the main research problem. In these subsections, I also introduce each article to provide the background of the methodological design.

4.1. **Methods, or “how to effectuate LOSS”**

This subsection examines the extended or supporting methods that help ground or effectuate LOSS analytically (as discussed in [section 3](#)), emphasising their strategic *complementarity* based on the stage in which they are utilised. These methods focus on discourses, myths, and narratives that simultaneously reveal and occlude the *co-constitution* of far-right normalisation, identity formation, and technosocial affordances as both dislocating and sustaining the modern liberal order. These methods are mobilised as *extensions* of LOSS, rather than as standalone, topic-based resources, to help address the main aim of this dissertation: [to investigate how the interplay between psycho-political processes and techno-mediatic dynamics contributes to far-right normalisation amid the crisis-plagued retreat of the modern liberal order](#). In this sense, the four manuscripts combine theoretical discussions, conceptual analysis, and discourse- and narrative-analytical methods to thoroughly engage with the four analytical levels⁵⁹ that, together, address the abovementioned aim.

⁵⁷ The *political and ideological* system at the international level; the *mediatic dynamics* level manifested on the hybrid media-political interstice; the *subjective* level, in enjoyment or *jouissance* as a central form of experiencing the normalisation of the far-right and the formation of identities; and the *technosocial* level, as seen in the relation between social media affordances and spaces and the normalisation of the far-right.

⁵⁸ Deglobalisation and white supremacy; emotional governance and hybrid media in far-right fantasies; enjoyment and the role of traditional right-wing subjects in the normalisation of the far-right; and the commodification of antagonism and the spectacularisation of far-right politics under neoliberalism.

⁵⁹ See [section 1](#): i) The political and ideological system at *the international level*; ii) the *mediatic system level* manifested on the hybrid media-political interstice; iii) the *subjective level*, in enjoyment or *jouissance* as a central

Conceptual Framework Analysis or CFA, developed by Yosef Jabareen (2009), provides a rationale for theoretical cross-pollination with non-LOSS concepts (“antagonism” and “the spectacle”), to develop a theory of far-right normalisation that focuses on the enabling of social media. Meanwhile, narrative analysis, as proposed by Corinne Squire, Molly Andrews, and Maria Tamboukou (2013) inspired the organisation of LOSS’ conceptual apparatus through the identification of meta-narrative frameworks generated present in the interaction of stories (e.g., “stop the steal” or “Islamic invasion”), practices (e.g., “equal footing” or violent manifestations), and power structures (e.g., MAGA Republicanism or the “new Swedish right”). Finally, Analytics of Enjoyment (AoE), formulated by Derek Hook (2017), occupies the “mid-way” position in the research process and entails a more in-depth, condensed method that dissects the experience of right-wing enjoyment (*jouissance*) as a political factor. AoE not only adds depth to the broader LOSS analysis but also, metatheoretically, enhances LOSS as a theory by highlighting the significant role of “positive” emotions and the context of political “victory” as one of crisis or symbolic upheaval.

In what follows, I weave these three supporting methods by i) explaining their operation; ii) motivating their choice; iii) situating them regarding the levels of analysis of this dissertation; and iv) clarifying how they extend or support the LOSS analytical framework.

4.1.1. *Conceptual Framework Analysis*

Conceptual framework analysis or CFA (Jabareen, 2009) is a qualitative method-theory that allows the articulation of different concepts into a cohesive body with which to address empirical and/or theoretical phenomena. In the context of this thesis, CFA is meant to unravel the political, psychological, and sociocultural dynamics and formations of power within hybrid media by mobilising key concepts related to the LOSS framework. CFA provides the organising yet versatile principles (i.e., conceptual definition, interaction, and synthesis) according to the research’s aims and questions. CFA was chosen and deployed due to its compatibility with the LOSS-infused poststructuralist design. This method is particularly effective in deconstructing and analysing

form of experiencing the normalisation of the far-right and the formation of identities; and iv) the *technosocial level*, as seen in the relation between social media affordances and spaces and the normalisation of the far-right.

concepts, allowing them to be re-examined and refined multiple times in conjunction with other concepts. Mirroring poststructuralism, CFA rejects essentialisations and predictions, focusing instead on the contingent and mutable process of forming concepts, their components, and frameworks (Jabareen, 2009, p. 54; see also Howarth, 2013, pp. 11-12). CFA is marked by high flexibility (e.g., allowing a dialectic between concepts of different disciplines, like “algorithm” and “ontological security”) and the ability to highlight the variability of the relations between these concepts in time and space. The links between *concepts* themselves are a key subject of analysis, as CFA characterises them as highly mutable and responsive to sociopolitical contexts and research imperatives. At a more practical level, under CFA, once the main concepts have been identified and contextualised, they become disaggregated into their parts (or signifiers) and categorised according to the research question(s). For instance, in [article 4](#), “antagonism” was a key component of the theoretical framework and was disaggregated into the conceptual components “conflict”, “othering”, “hegemony”, and “the political”. In turn, this disaggregation allows us to ask “questions” to other key concepts – in [article 4](#), “the spectacle” and “ontological security” – to generate an ontology that addresses these intersections (e.g., binding “ontological security” with “the political”).

CFA was selected as a key supporting methodology because of its ability to shape, problematise, and ultimately generate new fluid ontologies. CFA proposes to examine the characteristics, tensions, and scope of concepts (e.g., “deglobalisation”) not only concerning prevalent scholarship but also according to their socioeconomic, political, and cultural implications and manifestations. CFA allowed to “bind” the deployment and utilisation of the more empirical- and discourse-focused methodologies (narrative analysis and AoE) to the development of *new concepts* and *conceptual frameworks* (e.g., *liebesraum* and the “moment of victory”) to understand the co-constitution of far-right normalisation, identity formation, and the pervasion of technosocial affordances. The research questions stemming from the aim are theoretically- and conceptually-oriented, so all articles articulated the empirical analyses with “higher-level” theoretical problematisations supported by CFA.

CFA-based conceptual developments and re-imaginings – such as *re*-globalisation, ontological security as a perverse libidinal fantasy, and *liebesraum* – serve as windows that frame and are elucidated by analysing myths, narratives, and discourses linking the normalisation of the far-right to

technosocial affordances. CFA connects the empirical and conceptual work in preceding articles, providing a coherent yet fluid ontology addressing this dissertation's aim. CFA both cuts through and entangles this dissertation, informing and framing theoretical and conceptual development possibilities in each article based on prior contributions (cf. hourglass model). For instance, CFA's methodological purview is evident in [article 4](#), which mobilises the concepts from *deglobalisation* ([article 1](#)), the dysfunctional hybrid media system ([article 2](#)), and enjoyment as a political factor ([article 3](#)) to frame the interplay between ontological security, antagonism, and the spectacle into *liebesraum*⁶⁰.

4.1.2. *(Lacanian) Narrative Analysis*

As previously stated, narrative analysis (Squire et al., 2013) acts as an inspiration and methodological support to LOSS while being informed by it, effectively manifesting in a *Lacanian narrative analysis*. In this sense, while it is not directly discussed in [articles 1](#) and [2](#), this method nonetheless informed how LOSS was effectuated in them. As such, it requires acknowledging and detailing how it contributed to these exploratory, theoretically-orientated manuscripts. Narrative analysis is an umbrella qualitative method focusing on the formation of meaning and identity as traced to the *construction* of stories, their origin, and their interaction with sociopolitical structures, conditions, and influences. In a Lacanian fashion, this method posits stories (cf. fantasies) as structuring our sense of reality and, thus, as being prone to reinforcement and contestation. In this line, narrative analysis focuses on how narratives, identities, and power are related and how our relation with these narratives involves reinforcing and resisting political fantasies. Like CFA, the choice of narrative analysis stemmed from its compatibility with the LOSS-infused poststructuralist approach (Howarth, 2013, p. 18). Narrative analysis emphasises the political contingency of meaning, the influence of language over political phenomena, and the careful deconstruction of would-be fixed identities and power structures (Squire et al., 2013, pp. 2-3). Narrative analysis also forces a reflection into the social construction of narratives and discourses, i.e., how knowledge itself is product and harbinger of particular power

⁶⁰ Antagonism, a core component of *liebesraum*, is contextualised within *deglobalisation*, the hybrid media ecosystem, and experienced as *enjoyment*. This articulation generates *liebesraum* as the signifier of the perverse neoliberal transition from “hate of the other” to “love of the same”, experienced as an online spectacle of political antagonism. Thus, CFA-based conceptual articulation examines how the modern subject gains an ontologically securitising sense of belonging to its “space of love” amid the “fall of Empire”.

configurations and relations between diverse actors in society benefiting or suffering from them (ibid.; see also Howarth, 2013, pp. 190-191).

Narrative analysis contributed to the early LOSS exploration and analysis of the contexts of White supremacy and deglobalisation ([article 1](#)) as well as hybrid media dysfunctionality ([article 2](#)) in two ways. First, through thematic analysis (i.e., how themes and patterns emerge and how they link subjects), and second, via dialogic analysis (i.e., how different subjects enact narratives). In both cases, the analysis was focused on far-right and right-wing subjects and discourses. It was grounded in diverse sociopolitical contexts, like the 2021 US Capitol Hill Storming ([article 1](#)) and the *Almedalen* political forum in Sweden ([article 2](#)). In this sense, narratives are understood as socially constructed insofar as they provide sense to material, social, and emotional reality. Narratives and the Lacanian concept of fantasy (specifically, ontological security) both inquire on how meaning, identity, and belonging are structured in sociosymbolic terms, yet in distinct terms. On the one hand, narrative analysis is more focused on how the broader sociocultural, historical, and political genesis, production, and interpretation of these stories coalesce into meta-narratives. On the other, the fantasy of ontological security addresses these factors in relation to the unconscious⁶¹ process of subjectification – i.e., in how meta-narratives like “Stop the Steal” or “Make Sweden Great Again” signify more profound changes in our political subjectivities. In identifying the characteristics of these meta-narratives, the narrative analysis of complex, multidimensional phenomena like far-right normalisation both inspired and supported the organisation and streamlining of the LOSS analytical framework.

The usefulness of narrative analysis to support LOSS lies in its capacity to address how grievance-charged stories and myths are co-constituted with everyday emotional governance of performances and norms conditioning our ontological insecurities. Narrative analysis allowed me to examine algorithmic-governed hybrid media as a space for political, sociocultural, and historical inquiry in terms of how narratives develop (e.g., in [articles 1](#) and [2](#)). For instance, as addressed in [article 2](#), narrative analysis helped me address how TV news coverage in the US gradually began favouring a Trump-like persuasive

⁶¹ The Lacanian *unconscious* does not refer to an inscrutable, socially detached “inner world” within the subject, but rather to the Symbolic Order’s – the realm of language, norms, culture, and law – constitutive influence *over* and incessant formation *of* the subject (D. Evans, 2006; Fink, 1995; Safouan, 2004).

and authoritative rhetoric that displaced traditional informative and normative forms focused on editorial responsibility and the pursuit of journalistic “objectivity” (Pérez-Curiel & Limón-Naharro, 2019). In this sense, narrative analysis not only allows to trace the patterns of political phenomena (e.g., the gradual normalisation of far-right views enacted by mainstream media) but also to situate and contextualise specific performances, practices, and norms that reinforce or hamper power structures (e.g., the norm of journalistic “objectivity”; or the practice of “equal footing”).

4.1.3. *Analytics of Enjoyment*

The final theory-method in this dissertation is Derek Hook’s “Analytics of Enjoyment”, AoE (2017). While it was primarily covered in [section 3](#), here I emphasise how AoE serves as a more in-depth methodological companion to the LOSS framework. Contrary to CFA and narrative analysis, AoE is considerably more specific in its application ([article 3](#)), yet it has been informed and supported by the latter. AoE is a Lacanian-discursive approach that focuses on the identification of *contradictions* inherent in the tension between symbolically disavowed values and the experience of *jouissance* in sites of fantasmatic production – the location where the subject and the *Other* (the “thief of enjoyment”) are co-constituted. This can be seen, for instance, in the contradictions within the alliance between the Liberals and the Sweden Democrats. The latter’s radical nativist, anti-liberal, anti-progressive stances are nonetheless experienced as self-righteousness and elation on the side of the “victorious” Liberals in their othering of both centre-left rivals and non-Swedes.

AoE is firmly situated in the poststructuralist tradition rather than only compatible with it. For scholars like Stavrakakis (1999, 2007) and Žižek (2002), *jouissance* is a fundamental yet analytically-elusive factor affecting how ideology “grips” subjects and, thus, how power operates and is resisted (see also Homer, 2020). In other words, the analysis of enjoyment – embedded in the anti-essentialist logic of the Lacanian subject ([subsection 3.1.1](#)) – is quintessential to address the conditions and structures of (resistances to) sociopolitical change, which invariably respond to ideological commitments: “[for Stavrakakis,] without taking [*jouissance*] into account, poststructuralists are unable to account for the ‘force’ of a subject’s ideological investments” (Howarth, 2013, p. 176; see also Glynos, 2001). Thus, particular constructions

of sociopolitical meaning through (and as) discourse (i.e., ideology) cannot be excarnated from the workings of enjoyment and, more broadly, emotions and affect (Stavrakakis, 2007, pp. 20-21; in Howarth, 2013, p. 180).

In this thesis – and, in particular, [article 3](#) –, these contradictions are identified and analysed in the interdependence of three *locations* of modes of enjoyment (Hook, 2017): i) the threatening modes of enjoyment of the cultural “Other” (e.g., the political legitimacy or “popular mandate” that the left bloc claimed as theirs); ii) the threatened or imperilled modes of enjoyment of the “real Swedes” (e.g., the celebration of racial and ethnic self-determination of white Swedes in detriment of the immigrant other and their political allies in the left bloc); and iii) the tacit rules of political enjoyment in the Swedish public sphere (e.g., losing parties and discourses “needing to accept” their condition of political and even moral inferiority to represent “the real Swedes” – and thus, to return stolen enjoyment). *Jouissance* is not only a critical concept that I mobilise through the LOSS framework. Instead, via Hook’s “coordinates of modes of enjoyment” (ibid., p. 619), it becomes a window of analytical inquiry into how the far-right normalisation and the retreat of the modern liberal order are deeply intertwined.

In [article 3](#), I addressed, categorised, and organised the extracted material from Twitter/X via purposive sampling. Specifically, I focused on tweets by centre-right and right-wing politicians in Sweden during the 2022 electoral victory of the right-wing bloc. The criteria for processing and analysing this material resided with the AoE framework. I framed the evaluation and extraction criteria for tweets, which was focused on a specific timeframe (i.e., 10-16 September 2022), actors/users (19 politicians from the four parties of the right-wing bloc), and the enjoyment-infused rhetoric and its “targets”. Especially in the latter instance, AoE composed the analytical lens filtering the most analytically-rich according to the specific manifestations of *jouissance* – schadenfreude, self-righteousness, elation, gloating, sadism, etc. – rather than a broader gamut of emotions (e.g., anger, fear, revulsion, and so on).

