

Singing Theories of Conspiracy – Anti-Corona Songs as Political Protest in Denmark and Sweden

Magt og afmagt: konspirationsteorier i Danmark og udlandet

Denne artikel udforsker tilgangen til COVID-19-pandemien (2020-2023) i den globale konspirationsskulptur og fokuserer på anti-corona-musik i Danmark og Sverige. Artiklen undersøger sange som udtryk for politisk protest drevet af konspirationstænkning. Dette studie analyserer fire sange (to fra hhv. Danmark og Sverige) gennem deduktiv og induktiv kodning af tekster og observation af optræden online. Sangene udtrykker typiske retoriske strategier og

narrative troper, der findes i online anti-vaccine-retorik og musik i det tyske anti-vaccine-miljø. De danske sange afbilder "Men in Black"-konfronterende kultur, mens de svenske gengiver Frihedsbevægelsens vage ønsker om frihed. Artiklen generaliserer ikke på grund af den lille "sample" størrelse, men forsøger at kontekstualisere sangene i forhold til politisk protestkultur.

The rise of anti-corona protest music

In December 2020, the American entertainment periodical *Variety* listed the worst songs of the year (Willman, 2020). Out of this "list of an unlucky 13 songs that made a bad year worse", four were written by Van Morrison, one of them for Eric Clapton. All of them were highly critical of the public health measures taken to contain one of the most lethal pandemics in modern history, triggered by the Sars-Cov-2 (COVID-19) virus. To make the story short, everything the world population is told about the pandemic is a lie and the choice is now between slavery and freedom. Fundamental God-given rights are trampled by a fascist police state stoking fear and scientists who make up "crooked facts" (Van Morrison, 2020). Clapton and Van Morrison are arguably the most prominent producers of music targeting lockdowns, vaccines, and alleged government overreach. Yet the pandemic triggered cultural responses from less known figures such as German singer Nena or as expressed in the French anti-corona hymn 'Danser encore' (the YouTube video of which has been viewed almost ten million times). The song spread across Europe like wildfire and flash mobs assembled in public spaces - and according to right-wing *Spectator International*: "it became the soundtrack to Covid shutdown's first mass protest against government restrictions on people getting together", channeling "the mood of a huge segment of the European public" and its "resentment against the authorities" (Wood, 2022). The situation in Germany was covered by public broadcaster Deutschlandfunk Kultur in 2022, where three categories of anti-corona songs were identified: self-composed, covers, reinterpretations and re-writes as well as explicit far-right tunes (Meyen, 2022). One of the studies extensively presented below (Koehler, 2023: 1-22) concludes that far-right actors in Germany influenced the anti-corona protests

ANDREAS JAHREHORN

ÖNNERFORS

Projektleder, Medieinstitutet
Fojo, Linnéuniversitetet,
Sverige,
andreas.onnerfors@lnu.se

through subcultural expressions such as music blended with ideological positions. But how was the situation in Scandinavia? Did the global soundtrack of anti-corona protests also reach the European North? And how did it resonate with the protest cultures on each side of the Oresund?

This article investigates songs and music in the Danish and Swedish anti-corona movements as expressions of political protest fueled by conspiratorial ideation, “a relatively broad tendency to accept conspiratorial explanations for events” (Lantian et al., 2020). A thematic analysis of four songs (two from Denmark and Sweden respectively) is conducted, guided mainly by deductive and inductive coding of lyrics and observations of performance online. The results show that the sample expresses typical rhetorical strategies (RS) and narrative tropes (NT) as identified in corpora of online anti-vaccination rhetoric (Hughes et al., 2021: 1–18) and by Koehler in his study of German far-right influences on the German anti-vax protest milieu through music (Koehler, 2023: 1–22). Moreover, and to various degrees, the four songs analyzed also express typical elements of conspiracy rhetoric (Önnerfors, 2021: 38–46). The political dimension in the analysis of Scandinavian corona protest songs is addressed through two overarching perspectives: 1) in how far do the songs mirror the character of the protest movements in Denmark and Sweden? What differences and similarities are discernible? 2) What themes are expressed and how can they be interpreted against the backdrop of a general political unease in the wake of the pandemic oscillating between visions of direct democracy and support for neo-authoritarian illiberal rule?

Background – Scandinavian anti-corona movements

In 2023, Dyrendal published the first overview over COVID-19-related conspiracy theories in Scandinavia, providing important insights into the situation in Denmark and Sweden. Despite similar traits, the Scandinavian countries display different forms of governance, in particular related to societal crisis management. During the pandemic, “Denmark implemented stricter emergency actions and empowered the central government more than Sweden did”. Borders and schools were closed, and lockdown imposed, whereas “Sweden opted for a less restrictive approach with [...] more relaxed guidelines” (Dyrendal, 2023: 268). Covid restrictions were imposed differently in both countries, opening different lines of dissatisfaction, conflict and distrust between citizens and government and between Nordic governments. The pandemic recycled and amplified numerous pre-existing narratives in the Nordic conspiracy milieu ranging from general distrust for expertise and political authorities to specific fears related to vaccination or electromagnetic radiation. Previous research has grouped these narratives mainly around the thematic clusters of a) the state and secret elites, b) family, gender and sexuality, c) migration and dangerous outsiders as well as peculiar conspiratorial tropes of the Nordics as ‘noir’ (Astapova et al., 2021). These are “long-standing international tropes of conspiracy culture, featuring in apocalyptic crisis narratives which claim that ultimate values such as ‘freedom’ are currently threatened by

evil others” (Dyrendal, 2023: 269). Dyrendal identified the prevalence of such tropes on websites like Swedish *vaken.se*, perhaps the most prominent site in Sweden promoting conspiracy theories and important for the dissemination of anti-corona music, as we will see later. These theories coagulated around the “origins, vectors, causes and effects and cures” of the pandemic (Dyrendal, 2023: 269).

All in all, the development of Scandinavian anti-corona conspiracy theories followed the international development closely and aligned with its major themes and tropes, potentially with a few variations if placed meticulously and comparatively on a timeline. To Dyrendal, the “trope of ‘freedom versus tyranny’ was central” to these movements: “Anti-lockdown protests and conspiracy theories about Covid often revolved around the topic of individual freedom. Protestors and conspiracists saw themselves as freedom fighters against an increasingly totalitarian state, with the general public a brain-washed flock of sheep that needed to be awakened”, motives we will return to (Dyrendal, 2023: 273). The influence of conspiracy culture from the USA was very high, overlaps with QAnon-related theories were substantial, not least related to the assumed cabal of usurping ‘globalist elites’. With the rise of the ‘Men in Black’ (MiB) in Denmark in late 2020, the performance of protests would take another turn. Moving from the internet to the streets, MiB displayed a considerably more aggressive form of street protest, blending soccer hooliganism with acts of vandalism and violence directed against the police. MiB was able to forge an alliance between those who believed in the reality of the pandemic but rejected the harsh mitigation measures imposed by the Danish government and those who denied COVID-19 altogether, displayed vaccine hesitancy and resistance “and people with much broader conspiracist leanings” (Dyrendal, 2023: 274). As in other countries, anti-corona protests also attracted participants from the far-right.

In Sweden, anti-corona protests only emerged in early 2021, perhaps since restrictions had not been very harsh. It was now official policies were attacked within the same conceptual framework as elsewhere in Europe. The so-called ‘Thousand Man March’ aligned itself with the core messages of the World Freedom Alliance and rallied around calls “for freedom and truth”. The rise and fall of the Swedish ‘Freedom Movement’ over the course of the pandemic has been covered extensively by ethnologist Kalle Ström in a documentary produced for Swedish public broadcaster SVT (‘Rörelsen’, 2023). Essentially, the movement attracted different segments, many of them heavily engaged in green and alternative health, wellness, and fitness with overlaps to New Age spirituality and various anti-vaxx communities. Another segment was constituted by members of extreme conspiracist milieus, most prominently in circles around the above-mentioned platform *vaken.se* (‘awake.se’), which already before the pandemic were heavily invested in a broad range of conspiracy theories ranging from 9/11 to 5G and the Illuminati as well as specific Swedish theories related to the murder of PM Olof Palme in 1986 or the sinking of M/S Estonia in 1994 (Astapova et al., 2021). The ‘Freedom Movement’

also attracted and never distanced itself from far-right infiltration and to the contrary was very diffuse in its positioning, even using right-wing alternative media outlets as channels of communication. In the recent political history of contemporary Sweden, no other initiative has been able to mobilize such a large and complex base of support over time, crowned by a rally in Stockholm in January 2022, attracting almost ten thousand followers.