AoE is a method for/of paradoxes, as it examines highly emotional and transgressive moments in the political (i.e., instances of enjoyment) as *publicly* disavowed but simultaneously *fundamental* for the continuation and solidity of the neoliberal Symbolic Order. Thus, the adoption of AoE into the core of this thesis widened the scope of the inquiry into *why* the far-right becomes normalised. Simultaneously, this method-theory unearths the key role of

erstwhile-disavowing liberal and conservative subjects and discourses not only as enabling the far-right but *enjoying* alongside its process of normalisation. In this sense, AoE allowed me to delve into and connect the analytical level of identity formation (“subjective level”) with the macro-political context or “international level” of deglobalisation.

The lessons of deploying AoE in the 2022 electoral context of Sweden broadened the scope of my understanding of technology in psychosocial, cultural, and political terms, and how it affects the modern liberal order. First, the AoE-based analysis and findings of [article 3](#) substantially informed the recasting of the thesis-wide concept of *ontological security* as a libidinal and perverse fantasy of emotional governance operationalised via the algorithmic architecture of social media. Second, rethinking the framework of ontological security in terms of the algorithmic-infused enjoyment of *the political* led to the formulation of [article 4](#), which asks how social media technologies affect the (de)formation of the neoliberal Symbolic Order. Hence, an unexpected result from applying AoE to this dissertation’s framework is the recasting of the relationship between far-right normalisation, identity formation, and technological pervasiveness in terms of enjoyment and the anxiety that its fantasmatic *loss* implies.

Furthermore, enjoyment – as the intensity under which we experience ideology – retroactively permeates all levels or dimensions of analysis of the aim of this thesis. While the “subjective” level is the most prominently covered by AoE, it also informed the interpretation of the “international”. This level was addressed by AoE concerning the development of deglobalisation movements and democratic backsliding as *jouissance*-infused processes of affective negotiation that signify the anxiety-inducing quest *for* and the end *of* “exceptional” civilisational projects (e.g., “Swedish Exceptionalism”; “White Man’s Burden”). Furthermore, the techno-mediatic dimension of this thesis’ aim becomes retroactively connected through AoE, which allowed for a more critical scrutiny of social media in terms of the imperatives of the neoliberal hybrid media system – i.e., addressing the question of how algorithmic affordances ordained by hybrid media logics and spaces commodify the normalisation of the far-right.

Having examined the methodological choices and methods, I turn to discuss four elements that act as core epistemic principles: The case selection, sampling and data collection, and ethics considerations. In the case section, I

motivate choosing Sweden as the primary study case throughout this dissertation's manuscripts. I emphasise Sweden's suitability as an informative context in which to examine the co-constitution between far-right normalisation, social media massification, and the retreat of the modern liberal order (or the *fall of Empire*).

4.2. Case selection, sampling, and ethics considerations

The selected cases and illustrations in my research respond to the objective of elucidating what the relationship between far-right normalisation and hybrid media affordances convey about the retreat of the modern liberal order. While each article makes use of different methodologies, illustrations, and empirics, all respond to the objective of exploring this relationship in “advanced”, “Western” yet historically-diverse contexts where liberal polities shunned the far-right. As mentioned in [section 4](#)'s introduction, the dynamism of the research problem and its political context implied developing a flexible and sensible approach to the choice and analysis of cases, and media-based materials. Each case can be considered both representative, due to its historical and political relevance in the international system, and “deviant” since they contain unique manifestations of the relationship between far-right normalisation and the expansion of hybrid media affordances. Hence, in the following subsection, I discuss the relevance of analysing Sweden as the core case of this dissertation.

4.2.1. *Why Sweden? A litmus test of liberalism's ontological security*

Compared to other prominent cases, like the UK and the US, Sweden contains both broad similarities and unique characteristics that situate it as an enlightening context for analysing the link between the normalisation of the far-right and the massification of social media. However, it is important to note that the US and the UK are key complementary and contextualising cases that co-illustrate how the far-right becomes normalised through hybrid media affordances. Like its “Western” counterparts, Sweden has experienced a sharp rise in the popularity and ubiquity of far-right actors and discourses, better exemplified by the status of the Sweden Democrats as the de-facto king-makers of Swedish politics (Jupskås, 2022). Similar to the UK and the US, the

normalisation of the far-right in Sweden can be traced to the increased appeal of “populist” anti-immigration rhetoric (Giritli Nygren & Olofsson, 2021), the weaponisation of economic anxieties linked to support for nationalistic backlashes against globalisation (Hellström, 2023; Schreurs, 2021), and the increased influence of social media politics (Åkerlund, 2020; Askanius, 2019)⁶².

However, this political context also exposes key differences. Contrary to the UK and the US, Sweden is a country that has been historically dominated by social democratic regimes for most of the 20th century, which largely kept far-right parties and movements in the political fringes of the public sphere (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019). Moreover, unlike the far-right shift of traditional conservative parties like the Conservatives in the UK and the Republicans in the US, the Sweden Democrats have roots in neo-Nazism (Norocel, 2016; Westin, 2000). This “taint” marks their integration into the political mainstream as particularly distinct and even baffling for a country with strong social-democratic values and traditions linked to pluralism and egalitarianism (Schierup & Ålund, 2011). Furthermore, Sweden has been mythologised as the ancestral, primordial kernel of Whiteness (e.g., in the imagery of Vikings, *Asgård*, and *Valhalla*), from which international far-right and nationalist groups and discourses draw spectacular, discursive, and emotional inspiration (Åkerlund, 2023; Kølvråa, 2019). These contextual differences and similarities are further developed in the following paragraphs.

Sweden has long been perceived as a “bastion” of Western liberalism, highlighting self-branded “exceptionality” in world politics (Schierup & Ålund, 2011). As a bulwark of global liberal democracy, Sweden offers a unique microcosm to examine the link between far-right normalisation and social media massification. Reflecting global far-right trends (Widfeldt, 2023), Sweden’s nation branding as egalitarian and peace-seeking (Browning, 2021) obscures a darker history of (neo-)Nazism, war mongering, eugenics, and social engineering (Hart & Holst, 2024; Lucassen, 2010). Paradoxically, this dual image garners admiration for Sweden’s “beatific” liberalism and its “horrific”⁶³, ethnically-homogeneous counterpart (Åkerlund, 2023).

⁶² See [section 3](#) for more details on the characteristics of far-right normalisation in so-called Western contexts.

⁶³ Jakub Eberle (2019) refers to “beatific” and “horrific” fantasies to represent the co-constituted scenarios of utopia (i.e., where the desire for “wholeness” is achieved) and dystopia (i.e., where desire is unfulfilled and wholeness “lost”), which structure the affective and discursive construction of the nation and belonging to it.

Moreover, and contrary to prominent case studies of far-right normalisation, Sweden is neither a post-imperial (cf. US, UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria) nor post-colonial nation (cf. India, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Philippines). The Swedish context provides an analytical counterpart to these contexts, as it is historically characterised by political stability, strong social-democratic values, staunch non-interventionism, socioeconomic affluence, and the *perception of* ethnocultural homogeneity (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2017; Runblom, 1994; Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019). In contrast to Sweden, the US and the UK possess unique affective relationships with the ontology of Empire and liberal modernity: the US being a hegemonic yet utterly *falling* one (Hobsbawm, 1997; Schröder, 2022), and the UK being politically-addled and stagnated concerning its nostalgia of *lost* global empire (Browning, 2018; Saunders, 2020).

Furthermore, the Swedish context of far-right normalisation has been marked by the far-right's intensive, ubiquitous, and efficient use of social media technologies, platforms, and performances (Åkerlund, 2020; Askanius, 2021b; Jære, 2024; Merrill, 2020; Merrill & Åkerlund, 2018; Robinson & Enli, 2022) alongside those of traditional media in the country (M. Ekström et al., 2020; M. Ekström & Tolson, 2017; Herkman, 2017). In a global context where desires for "secure" political identities and material stability become increasingly palliated with spectacular politics enacted through hybrid media affordances, Sweden constitutes a compelling case to examine the limits and consequences of these dynamics. Except for the UK (90.9%), Sweden has a higher social media "density" or penetration rate (88.6%) of users aged 18 and above than the average of Western (78.2%) and Northern (80.2%) Europe, and the US (77.4%) (Datareportal, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Statista, 2024a). These structural conditions and mediatic affordances allow the far-right to bypass traditional media gatekeeping institutions, systems, and practices (Hafez, 2017; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2021). They also allow the far-right to cast a wide "net" over potentially receptive audiences, including women (Askanius, 2021a, 2022), conservative voters, youths (Ekman, 2014; Filimonov et al., 2016), and extremist White nationalist organisations (Askanius, 2019; Blomberg & Stier, 2019). For instance, in 2024, even when compared to media and entertainment companies, the Sweden Democrats were the organisation with the most reach and engagement across social media in the country (J. Gustavsson, 2024). Furthermore, the far-right in Sweden is composed of a complex, interdependent, fluid, and highly mediatised network of actors (or *continuum*, see Norocel, 2024). This includes political parties like the Sweden Democrats

and Alternative for Sweden; “alternative” media outlets like *Fria Tider*, Red Ice, Nordfront, and *Samhällsnytt*; influencers like Henrik Palmgren, Ingrid Carlqvist, Peter Imanuelsen (a.k.a. PeterSweden), and Marcus Follin (a.k.a. “The Golden One”); and radical movements like the Nordic Resistance Movement and the Soldiers of Odin.

Sweden, the US, and the UK share a civilisational narrative substantiated in ontological-(in)securitising fantasies of supremacy. These fantasies are materialised in key nationalistic narratives: Manifest Destiny and the White Man’s Burden in the US (Brantlinger, 2011; Johansen, 2017; Madsen, 2010); the myth of Great Britain as an unrivalled (Nedergaard & Henriksen, 2018) or a “chosen nation” (Hughes, 2018); and *Swedish Exceptionalism* (Alm et al., 2021; Granberg et al., 2021). However, Swedish exceptionalism differs from the more imperialistic US and UK iterations in its purported pursuit of “peace”, “equality”, “plurality”, and “neutrality” – a battery of political and civilisational values increasingly contested by centre-right and far-right discourses and actors (article 3). This key difference also marks Swedish exceptionalism as a modern, progressive brand of the liberal civilisational project – i.e., as a fantasy *of* and desire *for* ontological security for liberal societies and subjects. In this sense, Sweden can be seen as a litmus test of the resilience and capacity of the liberal project to provide a sense of ontological security to its subjects effectively. Furthermore, and inscribed in its disavowed yet inextricable White supremacist history, Sweden also provides a glimpse into how neoliberalism is neurotically mutating *into* or *within* civilisational, far-right projects of exclusion, supremacy, and brutalisation (Mondon & Winter, 2020; Davidson & Saull, 2017; Wilson, 2017).

4.2.2. *Sampling logic and collection process*

The treatment of material followed the logic of the research stages, which gradually co-constituted a heuristics framework to address the research problem of this dissertation – i.e., the relationship between far-right normalisation, identity (re)formation, and hybrid media expansion and ubiquity. In the four manuscripts, this framework focused on theoretical and conceptual discussions and development, which were supported and illustrated by empirical analyses. Given this thesis’ LOSS-infused theoretical bent and qualitative orientation, the chosen material departed from a *purposive sampling* logic, which undergirded the design and development of

the four manuscripts. Purposive sampling is a non-probability or non-random sampling technique which involves the deliberate choice of materials or cases based on their *quality* and capacity to inform or explore a research problem (Etikan et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). This technique relies on identifying and selecting sources considered available, well-informed (e.g., newspapers), and/or conveying critical information (e.g., tweets) about the research problem (Etikan et al., 2015, pp. 2-3). In this sense, the empirical examples were chosen purposively to illustrate the theoretical arguments in order to gain a deeper understanding of the mutable dynamics of far-right normalisation, rather than attempting to generalise their findings (ibid.). In particular, I use a combination of two purposive sampling methods (Ames et al., 2019, pp. 3–4): homogeneous sampling, which focuses on sources sharing similar traits or characteristics (e.g., right-wing politicians in Sweden; or local tabloids and newspapers in the US covering social media interactions from politicians); and critical case sampling, which, as its name indicates, focuses on identifying and analysing “critical” cases according to the research question and theoretical framework (e.g., MAGA Republicans in the US; mainstream Swedish parliamentarians supportive of the far-right) (Ames et al., 2019; Etikan et al., 2015; Palinkas et al., 2013).

As a qualitative sampling method, purposive sampling is not concerned with establishing generalisations. Instead, it aims to – through thematically-rich cases – analyse themes and patterns to improve conceptualisations (e.g., far-right normalisation), stemming from criteria established by a research question and theoretical framework (Ames, et al., 2019). In purposive sampling, *each* sample unit is “selected [...] with the expectation that [they] will provide unique and rich information” (Etikan et al., 2015, p. 4), which requires a “detailed engagement with text” (Ames et al., 2019, p. 2). The surveyed, selected, and analysed samples from traditional and social media sources in this thesis, thus, stem from each article’s research question, grounding and *illustrating* rather than justifying the main discussions, reflections, and findings. Furthermore, each article’s in-depth theoretical framework and political/contextual background serve as ontological bases under which the purposive sampling operates. For instance, in [article 2](#), the focus was on mainstream Swedish media sources (social media, online news sites, newspapers), specifically in *how* they covered the far-right. Regardless of their typology and political bent, these sources (tabloids, newspapers, official reports, and social media) provided the far-right with generous, “objective”, and oftentimes positive coverage, aiding the richness of the analysis. However,

the selected illustrative articles were derived from the different, oftentimes implicit *ways* in which they enabled the far-right (e.g., naturalising, failing to criticise, commending). Similarly, in [article 3](#), “analytics of enjoyment” (Hook, 2017) was specifically focused on instances of *jouissance*, which by definition are infrequent yet highly-revealing of the operation of ideology in the public sphere (cf. “extreme case sampling” in Ames et al., 2019, p. 3). Yet, their analytical and explanatory power, deployed first through a purposive sampling of the object group (mainstream right-wing politicians in Sweden), empirical site (Twitter/X), and period (“victory”), resides in addressing each brief tweet in the larger context of Swedish exceptionalism and the role of *jouissance*.

Furthermore, [articles 3](#) and [4](#) expand on this type of sampling. [Article 3](#) developed a more systematic collection, selection, and analysis of tweets, which required combining purposive sampling with *snowballing sampling* (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2013). This complements the purposive sampling of [articles 1](#) and [2](#) by identifying additional relevant content through interconnected online networks – e.g., “mentions” or hashtags in tweets; or hyperlinks in online news articles – enhancing data richness and diversity beyond the “feed” limit set by search engines (see Noy, 2008). For instance, this implied collecting and analysing “threads” stemming from quoted, replied, or referenced tweets present in both previously collected tweets and online newspapers. This co-sampling allowed to identify and collect tweets based on specific patterns (e.g., discourses of Swedish “unfreedom”) and user interactivity (e.g., the retweeted camaraderie between Moderates, Liberals, and the far-right Sweden Democrats) that gradually emerged during the collection period. Besides utilising snowballing sampling, [article 4](#), focusing on new theoretical pathways for studying the connection between far-right normalisation and social media massification, adapted purposive sampling into a *conceptual sampling* for analysing relevant academic texts. This approach responded to the methodological objective of entangling Lacanian psychoanalysis, discourse theory, and critical media studies into a novel explanatory structure for the normalisation of the far-right.

In the case of “old” media, the collection and analysis logics were guided by the independent cases addressed in each article, which differed by type (e.g., international news agencies like Reuters, tabloids like *Expressen*, and magazines like EXPO in Sweden) and spatial coverage (i.e., global, like the Guardian; or local, like Dagens Nyheter in Sweden). “Old” media also refers to official, publicly-available reporting through websites. Responding to the

mixed logic of homogeneous and critical purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2015; Palinkas et al., 2013), this included key official reports from outlets with diverse political orientations and institutional commitments: e.g., Reporters without Borders (2022), the Anti-Defamation League (2019, 2021, 2022), the European Commission (Lewandowsky et al., 2020), and the Swedish Government (Regeringen och Regeringskansliet, 2023).

In the case of new media, I focused on Twitter/X in the period December 2021 – September 2024 not due to its popularity (indeed, ranking only 12th worldwide on 2024 by number of monthly active users; Statista, 2024b) but because of its algorithmic affordances centred on viralisation and direct interactivity. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that Twitter/X’s audience can rapidly shift, as experienced after Musk’s 2022 buyout (Sweney, 2022) and the aftermath of the 2024 US elections (Dodds, 2024; Tenbarge & Collier, 2024), which saw influentials and millions of ordinary users stop using the platform or quitting altogether (Field, 2024; Spangler, 2023). Regardless of backlashes, Twitter/X still agglomerates actively engaged and controversy-prone political actors in Sweden, the US, and the UK (e.g., MP Jan Ericson in Sweden, Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene in the US, and anchorwoman Julia Hartley-Brewer in the UK). Moreover, in 2022, and under the guise of “free speech”, Musk re-instated far-right personalities and provocateurs like Donald Trump, Jordan Peterson, Marjorie Taylor-Greene, Andrew Tate, Tommy Robinson, Katie Hopkins, and Henrik Palmgren. The persistent presence of far-right and controversial influentials in the platform shapes it into a powerful space of political deliberation due to the structure of hybrid media: traditional news media – even when critical (Zhang et al., 2018) – keep referring to and quoting the platform, effectively providing it with a semblance of legitimacy and authority. In summary, Twitter/X was chosen due to its capacity to act as a repository of primary-source information (opinions, manifestations, statements) from highly engaged and interactive emotional governors (manifested in, e.g., “unhinged” or transgressive performances, the use of affordances like emojis or hashtags, or in dragging other actors into the discussion by “replying” or “tagging” them) (see Areni, 2019; Chun, 2018).

The collection of empirical material was most prominently focused on news media and social media, specifically Twitter/X. Traditional or legacy media sources, like newspapers, magazines, and official websites, complemented the material from social media. This complementarity not only responds to the quality of the information, the legitimacy of the outlets, or the stylistic in

discourses and rhetoric but was also informed by the logic of hybrid media⁶⁴. More specifically, the collection process was performed manually and focused on prominent political actors (e.g., politicians, media personalities, civil society leaders) on hybrid media (the designated *space* of methodological inquiry) during periods of “crisis” or heightened tensions (the *timeframe* of collection and analysis). Following the hourglass scheme, the sampling contexts were broader in [articles 1](#) and [4](#) and more condensed in [articles 2](#) and [3](#). Due to its exploratory bent, [article 1](#) was not bound to any specific period (e.g., using illustrations dating to the early 2000s). Meanwhile, [article 2](#) focused on the 2022 mediatic context around the *Almedalen* forum. Further, [article 3](#) focused on an even briefer window to extract an illustrative sample of tweets, 10-16 September 2022 – the period around the electoral “moment of victory” of the right-wing bloc. [Article 4](#) focused on two crises in the US: the 2021 Capitol Hill storming, and the 2024 electoral victory of Donald Trump. Moreover, while stemming from diverse sources (e.g., newspapers, institutional reports, and Twitter/X) and constituting different formats (e.g., articles, briefs, tweets), the material attained in each collection process i) built on the knowledge and problematisation developed by the previous stage – or, rather, by the *movement* of the analytical framework attestable in the three stages; and ii) responded to the hybrid logic of the neoliberal political mediascape – i.e., I interrogated the material’s content, format, and relative *position* concerning their articulation within the broader power structure of hybrid media. This methodological design and scheme also respond to (and were key in developing) the scope and limitations of the research ethics permit granted by the Swedish Ethics Review Authority (Dnr 2021-04081)⁶⁵.

Moreover, following the logic of purposive sampling, the selected materials/texts also reflected the topic of inquiry of each article in connection to the overarching research problem. These materials provided analytically-complementary perspectives (e.g., conservative, liberal; personal, governmental; traditional and new media). [Article 1](#) focused on a purposive sampling of traditional outlets’ texts directly or partially examining the relationship between deglobalisation and White Supremacy in the “Western” context. Based on this global contextualisation, [article 2](#) focused on texts discussing or evidencing the increased tolerance, enabling, and even defence of

⁶⁴ According to this logic, power operates through mediatic purview, yet media’s structure is one of constant shift, impermanence, and fluidity stemming from the oscillation and interdependence between “old” and “new” media technologies, subjects, performances, norms, and practices (Chadwick, 2017).

⁶⁵ This study (Dnr 2021-04081) has been authorised for the use of tweets by political actors and media personalities by the Swedish Ethics Review Authority (*Etikprövningsmyndigheten*).

far-right discourses in mainstream media environments in Sweden, both evidenced in traditional media and Twitter/X. [Article 3](#) mobilised both casuistic batteries to interrogate how centre-right Swedish politicians *enjoy* political victory alongside the far-right, specifically on Twitter/X. Finally, [article 4](#) sampled social and traditional news media, as well as academic texts to reformulate far-right normalisation as an enjoyment-providing, segregating fantasy of “love” and belonging sustained by neoliberal social media.

4.2.3. *Treatment of materials and ethics considerations*

Each article used the materials differently to *illustrate and support* the theoretical and contextual analyses of far-right normalisation. [Article 1](#) introduced empirical materials to support the literature review and LOSS-framed theoretical debate on deglobalisation, White supremacy, and White nationalism. These materials supported the discussion of White supremacy and deglobalisation as a “dark mirror” of the modern liberal order and as a project of aggrieved White reclamation or *re-globalisation*. Mainstream “Western” outlets were reviewed for their focus on anti-democratic backlashes, anti-globalisation discourses, and the rise in anti-liberal movements and their roles in hybrid media (Chadwick, 2017; Fuchs, 2021). News coverage from outlets like Reuters and the Guardian, and reports from governments and NGOs, grounded the theoretical discussions and allowed for a detailed empirical examination in Sweden.

[Article 2](#) used a similar purposive approach, grounding the LOSS-framed theoretical discussions with varied sources. Besides traditional news outlets and institutional reports, it included party leader speeches from the *Almedalen* Forum and tweets. The materials focused on the Swedish context of hybrid media enabling of far-right discourses. The empirical case of a mediatic “equal footing” – i.e., representing two or more actors as equally legitimate interlocutors regardless of their positioning (Kisić-Merino & Kinnvall, 2023, p. 64) – framing of a debate on democracy, racism, and authoritarianism motivated the research problem and the LOSS discussion. The newspaper Blekinge Läns Tidning provided “equal footing” to discuss Islamophobia with far-right Islamophobe and Minister of Justice Richard Jomshof (MP SD) and a Lund University political scientist (Nyberg, 2021b, 2021a). This attempt at neutrality reveals the media’s critical role in normalising the far-right alongside mainstream politicians.

[Article 2](#)'s materials were purposively sampled, focusing on speeches by the Sweden Democrats (SD) and the Christian Democrats (KD) at *Almedalsveckan*⁶⁶. First, traditional Swedish news outlets were selected and analysed for their enabling or whitewashing of the SD through policy and efficiency concerns, requiring a review of numerous 2022 election articles. This sampling highlighted SD's portrayal as "collaborative", "modern" (Stenberg, 2022), "powerful", and "tough on crime" (Hansing, 2022). Second, the analysis included *Almedalen* speeches by Åkesson (2022) and KD's leader, Ebba Busch (2022), and tweets by Moderate MP Jan Ericson, who virtue-signalled the SD alliance as one of "efficiency" and "trust" (2022a, 2022b).

Considering the global and mediatic context of far-right normalisation in [articles 1](#) and [2](#), [article 3](#) used tweets to analyse the role of Swedish centre-right and right-wing enjoyment (*jouissance*). Tweets were used to investigate two "modes of enjoyment": the threatening modes of enjoyment of Others (e.g., immigrants, socialists) and the purportedly imperilled enjoyment of "real" Swedes. The reviewed tweets from 19 right-wing politicians corresponded to the "moment of victory" between the 10th and 16th of September 2022, flanking the general election results on the 12th of September. After providing the LOSS-infused theoretical and contextual framework of this article, fifteen tweets were selected and analysed for emotions like elation, self-righteousness, sadism, gloating, and *schadenfreude*. "Analytics of enjoyment" contextualised the *jouissance* in these tweets within the far-right normalisation in Sweden and its implications for liberal democracy.

[Article 4](#) adopted the international and mediatic context from [articles 1](#) and [2](#), and [article 3](#)'s findings on mainstream politicians normalising the far-right through social media. It "re-opened" the treatment of empirical material into an illustrative scheme via conceptual framework analysis (Jabareen, 2009) to explore how the neoliberal Symbolic Order becomes co-constituted with the far-right via social media. The illustrations from old and new US-based traditional and social media supported the analysis of how antagonisms between far-right and liberal subjects become commodified through social media as *spectacles*, providing a sense of ontological security amid the fall of Empire. This empirical analysis was based on tweets by far-right Republicans

⁶⁶ The Almedalen forum, a prominent yearly forum and summit of Swedish political parties.

and Democratic parliamentarians⁶⁷ reported by traditional news outlets in two instances of electoral defeat: the 2021 Capitol Hill storming and the 2024 victory of Donald Trump.

In [Table 1](#) below, I provide a breakdown of the details of the selected research material per article, including the methods employed, the source types and names, the geographical foci, the sample size, the logic of selection/sampling, and the collection period.

Table 1. Breakdown of materials and sampling logic, per article

| | Article 1 | Article 2 | Article 3 | Article 4 |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Name | <i>Deglobalization and the Political Psychology of White Supremacy</i> | <i>Governing Emotions: Hybrid Media, Ontological Insecurity and the Normalisation of Far-Right Fantasies</i> | <i>The Role of Right-Wing Enjoyment in the Normalisation of the Far-Right</i> | <i>Liebesraum: The Ontologically-(in)Securitising Spectacle of Far-Right Normalisation</i> |
| Journal | <i>Theory & Psychology</i> | <i>Alternatives: Global, Local, Political</i> | <i>Review of International Studies</i> | Draft manuscript |
| Method(s) | Narrative analysis | Narrative analysis | Analytics of enjoyment | Conceptual framework analysis |
| Source type(s) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Magazine articles - Newspaper articles - Online news outlets - Websites - Blogs - Institutional reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tabloid articles - Conference speeches - Newspaper articles - Tweets - Institutional reports | Tweets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newspaper articles - Tweets - Blogs - Magazine articles - Institutional reports - Websites - Online news outlets |
| Source names | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Atlantic - The New York Times - SVT Nyheter - Arena Idé - CTC Sentinel - Reporters without Borders - Southern Poverty Law Center - The Guardian - Reuters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aftonbladet - Almedalen Conference - Blekinge Läns Tidning - Twitter/X - Svenska Dagbladet - Expressen - Göteborgs Posten - European Commission - Dagens Nyheter | Twitter/X (see article 3 & online appendix) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Twitter/X - European Commission - The Guardian - EXPO - Middle East Eye - Newsweek - BBC - CNN - NPR - The Independent - Al Jazeera - Black Agenda Report - The Associated Press - Los Angeles Times - The Observer - Politico - Florida Phoenix - Billboard - NBC News - USA Today - The Denver Post |
| Geographical foci | Sweden, UK, US | Sweden | Sweden | Sweden, UK, US |

⁶⁷ E.g., Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene (2021), Rep. Lauren Boebert (2021), Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (2021), and Sen. Chuck Schumer (2021).

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|---|
| Empirical sample size | 10 texts | 15 texts | 15 tweets. These were selected from a larger corpus or population: I manually surveyed every original tweet and reply from 19 selected Twitter/X accounts between 10-16 September 2022. (see article 3 for more details) | 25 illustrative texts |
| Logic(s) of selection | Purposive sampling | Purposive sampling | - Purposive sampling - Snowball sampling | - Purposive sampling - Snowball sampling |
| Collection period | Dec 2021 - Jun 2022 | Dec 2021 - Jul 2022 | Sep 2022 - May 2024 | Dec 2023 – Dec 2024 |

Considering these sampling, collection, and treatment criteria, it is important to note the political “moment” conditioning the hybrid mediascape of social media, particularly Twitter/X. Since the 2022 buyout of Twitter/X by self-proclaimed “techno-king”, the world’s richest man, and Trump-nominated leader of the “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE), Elon Musk (BBC, 2021; Forbes, 2024), this platform has become crucial for far-right normalisation. Musk’s ownership has invigorated far-right mainstreaming by i) reinstating banned accounts of far-right influencers and politicians; ii) enabling click-and-buy legitimacy affordances through “blue checks”⁶⁸; and, most prominently, iii) Musk’s active involvement with reactionary, techno-feudal, far-right movements globally, including pronatalism, longtermism, AfD, and MAGA Republicanism (Armellini, 2023; Auten & Matta, 2024; Black, 2022; Mahdawi, 2024). Thus, while erstwhile also an arena for liberal audiences, Twitter/X is suitable for analysing far-right normalisation due to the availability of far-right content. It also acts *itself* as a key corporate structure conditioning this phenomenon under the liberal guise of “freedom of speech” and “free markets” (cf. Han, 2017).

Moreover, following Chadwick’s hybrid media approach (2017), Twitter/X constitutes a significant feature of mainstream news broadcasting. Tweets are used in TV news, providing Twitter/X with legitimacy as a primary source of information and granting “old” media outlets validity in their utilisation of modern communicative affordances. Twitter/X’s format and “reputation” as a semi-public digital political sphere enable researching a unique experience of interactivity, engagement, and affect between ordinary users and political figures. However, Twitter/X is not universally representative, as first-hand sources and their influence can be mis-, under- or over-represented (e.g., hired

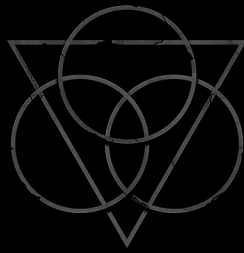
⁶⁸ Under Twitter/X’s previous ownership, these were conferred upon scrutiny of identity and to prominent users.

staff tweeting or bot-based diffusion; Hollingshead et al., 2022; Stewart, 2022). Nevertheless, this algorithmically-mediated experience allows ordinary users to feel “seen” by authoritative figures, granting them validity and belonging in public engagements, regardless of amity or animosity⁶⁹.

A final note on data collection concerns the conditions and limitations of data collection from Twitter/X. The Swedish Ethics Review Authority (*Etikprövningsmyndighet*) allowed me to analyse “prominent political actors”, e.g., parliamentarians, media figures, political influencers, podcasters, and opinion leaders. The collected and analysed tweets could only refer to their political activity, excluding interactions from their private lives. All Twitter/X data, despite its public availability, has been carefully handled and safely stored in line with Karlstad University’s guidelines (Karlstad University, 2024).