Methodology and data – how to study Scandinavian anti-corona protest songs

For this study, four songs have been sampled for a quantitative and qualitative thematic analysis, two from Denmark and Sweden respectively, listed for overview in Table 1 below. These are produced and performed by both prominent and less prominent artists engaged in anti-corona protests in Denmark and Sweden or both countries and released between January and July 2021. Acknowledging methodological approaches to the subject proposed by Koehler (2023: 1-22) in his novel study of right-wing subcultural influences on German anti-corona movements through music, deductive and inductive methods are combined. Koehler suggests the use of the ‘Codebook of Online Anti-Vaccination Rhetoric’ (subsequently: Codebook) by Hughes et al. (2021) for deductive coding of content. The Codebook identifies sixteen rhetorical strategies and 22 narrative tropes referring to “modes of persuasion” and elements of storytelling (Hughes et al., 2021: 3). While the Codebook wasn’t developed for anti-corona data samples in general and music in particular, for reasons of comparability between national datasets, I still have adopted Koehler’s methodology which furthermore is complemented by his inductively generated codes for narrative tropes (ten) and rhetorical strategies (five). In this article, coding has been conducted manually. The Codebook also investigated the prevalence of types of antagonists, establishing six varieties to which Koehler added further types. However, an analysis of antagonists was not carried out in this article.

Concerning the chosen methodology, there are a few caveats. First of all, conspiracy culture has both universal and particular features and is embedded into tacit layers of cultural meaning which frequently resonate with pre-existing narratives and motives. In this article, the pandemic and pandemic politics as such are interpreted as the main backdrop creating meaning of the songs analysed below. Their lyrics are mainly read as explicit manifestations of conspiratorial ideation in relation to the pandemic, an event possible to define in time and space. This happens at the risk of excluding deeper and implicit layers of interpretation that resonate with other subcultural expressions in each setting, might it be Danish or Swedish or universal. At the expense of uncovering or decoding such hidden meanings, songs and lyrics are classified according to narrative tropes and rhetorical strategies as applied by Koehler (with a few additions). A second caveat is that the sample size of both studies is relatively small and would need significant expansion in order to achieve solid interrater reliability. Yet, as stated above, the adaptation of Koehler’s clas-

sification approach to this additional sample is a way of establishing comparability across samples instead of just conducting a stand-alone context-bound content analysis of four Scandinavian songs. This article also aims to advance a methodology that can be applied to other and much larger samples. Such a project – in the ideal case supplemented and triangulated with deeper readings of contextual sub-cultural and implicit meanings – would however require much more space.

For full transcriptions or access to lyrics, see the references provided to this article. Song 1 and 3 below can be considered hymns or anthems in the Danish and Swedish anti-corona-movements respectively, measured by their dissemination through views on YouTube and streams on Spotify as listed in Table 2 as well as contextual evidence. They were written and (self-)produced by relatively established artists in Denmark and Sweden respectively. Songs 2 and 4 are self-produced by fringe artists and are characterised by relatively low dissemination figures. They are considered relevant to this study but will mainly be treated as references in relation to the overarching thematic analysis. The Danish artist behind song 2 crossed the Oresund and is frequently featured at Swedish anti-corona protests and also produced Swedish, English, French and German versions of her song. The artists behind song 4 can be considered activists in the Swedish alt-right environment. The songs and artists are shortly described in order below.

1. 'Mette Ciao' by Danish artist Rozenberg (Danny Rosenberg) is a catchy rewrite in Danish of the classical Italian anti-fascist partisan song 'Bella Ciao'. It was released in January 2021.
2. 'Frihed' ('Freedom') is a song with Danish lyrics by Danish artist Space Girl Music (Metgry Honey Vildernsky) and can be characterised as electro-pop, entirely self-produced and released during summer of 2021.
3. 'Vi är fria' ('We are free') is written by prominent Swedish singer-songwriter and producer Christoffer Lundquist and originally released in Swedish language in a studio version in April 2021 and later live flashmob-versions. It can be characterized as a typical freedom-ballad in the style of Björn Afzelius (1947–1999), a well-known Swedish singer-songwriter with strong political pathos.
4. 'Dom vill ha dig' ('They want you', lyrics in Swedish) is written, performed, and produced by the Swedish alt-right couple Martin and Nicole Hagwall who campaign on social media for traditional family values and against the prevailing system. Their musical style is a peculiar mix of classical music, rap, and ballads.