In discussing the supporting methods, sampling criteria, collection and treatment of materials, and ethics considerations, I detailed how the four studies of this dissertation were developed as standalone pieces and parts of a larger research problem. The manuscripts have a prominent theoretical bent, which is evident in the prevalence of Lacanian ontological security as the core theory and main analytical framework. The methodological reflection produced the self-flipping hourglass metaphor. It involved an initial exploration of concepts and narratives, leading to an in-depth, methodologically-specific study, and culminating in a pivotal theoretical reflection on far-right normalisation and its implications for the civilisational project of liberal modernity.

⁶⁹ See “parasocial relationships”; Kim & Song (2016); Paravati et al. (2020).



V: Overview of Appended Articles

5. Overview of appended articles

The objective of this section is to present and summarise the four articles of this thesis as well as briefly expand on their methodological development.

5.1. Article 1: **Deglobalization and the Political Psychology of White Supremacy** ⁷⁰

This article explored and problematised the relationship between deglobalisation, ontological insecurity, and the political psychology of White supremacy, examining how this relationship generates fantasies, myths, and identities in far-right politics. The (re)construction of narratives and myths are contested processes concerning the struggle for control over historical and cultural space and the articulation of needs for individuals and groups in the present. My co-author and I analysed the myths and stories being created around deglobalisation, insecurity, and the nation – stories that people and groups use to make sense of themselves and others. We focused on how deglobalisation and emerging ontological insecurities (e.g., sociopolitical and climate crises) relate to various fantasy narratives, understood in psychoanalytical terms of dislocation⁷¹ and impermanence⁷², alongside a search for security and stability.

We first problematised the relationship between globalisation and deglobalisation, using it to discuss the political psychology of White supremacy and the far-right. We then examined how ontological security, emotional governance, and the Lacanian fantasmatic elucidate fantasies generated by (and generating) deglobalisation as intertwined with identity formation, myth creation, and *othering*. Next, we explored extreme narrative White supremacy fantasies, exemplified by the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory and the ontological insecurity of Whiteness. We also discussed White supremacy in relation to the normalised narratives, myths, and practices enacted by White nationalists, using Sweden as an illustrative example. Here, we unpacked the roles and manifestations of fantasy narratives concerning radical White politics in the ontological-insecurising context of deglobalisation.

⁷⁰ This article was co-authored with Prof. Catarina Kinnvall (Lund University). The authors contributed equally to its development, pre-submission editing, communications with the journal, and post-review editing.

⁷¹ The process of destabilisation of meaning and subjectivity in the political.

⁷² The impossibility of attaining “ultimate” ontological coherence, wholeness, or fixity.

In the larger framework of my dissertation, this first article generated a contextual benchmark for far-right normalisation globally, addressing the “international” level of the main research aim. By exploring the interplay between the macro (e.g., globalisation), meso (e.g., reactionary political parties) and micro (e.g., authoritarian leaders) levels of White supremacy narratives, myths, and practices, we examined the normalisation of the far-right as a global psycho-political, technosocial, and historical phenomenon. Furthermore, the relationship between White supremacy and deglobalisation constitutes a window (and symptom of) into the ideological encroachment and destabilising role of neoliberalism in the modern liberal order, experienced in the mainstreaming of anti-globalising, far-right discourses globally.

5.2. Article 2: **Governing Emotions: Hybrid Media, Ontological Insecurity and the Normalisation of Far-Right Fantasies** ⁷³

Focusing on the debates on “due impartiality” provided to far-right leaders in Swedish media, this article used a Lacanian ontological security approach to address the relationship between the practices of normalisation of far-right discourses and fantasies, and the evolution of emotional governance at the interstice of old (i.e., traditional) and new (e.g., social media) media. Studies dealing with the normalisation of far-right discourse from a media perspective tend to focus on framing, journalistic norms, market structures and business incentives. My co-author and I aimed to expand these perspectives by opening a discussion on the interplay between the ontological (in)securities attached to the emotional governance of far-right leaders and the techno-social affordances and roles provided to (and by) “old” and “new” actors in the hybrid media ecosystem. We further analysed this interplay by looking at the particular fantasies embedded in it and the consequences of the enactment of “due impartiality” and “equal footing” norms and practices in the Swedish media landscape.

At the research design level, this article explored how hybrid media exploit narratives of ontological (in)security in an attempt to amplify the far-right’s emotional governance of the public sphere in Sweden and elsewhere in so-called Western settings. Here, we asked how these practices of emotional

⁷³ This article was co-authored with Prof. Catarina Kinnvall (Lund University). The authors contributed equally to its development, pre-submission editing, communications with the journal, and post-review editing.

governance are connected to fantasies of an autonomous “self” and others, and how they interrelate with the cultures and practices of hybrid media settings and new political subjects (e.g., political influencers). Specifically, we explored how traditional media practices and performances of providing “equal footing” and platforms to far-right positions connect to the larger pattern of normalising far-right discourses and fantasies. In the framework of this dissertation, this article is a novel exploration of the practices and discourses of the emotional governance of ontological insecurities as afforded by the AI-fuelled hybrid media system in Sweden. It problematises the process of identity bordering embedded in the interplay between i) the technosocial setting and affordances of the hybrid media system; ii) the practices of emotional governance of media and politicians in the context of the spectacularisation of politics; and iii) the process of “shameless” normalisation of far-right discourses (Wodak, 2020) in the context of enabling liberal political ecosystems.

5.3. Article 3: The Role of Right-Wing Enjoyment in the Normalisation of the Far-Right ⁷⁴

In the aftermath of the 2022 general elections in Sweden, the razor-thin victory of the right-wing bloc elicited expressions of elation, relief, and gloating on the part of the victors. Members and supporters of the bloc’s far-right party (Sweden Democrats, SD) used terms alluding to Nazism and White supremacy. A highly controversial event was picked up by the media, depicting the cheerful enunciation “*Helg Seger!*” (“weekend victory!”) by SD politician Rebecka Fallenkvist during bloc celebrations (G. Gustavsson, 2022; SVT Nyheter, 2022). This term is linked to the Nordic Resistance Movement’s phrase “*Hell Seger*” – the Swedish translation for the Nazi “*Sieg Heil*” (“Hail Victory”). This “dog whistle” was accompanied by rapturous celebrations by erstwhile-disavowing “mainstream” right-wing parties. In the context of excessive celebration (Hook, 2017), this dynamic underscores a deeper phenomenon in Swedish politics witnessed in victory-related affective expressions by SD and its enabling counterparts: the *normalisation* of the far-right.

SD became the highest-voted party in the right-wing bloc by reframing social issues like immigration, war/(in)security, and crime, significantly impacting political and media narratives that erstwhile disavowed them. In this

⁷⁴ I am the sole author of this article, published at *Review of International Studies* (2025).

purportedly baffling context of the integration of SD into mainstream liberal and right-wing politics in Sweden, I analyse how victory-related expressions of enjoyment – or *jouissance* speaking with Lacan (1998) – are articulated in the discourses of the right-wing bloc’s parties⁷⁵. In political contexts, *jouissance* manifests in moments of emotional upheaval (e.g., in the circumstance of “snatching” the victory of the hands of the “enemies”, i.e., centre-left bloc) and in intense attitudes and emotions (e.g., elation, self-righteousness, schadenfreude, sadism) that are disavowed or frowned upon in the every-day of our Symbolic order. In the Swedish context, this Symbolic Order manifests in the historical, civilisational hegemony of social democracy and liberalism.

In this article, I explored how expressions of enjoyment in the context of “victory” are articulated by the parties and leaders of the right-wing bloc in Sweden. Specifically, I revealed how victory-related modes of *jouissance* incorporate, celebrate, overlook, or negotiate far-right discourses and rhetoric as normalised components of the “new Swedish right”. This path towards the shameless normalisation of the far-right in Sweden is an informative case of a Western-wide phenomenon. This process was examined in the link between the *discourses* and *rhetoric of victory* espoused by “traditional” Swedish liberal, right-wing (the Liberals, the Moderates, and the Christian Democrats) and far-right (SD) parties.

5.4. Article 4: ***Liebesraum*: The Ontologically-(In)Securitising Spectacle of Far-Right Normalisation** ⁷⁶

Social media’s market-driven, technosocial structure is associated with the modern promise of connectivity, intimacy, and freedom that, paradoxically, has been crucial in mainstreaming the far-right. Social media transforms antagonisms – the perpetual possibility of conflict demarcating intersubjectivity – into entertaining products providing subjects with a sense of belonging. Understanding this manipulation at the techno-social and subjective levels is crucial for addressing possibilities of political change within neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is viewed as a fantasy organising political life, a discursive articulation or graspable picture of our *Symbolic Order*.

⁷⁵ See [section 3](#) or [Article 3](#) for a more detailed overview of this concept.

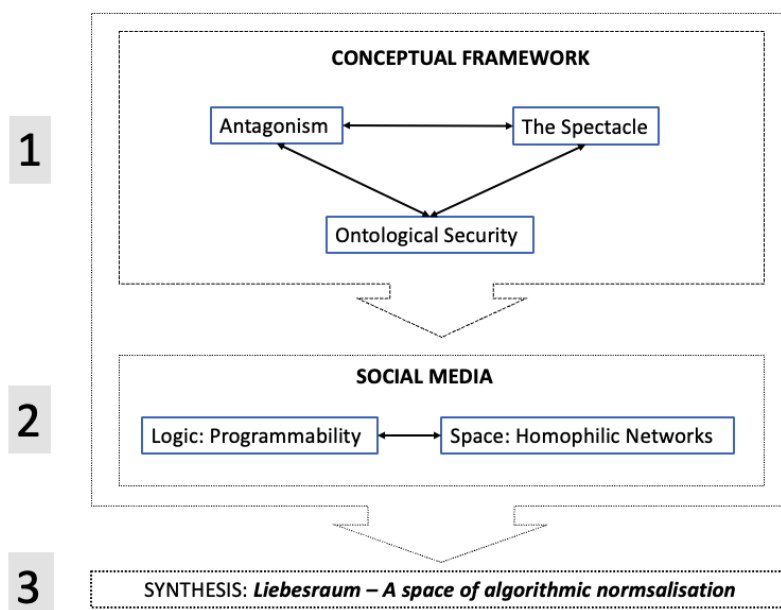
⁷⁶ I am the sole author of this draft article.

This article analyses how the interplay between social media and the neoliberal Symbolic Order simultaneously attempts to perpetuate the latter while hampering it by normalising the far-right. The analysis of this interplay is done through a Lacanian conceptual framework (Jabareen, 2009) entangling the notions of *the spectacle*, *antagonism*, and *ontological security*. The spectacle, the commodification of political life, is neoliberalism’s Symbolic frame organising fantasies. Antagonism is the content or political fantasy consumed through social media – manifested in commodified conflicts between liberal and far-right subjects. Ontological security is the affective mechanism of this fantasy, protecting against the dislocatory potential of antagonism (cf. the *Real*). This framework addresses how social media algorithms produce and hide traumatic encounters with sociocultural anxieties in homophilic networks – spaces where similarity breeds connection (Chun, 2018). Under a *façade* of connection, “love”, and freedom, these networks perpetuate and naturalise hierarchies and exclusion.

Social media is analysed via this Lacanian framework in two dimensions, composing the technosocial architecture normalising the far-right as a neoliberal spectacle: “logics” (i.e., how affordances organise social traffic by learning from users) and “space” (i.e., how homophilic networks manufacture belonging). The Lacanian analysis of these co-dependent dimensions generates the synthetic concept of *liebesraum* or “space of love”: a techno-affective governance form that perpetuates the neoliberal status quo while promoting exclusion and hatred masked as “love for the same”. [Schema 2](#) visualises this methodological-theoretical development in three steps ⁷⁷:

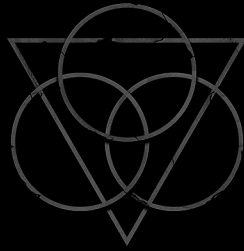
⁷⁷ 1. development of framework based on antagonism, ontological security and the spectacle; 2. exploration of social media – logic and space – via this framework; 3. synthesis in the concept of *liebesraum*

Schema 2. Methodological-theoretical scheme, Article 4 (source: author)



The operational and spatial dimensions of social media analysed in this study are logics/“programmability” and space/“homophilic networks”. *Logics* organise social traffic responding to neoliberal market imperatives. *Programmability* is a specific logic where users influence and are influenced by algorithmic-driven information flows. *Homophilic networks* are online communities where logics perform their functions and attain meaning.

Applying the conceptual framework recasts these technologies in terms of segregation, exclusion, and hatred disguised as “love for the same”. I crystallise this recasting into the concept of *liebesraum*. This concept helps understand far-right normalisation as an algorithmic spectacle by merging the agentic affordances of programmability, the spatial configuration of homophilic networks, and the concept of *lebensraum* (Nazism’s “vital space”). This LOSS-informed concept encapsulates the techno-affective transition from hate to love by enclosing the subject in a continuum of Symbolic transgression (*jouissance*) and correction (“love”). *Liebesraum* converts the far-right “challenge” into a sanitised yet anxiety-inducing spectacle, reinforcing modern political identities. This process commodifies conflicts between far-right and liberal subjects, providing ontological security (“love”) while mobilising anxiety (experienced as *jouissance*) to shape subjectivity and belonging. This stasis prevents substantial political changes against neoliberalism, subversively reinforcing the latter’s essence *into* and *as* the heart of far-right discourses, evidencing its Symbolic “(un)becomingness” for pluralist democracies.



VI: Concluding Discussion

6. Concluding Discussion

This section is divided into three subsections focused on addressing the aim of the dissertation: to – through a Lacanian ontological security (LOSS) lens – investigate how the interplay between psycho-political processes and techno-mediatic dynamics contributes to far-right normalisation amid the crisis-plagued retreat of the modern liberal order. First, I address this aim, particularly in its contribution to the framework and subfield of Lacanian ontological security. Second, I disentangle this general discussion by answering each research question. Unlike more structural or positivist accounts, these answers should be seen as provocations towards new theoretical, research, and potentially policy horizons rather than boxed-off formulae or explanatory models. Finally, I offer closing thoughts on avenues of future inquiry on the normalisation of the far-right and its connection with the fall of Empire or, as previously discussed, the retreat or mutation of the modern liberal order.

6.1. General reflection

In this thesis, I have foregrounded LOSS to address the interstice of the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions of far-right normalisation in four analytical levels and their interplay: the international, the mediatic, the subjective, and the technosocial. The articles attend to each of these analytical levels while not being bound by them. Instead, these pieces deploy them as departure points from where to develop theoretical connections, to varying degrees, with the other levels of analysis. Following the hourglass model⁷⁸, I explore how the articles gradually weaved these analytical levels to attend to this thesis' aim. In turn, I discuss how these contributions help expand on LOSS through a holistic approach to far-right normalisation for our hyper-mediatised and crisis-ridden political context.

The departure point concerned the dislocation of the modern liberal order experienced in the phenomenon of deglobalisation, which is encased in the “Western” structure of power that has historically conditioned the development of the far-right: White supremacy. Through LOSS, I advanced the understanding of the link between White supremacy, deglobalisation, and the

⁷⁸ See section 4: Methodological considerations.

media-supported normalisation of the far-right by analysing the interplay between discourse, identity formation, and techno-mediatic affordances.

Deglobalisation shapes a political landscape of far-right and White supremacist grievances, resentments, anxieties, hopes, and aspirations. Examining this landscape through LOSS reveals that deglobalisation and far-right normalisation co-produce retrotopian – revisionist reproductions of futures (Bauman, 2017) – civilisational horizons of White supremacy, framing borders and identities as natural, righteous, and worthy of violent defence against threatening *others*. This co-production of hyper-mediatised fantasies and Others affects identity formation, shaping how modern subjects *enjoy* belonging and difference amid crises. This process is evident in the submission of mainstream right-wing parties to the legitimacy-conveying Symbolic authority of the far-right. The co-constituted horizons of far-right deglobalisation and *re-globalisation* – the “return” to nativist, patriarchal, and imperial systems of structural brutalisation – involve both the anxiety of sociocultural dislocation and the *jouissance* stemming from the unfulfilled yet desired promise of modernity: prosperity, reason, harmony, and stability.

The emotionally-governed entanglement between White supremacy and deglobalisation is linked to the process of identity (re)formation insofar as this connection is co-constituted with discourses of *re-globalisation*. These discourses act as aspirational retrotopias for White supremacist and far-right imaginaries. In the context of the normalisation of the far-right, *re-globalisation* is enacted in discourses of grievance and belonging, like “Take Back Control” (UK), “Make America Great Again”, or “Keep Sweden Swedish”; and through influencer performances of parasocial encroachment⁷⁹. From a LOSS perspective, the onus of the identity-bordering discourse is not solely on contesting the antagonistic hegemony of liberal democracy. Instead, the emotional governance over this discourse relies on fixing a stable sense of individual, group, national, and cultural *continuum* simultaneously (i.e., a representational fantasy of belonging) through far-right civilisational projects.

Enjoying re-globalisation through deglobalisation – the *fall* of the modern liberal order – is a quintessential affective and political signifier of far-right normalisation. This “normalising” enjoyment-through-antagonism not only sequesters the attention and affective circulation (Solomon, 2018) of

⁷⁹ The increasing generation of *semblances* (Lacan, 1998) of “authentic” bonds between celebrities or influential actors and their followers (see Paravati et al., 2020).

contemporary political discourses, but (re)shapes our identities through hybrid media. *Jouissance*, being necessarily produced alongside the anxiety-inducing antagonism against the threatening other, is mediated, reproduced, and ultimately commodified in social media through their algorithmic affordances. The paradoxical enjoyment of deglobalisation by liberal subjects – their ontologically-insecuritising *end of the world* – is commodified in homophilic networks. This dynamic sustains the neoliberal status quo by reinforcing enjoyable identity signifiers and, consequently, foreclosing encounters with dislocating, counter-hegemonic political projects. This process forecloses the encounter with the historical-mobilising yet dislocating encounter with the *Real* (Fredricson, 1981; Žižek, 2009). This political foreclosure against the Real of the political is that of *ontological security*. It reifies identities according to commodified antagonisms peddled by social media and cradled in homophilic networks insofar as they reinforce the subject's sense of political belonging.

Amid the enactment of hybrid media logics and emotional governance practices in homophilic networks we can locate the contemporary *semblance* – the accepted social form – of far-right discourses of hegemonic, *re*-globalising violence. The semblance of this far-right civilisational discourse can be seen, for instance, in the transfiguration of redemptive violence from explicit, short-lived forms (e.g., attacks against asylum seekers and refugee camps in Sweden and the UK) to sanitised, long-term iterations (e.g., the Human Rights-violating “Illegal Immigration Act” in the UK, or the proposed “Snitch Law” in Sweden). The *delivery* of semblance is tied to the emotional governance of mediatic sites of affective contestation, manifesting in the spectacularisation of the political through hybrid media logics like programmability (e.g., in “liking” or “sharing” content), algorithmic curation (the organisation of content based on programmable interaction), and choice architectures (in how the content is presented and entangled with the broader attention-mediatic architecture). This technosocial architecture also conditions the mutation and our experience of the hyper-mediatised political. It is infused with *meaning* via the co-constitution of segregationist neighbourhoods of sameness and the borders that contour the ontological (in)security of the neighbour-subjects and, thus, the signification of the *threatening* Other.

In the context of deglobalisation, the interaction between ontological (in)security and enjoyment has also been analysed concerning the perverse co-constitution between the modern liberal order, the far-right, and the

technosocial affordances of social media. As in the case of globalisation and deglobalisation as co-constituted processes, liberal democracy, values, and practices have planted their own entropic seeds by embedding themselves within the spectacle. In other words, the Symbolic authority of the modern liberal order is gradually experienced as an ontologically-*in*securitising ontology conditioned by neoliberalism and enacted through social media. This ongoing self-destruction, rot, or technosocially-infused shambling-on signifies a perverse mutation in the context of the normalisation of the far-right. Like in the Žižekian metaphor of the *undead* or the Lacanian lamella, the neoliberal Symbolic Order is understood as undergoing a Cronenberg-like *un*-becoming. It simultaneously shambles on yet invisibilises itself via an obscene fusion to (or sprouting from *within*) new authoritarian, techno-solutionist, and exclusionary Symbolic iterations that materially and ontologically depend on and reinforce neoliberalism.

Contrary to the fading liberal project, the obsessional neurotic, “holding on at all costs” structure of neoliberalism (Wilson, 2017) points to this system’s core obscene immortality, as argued by Žižek (2006), rather than its death. This *un*-transition signifies the lingering power of this Symbolic system of ontological (in)securitisation, which perversely conditions (and thus, forecloses) the affective, material, and political possibility of substantive democratic recalibrations of our political. The representation and emotional governance of authority, legitimacy, expertise, trust, and “truth” in this context entails a perpetual civilisational struggle. It reveals the limits, prospects, and threats of the neoliberal post-political amid a context of technosocial immediacy and unbecoming far-right intimacy.

Identity borders are drawn along these fast-changing, intimate, fantasmatic lines of far-right enjoyment. They are emotionally charged with feelings of ontological (in)security and mediated by the neoliberal structure of hybrid media affordances. The manner of this identity bordering is the *animating drive* of the normalisation of the far-right, and its mutation constitutes the overlapping structure of the political at an individual, national, and global scale. This far-right normalising bordering affects the constitution and experience of the modern liberal order as mutating into a disturbing system or nurturing carcass for the development of far-right retrotopian projects – e.g., techno-feudalism (Morozov, 2022; Varoufakis, 2023), neo-reactionism (A. Jones, 2019), Christian nationalism (Armaly et al., 2022; Perry & Schleifer,

2023), neo-fascism (Cammaerts, 2020), and techno-libertarianism (Desmond, 2023).

The far-right's attempts to affix meaning to floating signifiers like "freedom", "democracy", and "the people" under a retrotopian frame respond to the logic of spectacularised politics as conditioned by the hybrid media system. For instance, in the prelude to the 2021 US Capitol Hill storming, the frame of the "reclamation" discourse manifested in legitimising the grievance narratives of the Great Replacement and QAnon conspiracy theories and communities. This act of legitimisation was articulated into and framed the *jouissance*-inducing enactment of the "Stop the Steal" discourse, manifested in the storming of the Capitol building by far-right rioters. The storming was an emotionally-governed festival of excess narratively grounded in White supremacist discourses, conditioned by the combined techno-mediatic influence of Donald Trump and Twitter/X affordances, and experienced in the elation, sadism, self-righteousness, and *schadenfreude* of the far-right mob. This frame is relevant for understanding the relationship between identity bordering and far-right normalisation insofar as it reveals the fantasmatic sites of affective contestation that constitute the hyper-mediatised spectacle of the political (e.g., Manifest Destiny or MAGA). In Sweden, this frame is that of Swedish exceptionalism, an empty signifier and vessel of ontological (in)security catalysing the mainstream right-wing's identity shift away from traditional liberal tenets and into the exclusionary frameworks of a new Symbolic authority, i.e., the far-right.

Hybrid media spaces showcase and rearrange themselves according to real-world instances of discursive articulation and contestation around hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, supremacist projects that have become normalised and even synonymous with "love", "patriotism", and "loyalty". This surreptitious property of media hybridity can be appreciated in the front-stage genuflection of social media and tech moguls in the US (e.g., Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai, Tim Cook) towards Donald Trump's far-right regime of exclusionary belonging (Helmore, 2025). These media spaces and their related affordances and performances, like those of influencers and ordinary users, are critical for how modern political identities are moulded. For instance, the performative provision of "equal footing" to the far-right in Swedish prime-time TV reveals how the tension between the "pathological normalcy" (Mudde, 2017a) of far-right discourses and the liberal imperative of "tolerance" shapes bordering practices of the "newsworthy" and "socially accepted". As seen in Trump's 2025 inauguration, these "new socially accepted"

norms stem not only from the emotional governance of fantasies and identities of the far-right but from their simultaneous sanitisation or post-politicisation by mainstream actors in media and politics. In the oxymoronic *post-political politicisation* of hybrid media, political contestation – i.e., antagonism – is subverted in favour of narratives satisfying the interplay between the anxiety-induced *jouissance* of uncertainty (e.g., “White extinction”; Bhatt, 2021; Stern, 2022) and the desire for ontological security.

The normalisation of the far-right should thus be understood not only in terms of grievance, resentment, fear, and uncertainty but also incorporating aspiration, hope, and “righteous” struggle experienced as the enjoyment of civilisational reclamation. In this sense, the painful oscillation between utopia (e.g., in the promise of a “White nation”) and dystopia (e.g., in a Swedish homeland “invaded” by non-Whites, non-Christians) generates the conditions for transgressive enjoyment manifested as gloating, self-righteousness, sadism, and elation. Experiencing these far-right beatific and horrific scenarios (Eberle, 2019) as inextricable reveals the symbolic coordinates of enjoyment as *threatening* (e.g., ethnic shifts) and/or *imperilled* (e.g., “Sweden as a White nation”) by ethnocultural and/or antagonistic others. In the contexts analysed in this thesis, the conveyance and production of these others (and the big Other) is inseparable from its algorithmic essentialisation via social media that segregates users in networks of “sameness”. These algorithmically-conditioned coordinates reveal the encroachment of the far-right into mainstream politics as their victories and discourses are increasingly *enjoyed* by purported defenders of liberal democracy, plurality, tolerance, and the rule of law (i.e., neoliberal centrist and right-wing parties).

The mutual shaping of *jouissance* and hybrid media underpins the paradoxical architecture of far-right normalisation and neoliberal perpetuation. Hybrid media enact far-right fantasies, shaping enjoyment and the process of othering amid crises, while *jouissance* provides the political intensity that sustains the attention-hoarding, democracy-dislocating structure of hybrid media. Within this structure, social media constitute not only technologies but core political platforms where far-right and neoliberal discourses co-produce modernity’s regimes of belonging. These platforms provide these discourses with a space of affective circulation (Solomon, 2018), where their exclusionary content and rhetoric become algorithmically amplified, sanitised, and reconstructed as cherished belonging and “love for the same”. However, belonging and identity beget *othering* and, thus, antagonism. Neoliberal hybrid media, therefore,

produces *jouissance*-inducing, commodified antagonisms that sublimate (yet can never fully integrate) encounters with the Real of the political in order to self-perpetuate, futilely attempting to foreclose internal contradictions and substantial political change. This perverse co-constitution between neoliberalism and the far-right is not fixed but an ever-mutating ontology renewing the latter's unconscious, ideological bind through mediatic affordances over modern political subjects.

For instance, the norm of “due impartiality” in traditional media, including platforming far-right leaders, constitutes a practice of emotional governance of ontological (in)security. The enactment of due impartiality is tied to social media affordances, which reflect the placement of popular attention and mood as norms and practices that reinforce far-right discourses. This can be seen, for example, in how the sheer popularity on Twitter/X of far-right politicians and actors like Jimmie Åkesson (Sweden), Suella Braverman (UK), Donald Trump (US), and Elon Musk generates spaces for mainstreaming their views on controversial topics. This media-afforded reinforcement rests on emotionally governing ontological *insecurities* while simultaneously incarnating the promise of ontological *security*. For instance, Musk's incessant fearmongering about White ethnocultural replacement on Twitter/X simultaneously produces desired far-right imaginaries placating “German”/AfD's White anxiety and even (Nazi) guilt (Treisman, 2025). Likewise, these dynamics can be observed in TV broadcasts platforming narratives that highlight the threat of non-White demographic transformation and in the related “push” for politics that reject, objectivise, and de-humanise immigrant others (Toth, 2023).

These exclusionary practices and discourses are situated in the democracy-dislocating framework of social media politics and the dysfunctional hybrid media sphere, as seen in issues of misinformation, disinformation, and post-truth politics. For instance, following Lewandowsky et al., the attention economy and the massification of epistemic crises can be understood as co-constituted, effectively comprising an architecture of emotional governance sedimented on narratives of ontological (in)security: “Two core attributes from the attention economy and human psychology create the perfect conditions for the spread of misinformation: algorithms that promote attractive, engaging content and people's strong predisposition to orient towards negative news, as most ‘fake news’ tends to evoke negative emotions such as fear, anger and outrage.” (Lewandowsky, 2020, p.5). Thus, the hybrid media-based production and commodification of the far-right as an integral part of the neoliberal

attention economy responds to the shift towards an algorithmic-governed semi-public sphere. This mediascape is sustained by and produces discursive and emotional extremes of our experience of the political, normalising the far-right as an essential narrative cog of the formation of modern political identities while naturalising its resulting segregation.

This techno-mediatic “trap” that governs our experience of the political can also be appreciated in how the mutual constitution of homophilic networks and affordances like programmability condition the normalisation of the far-right by commodifying it. The constitution of belonging via communities of sameness and the generation of fantasies of agency fuelled by programmability (i.e., fantasies in which our actions influence algorithms) generate a vicious cycle of fantasmatic circulation. This cycle normalises the far-right insofar as it can commodify it for our consumption, which is experienced in “heroic” antagonisms between liberal and far-right subjects. The technosocial architecture of social media situates subjects in a stasis of ontological security, in which antagonisms emerge only if they can be produced, edited, and domesticated by data- and attention-hoarding algorithms. Paradoxically, yet in line with *jouissance*’s logic, hybrid media support the undead shambling-on of neoliberalism by emotionally governing and fostering our criticism and antagonisms. This technosocial imperative constitutes a key paradox of ontological security. It normalises the far-right via its enjoyable spectacle to reinforce identity and belonging under neoliberalism, which implies eroding the modern liberal order that provides it with an operational structure.

The homophilic networks that host this spectacle or fantasy of far-right normalisation are based on processes of algorithmic segregation under the guise of market logics, which occlude core aspects of our subjectivities – like gender, race, and age – in favour of “neutral” and unimpeachable ones (like “good debtor”). This apparent phasing-out of “overtly political” criteria for neighbourhood-building, however, works to reinforce the same structural differences that both sustain neoliberalism and feed far-right politics. They naturalise segregation based on alleged “neutral” or “objective” qualifications and algorithmic processes of data herding, selling us a sense of agency on how we behave and feel in social media. Under homophily, cyberspace mutates into a series of neighbouring echo chambers, simultaneously foreclosing and promising a sense of fulfilment and enjoyment through recognition of “mutual identities” achieved through openness, connectivity, and *love* (see *liebesraum*, [section 3](#) and [article 4](#)). In this sense, network homophily can be understood as

the technosocial application of ontological (in)security in its capacity and drive to perversely foreclose categorical identifications.

The resulting *jouissance* from this excessive process of algorithmic-mediated identity bordering (e.g., experienced in receiving “recommendations” based not only on likes and commenting patterns but on the “sameness” with other users) is both i) the Symbolic reward for the subject’s submission to the neoliberal Symbolic Order, and ii) the condition for the transition of exclusionary discourses into those of “love for the same” (see *liebesraum*, [article 4](#)). This algorithmic-mediated process involves projecting an unflinching assemblage of consumable images and social relations affixed by discourse. In Lacanian terms, it consists in constructing a (*faux*) stable “self” rather than facing the dislocating Real of its perpetual *becoming*. The entanglement between the image, its relational impact (i.e., the commodified antagonisms forging our intersubjectivities), and the Symbolic condition that constitutes this image (the sociosymbolic structure of neoliberalism, *the spectacle*) shapes the normalisation of the far-right.

Following this extended reflection and considering the research problem of this dissertation, I discuss, in a more concrete fashion, the normalisation of the far-right from a Lacanian ontological security approach. I analyse far-right normalisation as an affective, psycho-political phenomenon undergirding and being shaped by social media’s techno-mediatic affordances.

6.1.1. *Far-right normalisation via Lacanian ontological security*

The normalisation of the far-right conveys a process of hegemonic antagonisation (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 112) that highlights the perceived anomic element (i.e., the far-right) embedded in said antagonism. On the one hand, this antagonisation signifies the gradual retreat of liberal, post-material democratic values, like human rights, pluralism, feminism, and egalitarianism. On the other, the normalisation of far-right discourses relies on filling the discursive gap left by the retreating civilisational project of liberalism. These discourses vie to become privileged reference points of our identities, aiming to affix meaning and provide stability by assembling idyllic pasts, unsatisfactory presents, and anxiety-infused futures into “concerned” and “thoughtful” discursive frameworks. For instance, the moral and ethical

contradictions inherent in Swedish political history – e.g., a history of social democracy, liberalism, and solidarity mixed with a heritage of neo-Nazism and White supremacist eugenics (Browning, 2021; Kølvråa, 2019; Lucassen, 2010) – implies developing regimes of normality that rationalise these contradictions into securitising frameworks of collective autobiographical continuity (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020; Subotic, 2016). Crucially, this process implies contesting i) *what* belonging is and ii) *how* it can be *enjoyed* away from antagonistic discourses and *within* the avowing, sanitising, and ultimately normalising and “safe” embrace of the far-right (see Leser & Spissinger, 2020).

The association of “crises as normal” with the threatening Other implies the development of multidimensional affective and performative frames for making sense of our dislocated world and stabilising our identity within. Under these regimes, exclusion, supremacy, brutalisation and, hence, *belonging* become “normal”. These intricate dimensions and dynamics of far-right normalisation reside in – and are revealed via – affective spaces of “disavowed” enjoyment, which are discursively associated with the security of the crisis-ridden “homeland” brought by the threatening Other. Just like ontological security and *insecurity* are co-constituted, so are regimes of normality interdependent with the production of crises and, in their projection towards the future, with utopian and dystopian fantasies (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 100; see also Eberle, 2019).

This ever-oscillating structure of normality mirrors that of subjective belonging and othering, of lost enjoyment, and sequestered desire. From a Lacanian perspective, this situates the subject interpellated by the far-right within the anxiety-inducing structure of *jouissance*. It is the lack-evidencing anxiety incarnated in dystopia that triggers the righteous, transgressive, and ultimately painful mobilisation of desire towards promised utopia manifested in the recapture of its lost object-cause – e.g., ethnocultural homogeneity, national harmony, and “righteous” hierarchies. The far-right’s generation of the “new normal” implies the simultaneous (re)production and perpetuation of *crises* as normal (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023; Žižek, 2002b), particularly through the ontological (in)securitising architecture of homophilic networks. In this context, we can appreciate the full fruition of the cycle of ideological interpellation proposed by Žižek (2009; see also Mandelbaum, 2023): the normalisation of the far-right transitions from narrative articulations into a surreptitious libidinal fantasy of righteous *jouissance* that rewards the subject the more it *struggles* within/against the hyper-mediatised, identity-conferring

crisis. Thus, the normalisation of the far-right embodies a perverse structure by simultaneously producing crises and withholding the promised *jouissance* of our investment in their “new normal”. Similar to neoliberalism (Davison & Saull, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2020), the far-right peddles the anxiety reproduced as righteous purpose and, ultimately, consumed through hyper-mediated affordances as our desired horizon of normality.

Material and ontological *crises* are traumatic disruptions to the stability of the experience of modernity enshrined in liberal democracy. These ruptures in the fabric of democratic fantasy entail an encounter with the Real. These manifest in far-right discourses as dystopian scenarios of civilisational collapse of the White “West” invariably adjudicated to the threatening Other. However, this traumatic structure also withholds the possibility of ecstatic enjoyment for the aggrieved subject. It is the painful, struggle-forcing character of crises that foregrounds the possibility and shapes the affective intensity of transgressively enjoying the “righteous” recapture of lost *jouissance* – and underscores *jouissance* as an ominous component of reactionary politics peddled by the neoliberal imperatives of social media algorithms. In this context, *normalisation* becomes a paradoxical architecture of stabilisation or renewal of ontological security defending against crisis. It involves both categorical closure and commitments to fantasmatic identity signifiers, as well as the perpetuation of an antagonistic struggle (e.g., between liberal and far-right subjects) for affixing *what* normality entails and *who* belongs to it⁸⁰. Thus, the normalisation of the far-right constitutes a dangerous fantasy of ontological (in)security that actively impugns the character of liberal democratic modernity while promising a return to the Symbolic’s embrace. In the context of social media politics, this process is organised under the perverse algorithmic *continuum* between *jouissance* and love, the ever-expanding and entropic body of *liebesraum* (see [article 4](#)).

The normalisation of the far-right, thus, not only represents a process of widespread political re-articulation “towards the right” but also conditions the identity of liberal modernity itself. It is simultaneously a litmus test and audition of civilisational fracture and renewal, a spectacle that is occluded and organised through increasingly intractable hybrid media dynamics. This reformulation or cross-pollination of far-right normalisation from a Lacanian ontological security perspective – integrating concepts from critical discourse

⁸⁰ See the “new normal” (Krzyżanowski et al., 2023).

analysis⁸¹ – constitutes a key “encompassing” contribution of this thesis. However, it also contributes to reimagining and expanding the concept of ontological security in its complex relationship with the process of far-right normalisation, hybrid media massification, and identity (re)formation.

6.1.2. *Contributions to Lacanian ontological security debates*

Ontological security constitutes not only an ideal lens to examine the normalisation of the far-right but is itself an object of study that, in the course of this dissertation, has expanded thanks to its constant ontological contact with this phenomenon and supporting concepts. This expansion resulted from the analysis of the subject’s co-constitution with civilisational fantasies of fixity. In turn, this ontology was elucidated through the exploration of the hyper-mediated Other and the neoliberal techno-social architecture that conditions its engagement with the political. In LOSS, the subject’s ideal “image” (see “ideal-ego”; Lacan, 2006) – peddled and (re)constituted through social media – is an irremediably painful fantasy of fixity that signifies misrecognition, i.e., it cannot be achieved. Yet, its Symbolic *possibility* signifies the subject’s never-ending lack. In the realm of the hyper-mediated political, this “ideal image” is paradoxically both more tangible (e.g., in “profiles” and “user activity”) and blurred, thus composing a fantasy of ontological (in)security. This tense fantasy provides us with a complementary contribution to the aim of this dissertation: that of rethinking ontological security in terms of *jouissance*. Subjectivity itself – and the split nature of the lacking subject – is based on the traumatic process of entering into the sociolinguistic realm or Symbolic Order, experienced as the ungraspable recognition by the Other. This figure embeds both the prospect of *lost wholeness* and the possibility of its recapture. In this sense, the Other is deemed to actively threaten the subject’s enjoyment both by stealing it and by projecting its own “alien” forms of enjoyment (e.g., “wokeness”). Despite its stabilising quality, ontological security only generates the *illusion* of fixity, and its inevitable breakage painfully reveals the subject as permanently *becoming*.

In the over-simplified **Schema 2** (see below), the “affixed” subject of enjoyment (“ego”) is dimensionally represented by its relation to the fantasy of ontological security, which responds to the subject’s expectation or “prior attribution” (Hook, 2017) of *ownership of jouissance* or what I label as “fief”. For instance,

⁸¹ In [section 3](#) see K. Brown et al. (2023); Krzyzanowski et al. (2023); Mondon & Winter (2020a); Wodak (2020).

the aggrieved, far-right, SD-supporting subject unconsciously holds and produces these “prior attributions” based on overdetermined fantasies of self and nation. In them, the “real Swedes” are the historically rightful and righteous “*owners*” (fief) of the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural uniqueness and wholeness distinguishing the idyllic, long-lost past of the nation. This “loss” is, paradoxically, what allows the aggrieved far-right subject to both experience the *jouissance* of Swedishness via nostalgic narratives and identify the would-be threat or *thief* that enacted said loss: the ethnocultural Other. In other words, it is only in the paradoxical perpetuation of loss (lack) that enjoyment can be experienced – that the long-lost object of desire can be encountered yet never grasped (see Glynos, 2001; McGowan, 2021).

On the right side of [Schema 3](#), the imaginary (ethnocultural or otherwise adversarial) *Other* – the entity threatening our enjoyment – is associated with the fantasy of ontological *insecurity*. This subject is associated with it both as a conveyor of ontological insecurity (i.e., as threatening our enjoyment) and as rightfully suffering from it due to its alien presence to the “group”, fiefdom, homophilic network, nation, and so on. Both in its suffering (e.g., in the Social Democrats losing the 2022 Swedish election) and its potential theft (e.g., in immigrants “saturating” the Swedish welfare system), the Other constitutes the vessel through which we sustain our enjoyment (McGowan, 2021). I label this “coordinate” of the *Other* as “*thief*”, the result of the prior judgement or adjudication that the subject rules upon its entry into the Symbolic Order. In the *possibility of reversal* (see purple diagonal lines) and the brittleness of these divisions/borders (symbolised in the dotted or unsealed boxes) lies the traumatic *Real* of the political: the “cut” in the Symbolic order, the possibility that the politically-antagonistic and/or ethnocultural Other steals our enjoyment, our fantasy of ontological security. This is seen, for instance, in the discourse of the “Great Replacement” and in the anxiety around the signifier “Swedishness” that distinguishes the new Swedish right. In the realm of the political, this “possibility” is what politically animates the subject, (re)vealing both the traumatic *Real* and the recurrent structure of the prior attributions of fief and thief. They are fantasies that, if achieved, would extinguish the lack that constitutes the subject; yet, simultaneously, they forge the structure from which anxiety through *jouissance* can emanate.

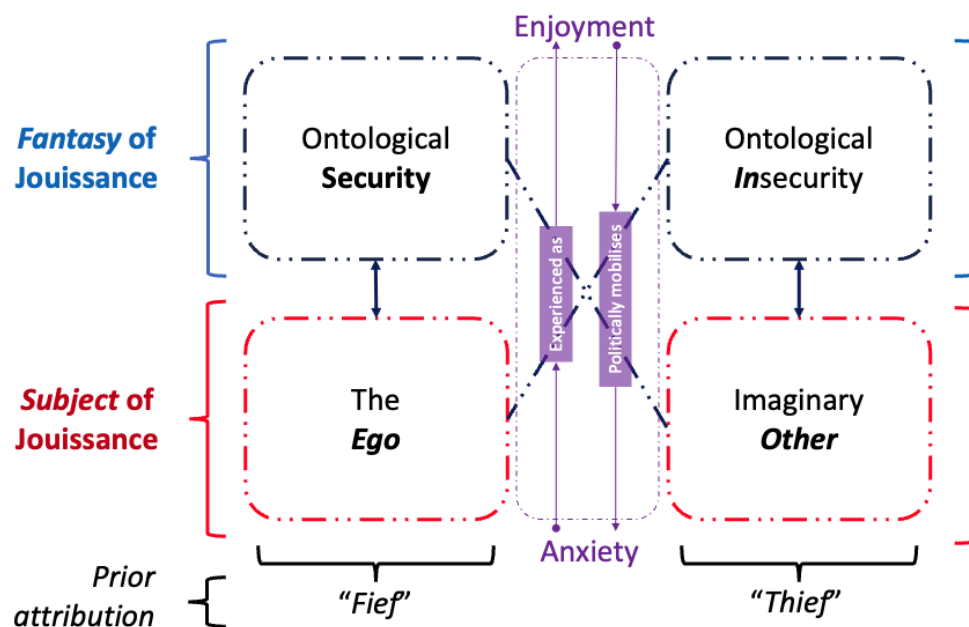
The ever-present possibility of this *reversal* reveals not only the radical difference and the threatening nature of intersubjectivity but also the pre-attributed status of “thief” (the Other) and “fief” (the ego or self) as different

sides of the same coin. Just like ontological security and *insecurity* are co-constituted, so is the subject shaped by the Other's recognition. In other words, in "prior attribution" – that "we", and not others, are "owed" *jouissance* – lies the inescapable and anxiety-inducing nature of *misrecognition*: that our alienating self-image (withheld by the *Other*) cannot capture our entire subjectivity, our ever-becoming "fulness". As Evans argues, "the ego is basically a misrecognition of the symbolic determinants of subjectivity" (2006, p. 112). Far-right normalisation involves leveraging this anxiety of misrecognition to produce comforting and politically-mobilising fantasies of ontological security. In a context of ubiquitous, hyper-mediatised crises, this leveraging reinforces pre-attributed roles, identities, and segregational structures, making far-right ideologies appear more "acceptable" both in the broader public sphere and more "intimate" homophilic networks.

This traumatic *Real* of the political – that the fantasmatic borders that fasten our identities are but fickle, ultimately insubstantial narratives – necessitates and generates anxiety. This anxiety is related to the categorical closure concerning the threat to ownership and the corresponding identity tied to our prior attributions of fiefdom over *jouissance* (*I am the righteous Swede; I deserve its boons, not them*). Thus, (in)security is mobilised by the anxiety-inducing yet *enjoyable* kernel of dislocation or dispossession – i.e., *jouissance* animates our belonging and "ownership" by reiterating *loss*. Enjoyment (upper-centre in [Schema 3](#)) is understood under this conceptualisation of ontological (in)security as the mirroring counterpart of anxiety. Moreover, *jouissance* is how subjects experience anxiety when ordained by Symbolic's imperative to "*enjoy!*" to fully partake in the reward-punishment-disavowal continuum of the social order. In turn, enjoyment is how anxiety becomes *politically mobilised*. After all, it is the seductive *jouissance* of reclamation or recapture of the long-lost object-cause of desire (e.g., "Swedishness" or "America") that fuels the far-right and entices and submits their mainstream enablers and vassals. This can be seen in the rapturous celebrations of the Liberal party alongside the supposedly anathematic far-right Sweden Democrats – a *jouissance* experienced out of the anxiety of potential loss and *undesirability* against the "common enemy/Other" incarnated in the centre-left coalition. In this line, and following Derek Hook (2017; see also Hook & George, 2021), I understand *jouissance* as a quintessential dimension of fantasy. Enjoyment not only mobilises anxiety but also *occludes* its Real kernel, e.g., of Sweden no longer constituting an ethnoculturally homogeneous nation. This occlusion is done through fantasies of heroic antagonisms (cf.

“interpassivity”, Žižek, 2002a, pp. xxxi–xxxii) curated or tailor-made *for* and *by* our perpetual consumption through ever-learning social media algorithms. In contrast to the “stable” (yet unreachable) quest for quenching desire (Hook, 2017), *jouissance* operates through a paradoxical and perverse structure: it provides ontological security insofar as this fantasy sustains excessive enjoyment. In other words, it ultimately attempts against the ontological security of the subject by providing it with an algorithmically-curated glimpse of the most cherished experiences of a continuous self and group belonging⁸².

Schema 3. *Ontological (in)security and jouissance (source: author)*



This conceptualisation, advanced through analysing the relationship between far-right normalisation and social media affordances, expands on ontological security as a *libidinal and perverse fantasy of categorical closure*. Our immersion into the Symbolic Order and the uneasy subordination to the *jouissance*-withholding *big Other* frame the libidinal dimension of ontological security – “that which is most enjoyed in an ideology” (Hook, 2017, p. 605) – and signifies it as a potent yet *perverse* fantasy of self-coherence. This perverse immersion is inextricable from the affordances and symbolic constraints of the neoliberal spectacle, effectuated through identity-reinforcing social media and its big Other: the algorithm. For Lacan, perversion is not a form of behaviour

⁸² Additionally, this perverse structure lies in producing a signifying chain of *hope* inextricable from Symbolic commitments to a modern neoliberal order affectively sustained in utopias built on “naturalised” exclusion, “common-sense” supremacy, and systematic brutalisation.

but a subjective structure persisting even after a perverse behaviour attains formal social acceptability (Evans, 2006, pp. 141-142). Perversion implies an inversion in the libidinal structure, in which the subject assumes the “position of the object-instrument of the ‘will-to-enjoy’” (ibid., p. 141) for the enjoyment of the big Other. It is a form of self-instrumentalisation where the big Other’s *jouissance* (e.g., in attempting to “hack” or “satisfy” the algorithm) becomes how the subject enjoys and which, crucially, serves to justify excess and transgression (e.g., “I do this for/am the instrument of my country / god / people”). Thus, perversion is inextricably tied to an excessive, painful quest for *jouissance* (Hook, 2017).

The political fantasy of ontological security shares in this structure, evidenced by its fleeting stabilising quality. Ontological security cruelly promises the roadmap for recapturing the lost object-cause and the *jouissance* it withholds, which is devised via the anxiety-inducing encounter with ontological *insecurity*, its inextricable other half. It is the split, perpetually-becoming subject and the partial arresting of ontological security in political fantasies of civilisational reclamation (“Make Sweden Great Again!”) that underscore the perverse quality of this fantasy. In this sense, *jouissance* can be interpreted as the framework or fuel for the *fantasy of division* (i.e., that the categories of othering are fair and immutable, thus granting ontologically security), which resides in our demand for comforting Symbolic return. Here, I summarise the conceptual expansion of ontological security achieved through the overlap of the four articles:

*“I categorise **ontological security** as both **libidinal**, as it structures desire-sustaining enjoyment; and **perverse** (Lacan 1998, pp. 181-182; 2006, p. 697) as it assumes the position of the Other by withholding the promise of wholeness (of lost *jouissance*) via its punitive inversion – i.e., by effectuating lack and anxiety through ontological **insecurity**.”* (Kisić-Merino, 2025; emphases my own).

This section has so far addressed the aim of this dissertation by weaving the reflections and findings from the four articles. The next subsection will offer a more detailed account of how each research question has been answered in their respective articles while also highlighting prominent overlaps with the other articles. These questions respond to the four interdependent analytical levels that compose (and result from) the aim, centred on the phenomenon of far-right normalisation: the international, the mediatic, the subjective, and the technosocial (see [subsection 1.2](#) for further details on their connection).

6.2. Addressing the Research Questions

The answers for each question are mainly addressed by their corresponding research articles (**question 1** corresponding to [article 1](#), and so forth). However, each answer also includes a broader discussion showcasing the thematic and theoretical overlaps with the other articles of this thesis.

6.2.1. Question 1: *How does the relationship between White supremacy and neoliberal (de)globalisation shape and reinforce the (re)production of far-right fantasies of recapturing long-lost wholeness?*⁸³

White ethnocentric narratives simplify the complex process of deglobalisation by intertwining with fantasies of belonging, emotionally governing identity formations into a simplistic “us” vs “them” rhetoric across space (national borders) and time (anxiety-inducing futures; idyllic pasts). Violence, both explicit (e.g., the murder of Heather Heyer during the 2017 Charlottesville riots or the 2019 Christchurch massacre) and structural (e.g., the 2023 “Illegal Immigration Act” of the UK), stems from myths and fantasies in these reductive identity negotiations. These fantasies are generated within hybrid media spaces, amplified by the combination of algorithmic affordances and “traditional” legitimacy frameworks (e.g., TV interviews), and experienced in far-right “solidarity” networks, blurring their geographical and organisational limitations (Kinnvall & Kisić-Merino, 2023, pp. 239-240; see also [article 2](#)).

Through these mediatic affordances and spaces, the discourse of deglobalisation reifies the “globalising” other (e.g., “invading refugees” or its enabling “liberal elite”) as a valid receptacle for redemptive violence for stealing national and ethnocultural wholeness (*jouissance*; *ibid.*, p. 239). In this context, far-right and White supremacist discourses become normalised, offering simple answers to the maladies of globalisation and promising a return to long-lost righteous pasts and White power hierarchies. Deglobalising discourses rage against the liberal iteration of this process, emphasising that the promise of recapturing lost wholeness lies with re-globalisation according to its “original”, White, imperialist, and colonialist standards enshrined in civilisational projects like “Manifest Destiny”. These processes manifest

⁸³ This research question was mainly addressed in [article 1](#): “Deglobalization and the Political Psychology of White Supremacy”.

alongside shifts in political violence, temporarily satisfying ontological security needs mobilised by the far-right. Paradoxically, as [article 2](#) suggests, the technological, financial, and social architecture of neoliberal globalisation (cf. attention economy) supports and sustains White supremacist emotional influence and networks. As [article 4](#) emphasises, this symbiosis occurs even as White supremacy underscores a violent break with its liberal cradle (see “re-globalisation”), signifying their *jouissance*-infused content and ontological insecurities (e.g., White genocide) as essential commodities ontologically-securing neoliberal modernity.

The normalisation of White supremacist ideologies implies the emotional governance of supporters, detractors, and “neutral” subjects, drawing them into a shared discursive arena where historical power relations intersect with deglobalisation narratives (see also [articles 2](#) and [4](#)). In this context, White supremacists are gradually seen as valid political interlocutors throughout the so-called liberal West, promising to address the maladies of liberal globalisation and its ideological kernel, liberal democracy. As analysed in [articles 1](#) and [3](#), these far-right rhetoric and performances “trickle down” in their capacity to convey the ethnocultural Other as stealing our righteous enjoyment and (White, male) identities (*ibid.*, pp. 235-36, 241). In Sweden, this grievance for long-lost *jouissance* caused by neoliberal globalisation manifested in narratives of “national erosion” (i.e., of ethnic identity, presence, and culture), which influenced the mainstream right-wing 2022 government’s agenda on crime, citizenship rights, immigration, and welfare. This process normalised the Sweden Democrat’s agenda, translating ontological (in)security into “neutral” policy discourses through complicit hybrid media affordances and, as also seen in [article 3](#), reconfiguring the identity of the vassalic mainstream against the antagonistic centre-left and ethnocultural Other. This antagonistic legitimisation process implies that exclusionary, bordering narratives of nationhood, religion, and gender have become gradually adopted and naturalised by mainstream political actors throughout the so-called liberal West, aiding the normalisation of the far-right.

6.2.2. Question 2: *How does the hybrid media system enable the far-right's emotional governance of ontological insecurities?*⁸⁴

The far-right exploits paranoid mindsets and narcissistic fantasies via hybrid media affordances and performances (e.g., “influencing”), generating feelings of ontological (in)security that position them as legitimate emotional governors. Hybrid media spaces and affordances play a key role in this process of normalisation, aiding the far-right by reshaping the norms of political and mediatic influence and, thus, social acceptability. Social media’s ubiquity, celerity, low implementation costs, and pervasiveness, and traditional media’s legitimising framing (e.g., using tweets as first-hand sources on live broadcasts) combine to reinforce the interests of highly-engaged and “passive” users alike around highly-controversial topics and rhetoric. This hybrid architecture is shaped by and shapes feelings of distrust in liberal democratic values and institutions (i.e., deglobalisation, see [article 1](#)), reinforcing the affective hold of “alternative”, identity-reinforcing ideologies promising to rectify or recapture lost enjoyment (see also [articles 3](#) and [4](#)). As explored in [article 4](#), this anxiety-inducing technosocial structure is that of ontological insecurity, which, through the exploitation of hyper-individualistic engagement modes (cf. heroic self-fantasies), transforms into one of “love” and belonging for “us” (i.e., ontological security). This categorical foreclosure is reinforced and legitimised in hybrid media, which – following the White supremacist kernel latent in neoliberalism – frame segregation and violence against the algorithmically-essentialised other as “fair”, “commonsense”, and even “natural” in our quest for reclaiming *jouissance* (see also [article 3](#)).

New political-mediatic ontologies like “political influencer” embody and perform reified desires and enjoyment (e.g., being heard or “important” or “living life to the fullest”) in an alienating semi-public sphere. These “influentials” act as catalysts of emotional governance in the hybrid media ecosystem. In this context, “influencer” becomes a key *role* rather than a strict ontology and is mobilised by right-wing politicians (e.g., Donald Trump in the US or Johan Pehrson in Sweden) to produce and govern ontological (in)securities in liberal polities by appealing to authenticity and directness (Kisić-Merino & Kinnvall, 2023, pp. 62-63). Political influencers perform as opinion leaders and mediators, leveraging social media’s decentralised

⁸⁴ This question was mainly addressed in [article 2](#): “Governing Emotions: Hybrid Media, Ontological Insecurity and the Normalisation of Far-Right Fantasies”.

architecture to foster parasocial relationships (i.e., the fantasy of having a relationship with a famous individual) around users' ontological (in)securities (ibid., p. 63). These insecurities are related to far-right mediated fantasies of, e.g., White replacement (article 1), civilisational collapse or diminishing (article 3), and loss of political and national identity (article 4). Traditional mediatic norms disregarded or perverted by these new actors/roles, like providing an “impartial” debate setup (i.e., due impartiality), and sidestepped by algorithmic affordances (e.g., editorial filtering, fact-checking) need re-contextualisation in the era of the attention economy. As discussed in article 4, not only are these norms no longer able to provide ethical and procedural standards and controls, but they have become vital neoliberal cogs in legitimising, platforming, mainstreaming, and normalising the highly-engaging far-right.

The quest for influencer-shaped enjoyment and fulfilment, promised by far-right and mainstream right-wing leaders, is deeply connected to the (mis)recognition of an idealised imagined “self”. This quest for ontological security involves subjects and ideologies becoming fantasmatically affixed based on the influential fantasies peddled by these mediatic norms, performances, and technosocial affordances. Article 1 suggests that this mediatic process is deeply embedded in (and sustains) a broader Symbolic architecture that instrumentalises societal grievances into deglobalising narratives, which are paradoxically angled against its producer: the modern liberal order (see also article 4). The consonance between social media platforms and traditional mediatic frameworks fosters these dislocatory attachments – the latter providing a format of legitimacy mimicked and reproduced by the former (e.g., in framings, rhetoric, communicative styles, etc.). As also seen in article 3, the Swedish case exemplifies how the Sweden Democrats have successfully leveraged these mainstream legitimising logics while sustaining their radical base through social media affordances. This combination has been increasingly replicated by mainstream right-wing vassals/“allies”, who increasingly adopt popular “influential” frameworks and rhetoric regardless of their exclusionary content. Due to the pressures of the attention economy and the anxiety-inducing prospect of political irrelevance (i.e., becoming *undesired*), the mainstream right-wing has traded a favourable *status* (i.e., as the ruling coalition) for their erstwhile liberal, pluralist, and tolerant *identities* through hybrid media (see also article 4).

Mediatic norms like “due impartiality” and “equal footing” – institutionalised by traditional media and replicated as well as streamlined by new media –

support the legitimacy and normalisation of far-right fantasies. These norms portray authenticity and relatability as inextricable from these hybrid media framings (i.e., the visual and affective cues emanating from both “propriety” and relatability), and are experienced through hyper-mediatised figures/roles like the influencer. Thus, hybrid media conditions the material (e.g., algorithmic affordances) and affective factors (e.g., appeal, support, *jouissance*) shaping how *the political* is consumed, experienced, and emotionally governed through co-constituted far-right fantasies of civilisational decline and retrotopian recapture.

6.2.3. Question 3: *What does the enjoyment (jouissance) of mainstream right-wing parties during victories reveal about the normalisation of the far-right?* ⁸⁵

This question is grounded in the critical context of Sweden. The ontological securitisation of mainstream right-wing parties mirrors the gradual dislocation of civilisational fantasies of ethnocultural superiority or exceptionality. This is evident in Sweden through the composition of the far-right enabling “new Swedish right” and the fantasy of Swedish exceptionalism – the belief that Sweden constitutes a unique, superior, post-conflictual ontology in world politics. This ontological securitisation of the mainstream right-wing parties – Liberals, Moderates, and Christian Democrats – manifests in their submission to the far-right Sweden Democrats (SD) and in their ways of *enjoying* politics and wielding power. These right-wing ways of transgressively enjoying politics – i.e., in accordance with the far-right – can be captured in moments of heightened crises or of discursive and affective dislocation, such as the “moment of victory” during the September 2022 Swedish general elections.

In Sweden, the ontologically insecure right-wing subject stabilises its identity by simultaneously disavowing (“we are not racists / authoritarians / misogynists”) and acquiescing (“*make Sweden great again!*”) to an ideal signifier of Swedishness. This signifier of exceptionalism has been gradually coopted and advanced by the exclusionary and supremacist discourses of SD through hybrid media (see also [articles 2](#) and [4](#)) and the increased complicitness of their mainstream right-wing counterparts. The process of externalising the desire for Swedishness towards the “authoritative” SD

⁸⁵ This question was mainly addressed in [article 3](#): “The Role of Right-Wing Enjoyment in the Normalisation of the Far-Right”.

triggers an anxiety of de-subjectification or loss of identity for the mainstream right-wing. This is evident, for instance, in the contradictions and betrayals against their liberal or pluralist identity signifiers in favour of *status* as part of the ruling bloc. As [article 1](#) suggests, the increased camaraderie and support between the far-right and mainstream right-wing around supremacist signifiers like “Swedish exceptionalism” is historically grounded in broader processes of White supremacy. The phenomenon of deglobalisation manifests as supremacist “reclamation” (re-globalisation) against the “betraying” centre-left Other and order. In Sweden, the “centre-left” bloc is narratively associated with the maladies of globalisation resulting in economic precariousness, ethnocultural “replacement” through immigration, and heightened insecurity (e.g., urban crime). This condition of ontological insecurity adjudicated to the antagonistic Other is constructed as a direct threat to Swedish exceptionalism and the fantasy of “Swedishness” as a social binder experienced through hyper-mediated *jouissance* (see also [article 4](#)).

This discursive and emotional exchange is evident in modes of enjoyment oscillating between inclusionary (e.g., the elation of “rescuing” Sweden from the centre-left bloc) and exclusionary (e.g., gloating over the defeated “threatening” centre-left and its sociocultural beneficiaries, the ethnocultural Other). The far-right’s normalisation follows this tension between the status conferred by victory and the loss of identity of mainstream right-wing subjects. This tension unearths the modes and spaces of enjoyment in Swedish politics, as increasingly-similar far-right and mainstream right-wing subjects affix their legitimacy and authority amid the liberal order’s decline. These modes of *jouissance* were omnipresent during the moment of victory. These operate within and despite societal “rules” (e.g., tolerance, pluralism, solidarity), revealing how supposedly disavowed far-right elements are rather profoundly entrenched in Sweden’s social order and ontological-securitising fantasies.

However, as [article 4](#) also shows for the US case and the context of *loss*, *jouissance*-infused expressions are not necessarily *directly* aimed at the ethnocultural Other. Rather, they tend to overtly focus on a socially acceptable target – i.e., the centre-left bloc – that performs as an affective buffer veiling their actual target (the ethnocultural Other). This process underscores the remainders of sociosymbolic commitments (e.g., multiculturalism) animating the inescapable and painful dimension of *jouissance* for the identity-addled mainstream right-wing. [Article 4](#) complements [article 3](#)’s moment of victory by focusing on the *jouissance* of/in *loss*, suggesting that US political leaders

attempt to “correct” the online excesses of racist and nationalist enjoyment (e.g., experienced in the US Capitol Hill storming). They publicly disavow this *jouissance* to ontologically securitise (see “love”), while implicitly reinforcing its anxious kernel by providing a remainder of support (e.g., rioters praised as “patriots”) or displacing its root causes into vacuous, self-comforting, post-political performativity (e.g., Democrats’ “we need our own Joe Rogan”).

In summary, the co-constituted process of (dis)avowing enjoyment and normalising the far-right has reconfigured the identities of the mainstream right-wing parties, reconstituting them as useful vassals for the far-right. This process involves simultaneously *submitting to* and performatively *disavowing* a vessel of authority (i.e., SD), which can be constructed and conveyed as a coherent mainstream right-wing identity. This coping mechanism is evident in the excessive celebrations symbolically *tied to* and *signifying* the “moment of victory” – an instance of anxiety-induced reclamation shaping the political subject and falsely fulfilling the quest for the object-cause of desire, *Swedishness*. Furthermore, as [article 2](#) shows, the social relevance of the experience of *jouissance* needs to be contextualised in the space of hybrid media. New forms of political representation, e.g. influencing, are affectively tied to politically-profitable cultures of entertainment and celebrities that foster and legitimise quests for excessive and transgressive “happiness” in an alienating world (see “love”, [article 4](#)). The expressions of *jouissance* in these instances mask their true cause – the anxiety of political irrelevance and de-subjectification – and reveal their transgressive transformation into a volatile coping strategy, manifested as performative cruelty towards perceived threats. This *jouissance*-infused, paradoxical dynamic of de-subjectification and status-seeking of mainstream right-wing subjects lies at the core of the process of far-right normalisation in Sweden, signifying the far-right’s embeddedness in the kernel of Swedish exceptionalism.

6.2.4. Question 4: ***How does the co-constitution between social media and the neoliberal Symbolic Order generate the normalisation of the far-right as a fantasy of ontological (in)security?*** ⁸⁶

⁸⁶ This article was mainly addressed in [article 4](#): “*Liebesraum*: The Ontologically-(in)Securitising Spectacle of Far-Right Normalisation”.

Our contemporary political landscape is distinctly characterised by the paradox of an AI-based technosocial system that, through the commodification of antagonisms, strengthens neoliberalism and undermines the modern liberal order the latter shapes. This coalesces in the normalisation of the far-right. This paradox, evident in the interplay between the logic of programmability and the configuration of homophilic networks, results from opening lucrative avenues to ontologies of hatred, exclusion, and supremacy towards the Other, masquerading as “love for the same”. Mirroring the “marriage” between the far-right and capitalism, the neoliberal Symbolic simultaneously shuts doors to radical democratic initiatives that challenge its foundation and opens them to exclusionary ideologies that extend its lifespan at the cost of the fantasy of liberal democracy. This process is significantly aided by algorithmic spaces (homophilic networks) and learning functions (programmability) in social media, which operate under the guise of connection, freedom, and “love”.

Liebesraum – the space of love – is central in the normalisation of far-right discourses as algorithmic spectacles of identity reinforcement. *Liebesraum* is the techno-political ordinance of neoliberalism. It is animated by the attention economy’s algorithmic programmability and grounded in expanding homophilic networks nudging us to “enjoy!” based on our digital labour/input and desire for ontological security. *Liebesraum* encompasses the experience of homophily in *the political* as a space of anxiety masked as love for one’s identity; the emotional governance of ontological (in)securities through commodified antagonisms; and the narrative of joyful, “righteous” expansion towards our object-cause of desire. Stemming from [article 3](#)’s development of *jouissance* as a core component of ontological security and Lacan’s approach to *love*, *liebesraum* technosocially conditions a perverse affective *continuum* of transgression (*jouissance*) and Symbolic “correction” (“love”). While this symbolic correction (cf., “Symbolic return”, see [article 2](#)) addresses the disavowed excesses of *jouissance*, it also establishes the conditions for its own transgression. This *continuum* perpetuates ontological *insecurity* as an inextricable component of the neoliberal spectacle of antagonism, providing modern subjects with an algorithmically-coded and homophilically-organised experience of political identity.

In this context, the dystopias embedded in commodified antagonisms between liberal and far-right subjects serve as blueprints of ontological (in)security. These algorithmic-shaped blueprints aim to preserve neoliberalism while promising the recapture of enjoyment lost to liberal democracy, as seen in

deglobalisation narratives ([article 1](#)). The retreat of liberal Symbolic authority increasingly manifests as an AI-governed spectacle seen, for instance, in “heroic” calls to arms tweeted by far-right Republicans and viralised in their networks during the US Capitol Hill storming. These algorithmically-mediated forms act as ontological security mechanisms to cope with the unberable *Real* of the fall of Empire, experienced as an epistemic crisis amid the decline of its liberal-democratic institutions, values, and legitimacy. [Article 1](#) emphasises how this experience of retreat or fall is funnelled in hybrid media through deglobalisation narratives, not only “raging” against liberal democracy but promising a return to “righteous” Symbolic authority. The spectacle of antagonism between liberal and far-right subjects obscures the Real of the subject’s passage through dystopia, providing ontological security fantasies that are efficient insofar as they reflect the dislocatory hue of the collapsing Symbolic (e.g., in contexts of societal crisis – from the 2024 Trump victory to the 2022 right-wing bloc’s victory in Sweden). Thus, our ontological (in)security is not confined to the evasion of this process but also manifests in how we sublimate, consume, and derive *jouissance* from its Real as a “loving”, far-right coded, and algorithmically-supported spectacle of the world’s end.

In these subsections, I have discussed the answers to the research questions, interrogated far-right normalisation as a psycho-political phenomenon conditioned by neoliberal social media, and expanded on the concept of ontological security by integrating the notions of *jouissance* and perversion. I close this section and dissertation by offering some brief remarks on avenues of future research in this rich and vast analytical interstice.

6.3. Future research

Exploring the issue of far-right normalisation in connection with social media from a Lacanian ontological security perspective has greatly enlightened my understanding of contemporary and future political developments throughout the so-called Western hemisphere. This enlightening exploration has also provided a glimpse into the vast darkness of this interstice and its potential political implications not only for diverse research fields and theoretical traditions but also for our increasingly brittle societies.

The study of far-right normalisation and social media massification needs to better interrogate centrist and “centre-left” actors and discourses alongside

their mainstream right-wing counterparts. [Articles 3](#) and [4](#) explore their responsibility and roles; however, these contributions are limited to the historical Social Democratic governments in Sweden and the Democratic party in the US. These actors, alongside others like Labour in the UK, the Social Democrats in Denmark, and the Norwegian Labour Party, have been instrumental in mainstreaming and normalising the far-right in erstwhile “bastions” of liberal, pluralist Western democracies.

This issue connects to another area of future inquiry, which is time and memory. While partially addressed throughout this dissertation, nostalgia, memory, and the production of pasts and futures in public arenas like popular culture play a central role in developing or hampering democratic imaginaries beyond the limited and obscene scope of neoliberalism. In particular, the concept of *anemoia* – the nostalgia for something that we have not experienced – represents an intriguing concept of political analysis, given the centrality of mythological retrotopias in far-right discourses.

Furthermore, this thesis hints at the undead-like “shambling on” of neoliberalism through exclusionary and supremacist bodies of the far-right. However, some of these more specific civilisational projects remain unexplored from a Lacanian ontological security perspective, including critical ideologies informing and shaping contemporary US politics, like neo-reactionism, techno-feudalism, and techno-libertarianism – i.e., what I label as *techno-supremacist* ideologies. This issue also connects to the need to analyse the role that techno-libertarian actors, in particular those of Silicon Valley, play in the modern-day configuration of politics and *the political*. As we can attest in the torrid final months of 2024 and early ones of 2025, this is an urgent research and political area that yet remains severely underexplored. This, in particular, concerns the reconfiguration of the modern liberal order and the (shattered) *meaning* of “order”, power, and sovereignty. Future research further involves identifying and analysing the intimate links between these future-obsessed, techno-supremacist, and religious-extremist ideologies gestating our anxiety-inducing and politically-mobilising dystopian horizons and, thus, the ontological-securitising *promises* of redemption and salvation. These groups include Christian Nationalism in the US, Christian Identity (CID), and genderphobic religious movements like “do not mess with our children” (“*con mis hijos no te metas*”) in Peru.

This last point connects to the need to look at the complex phenomenon of far-right normalisation beyond the so-called Western hemisphere and engage with the consequences of social media massification in countries with a constant presence of far-right actors and politics. For instance, this would imply engaging more concretely with contexts like Argentina, Peru, Chile, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, India, and the Philippines and examining their unique and ominous manifestations of far-right politics. This leads to an increased need to incorporate postcolonial and gender perspectives into the analysis of far-right normalisation. This phenomenon, and the subfield of Lacanian ontological security, would enormously benefit from developing a psychoanalytic understanding of paraontologies⁸⁷ by integrating the theories and perspectives of prominent postcolonial theorists like Franz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, and Homi Bhabha; and psychoanalytic-inspired gender scholars like Braha Ettinger, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler.

Finally, the field of political studies sorely necessitates breaking off or gaining autonomy from the stagnating, neurotic remainders of the natural and exact sciences. This issue is not exclusive nor necessarily characteristic of positivist or quantitative work, but it also distinguishes increasingly more prosaic and timid research from would-be critical approaches. In this sense, a future and eclectic area of research connects to areas like cultural studies, felt ethics (Garrett et al., 2024), and popular culture – namely, the operationalisation of concepts like undeath, the eldritch, and xenomorphism to better understand the impact and appeal of far-right politics in shaping our identities. This also implies developing more adventurous and purposely flawed multidisciplinary endeavours to integrate the role of technology, media, and AI into the scope of the political beyond the push towards techno-solutionism and policy pragmatism. In the spirit of Feyerabend and Lacan, pursuing these creative ventures promises not only new and exciting views on our relation to politics. It constitutes a humble pushback against an era and cultural ethos of norm-conformity, research vapidness, and decaying humanity cradled by neoliberalism and increasingly reproduced in academia.

⁸⁷ Paraontology is a re-examination of *ontology* by focusing on politically-produced absence, disturbance, and *threat* (e.g., seen in Afropessimism) that distinguishes non-normative and interstitial bodies, discourses, and subjects (Bey, 2019; Fanon, 2004, 2008; Moten, 2003, 2017; also see Ettinger, 2020).

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Enjoying the Fall

Over the past decade, the far-right has become normalised globally. The tolerance of these ideologies challenges the weakened modern liberal order, signifying its limitations as modernity's symbolic authority. This phenomenon involves an unprecedented ontology in which fantasies of "stolen" ethnocultural wholeness and supremacy propagate through social media governed by neoliberal imperatives of attention hoarding. Fantasies of self-continuity amidst crises – ontological security – are diffused via social media, whose algorithmic governance of our everyday shapes identities and experiences of the political. This problem points to the pressing need to explore the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions of far-right normalisation. This thesis provides a novel perspective by mobilising Lacanian ontological security to investigate the role of these dimensions in normalising the far-right in four levels. It analyses the role of White supremacy and deglobalisation in shaping othering fantasies; traditional and social media's roles in conveying far-right actors as legitimate interlocutors; the mainstream right-wing's enjoyment of far-right fantasies; and the algorithmic governance of far-right normalisation as a fantasy reinforcing neoliberalism and eroding liberal democracy.

ISBN 978-91-7867-544-9 (print)

ISBN 978-91-7867-545-6 (pdf)

ISSN 1403-8099

DOCTORAL THESIS | Karlstad University Studies | 2025:9

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Over the past decade, the far-right has become normalised globally. The tolerance and wilful welcoming of these once-shunned ideologies challenge the weakened modern liberal order and signify its limitations as modernity's symbolic authority. This phenomenon involves an unprecedented ontology in which far-right fantasies of "stolen" ethnocultural wholeness and supremacy propagate through social media governed by anti-democratic, neoliberal imperatives of attention hoarding. Fantasies of self-continuity amidst "permanent crises" – ontological security – are diffused via social media, whose algorithmic governance of our everyday shapes our identities and experiences of the political. This problem points to the pressing need to explore the psycho-political and techno-mediatic dimensions of far-right normalisation.

This thesis provides a novel perspective by mobilising Lacanian ontological security to investigate the role of these dimensions in normalising the far-right. First, examining the link between White supremacy and deglobalisation discourses, I find that these pushbacks against liberal democracy become affectively influential in justifying violence against essentialised others. Second, social and traditional media enable the emotional governance of far-right actors, generating feelings of ontological (in)security that position them as legitimate interlocutors. Third, I examine how mainstream right-wing politicians partake in transgressive enjoyment with the far-right against threatening others. I find that far-right normalisation is inextricable from the reformation of identities, in which previously held liberal beliefs recede due to the anxiety of becoming politically undesired. Finally, I analyse far-right normalisation as a fantasy of ontological security produced by social media. I find that, in commodifying political antagonisms between liberals and the far-right, these platforms reinforce neoliberalism while gradually eroding the modern liberal order.



WASP—HS

DOCTORAL THESIS | Karlstad University Studies | 2025:9

ISSN 1403-8099 | ISBN 978-91-7867-544-9 (print) | ISBN 978-91-7867-545-6 (pdf)