Table 1: Overview of songs with title and attributed artist

ID	Title	Title English	Artist	Length (words)
1	'Mette Ciao' (DK)	'Mette Ciao'	Rozenberg (Danny Rosenberg)	2'47" (332)
2	'Frihed' (DK)	'Freedom'	Space Girl Music (Metgry Honey Vildernsky)	2'58" (143)
4	'Vi är fria' (SWE)	'We are free'	Christoffer Lundquist	3'39" (209)
4	'Dom vill ha dig' (SWE)	'They want you'	Martin and Nicole Hagwall	3'40" (495)

Table 2: Available numbers of views, likes and streams (as of 2024-01-06)

ID	Title	YouTube	Channel	Spotify (stream counts)
1	'Mette Ciao'	≈ 430k views ≈ 4.800 likes	Men in Black FRIHED	≈ 2m
2	'Frihed' (Danish version)	≈ 1.500 views 30 likes	Space Girl Music	≈ 46k
3a	'Vi är fria'	111 views 11 likes (studio version) ≈ 3.800 views ≈ 200 likes (Swedish flashmob version)	Christoffer Lundquist (official)	≈ 35k
3b	'Vi är fria'	≈ 4.000 views (flashmob version)	vakenpunktse	-
4	'Dom vill ha dig'	≈ 7.000 views	vakenpunktse	-

All songs are also available on other channels and platforms adding additional views, likes and streams. Most remarkably, the channel 'vakenpunktse' – one of the most prolific sites in Sweden spreading conspiracy theories – has published Space Girl Music at least ten times and has also actively disseminated Lundquist's song, in total generating more than 8 000 additional views. A playlist created in 2021 on the same channel lists until 2024 no less than 28 anti-corona music videos, featuring songs 2, 3 and 4.

While the available official music videos and videos of live performances offer additional context to the analysis, they are not discussed more than circumstantially. The same applies to the music itself, which deserves deeper musicological analysis. Originally, seven songs were sampled yet for matters of space, the analysis was not included in this article but is in line with what is presented below. Deductive and inductive coding create comparable overview over large datasets, yet a narrative description of each song would have added more layers of cultural context to the analysis and thus deepened our understanding.

Results – Rhetorical Strategies and Narrative Tropes expressed in anti-corona Lyrics

The presentation of results is structured according to the thematic analysis based on the Codebook, additional codes suggested by Koehler, and further codes as identified in the source material for this article. First, rhetorical strategies (RS) are discussed, followed by narrative tropes (NT).

Rhetorical strategies

In this section, the sample is discussed with regards to the sixteen RS described extensively in the Codebook. Table 3 below provides an overview over the prevalence of detected RS for each song. As emerges from the table, there is a significant number of codes that are not represented in the data set, yet still more than in the sample analysed by Koehler (11 as opposed to 3). Brackets indicate that there is correspondence with the suggested RS in the Codebook, yet perhaps not in all aspects as defined there. Koehler (2023:14) identified five additional rhetorical strategies, ‘Join Us’, ‘Community’, ‘Wake Up’, ‘Courage’ and ‘End of Patience’, which instead of in a table will be addressed for each song below.

Table 3: Prevalence of rhetorical strategies (RS) as identified in the Codebook and their codes across the data sample

Song	RS1	RS3	RS4	RS5	RS6	RS7	RS10	RS11	RS12	RS14	RS15
1	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	
2	-	-	-	x	(x)	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	x	x	-	(x)	-	x	-	-	-	-
4	(x)	x	x	x	(x)	-	-	x	x	(x)	x

RS1= Absurd!; RS3 = Brave Truthteller; RS4 = Do Your Own Research; RS5 = Epic Significance; RS6 = A Global Movement / Sleeping Giants; RS7 = Health Freedom; RS10 = Lovebombing; RS11 = Mountains and Molehills; RS12 = Panic Button; RS14 = Question Begging; RS15 = Think of the Children!

‘Mette Ciao’ quotes Danish PM (on the dire consequences of anti-corona measures) in the song with a partly distorted voice, which potentially aims to ridicule the rhetoric as alarmist with a “tone of mockery and contempt” (Hughes et al., 2021: 7). MiB are styled as brave truth-tellers, celebrating “vaccine resistance by depicting its messengers as heroic in their stand against the establishment” (Hughes et al., 2021: 7). The clear rejection of forced vaccination in the lyrics “frames public health as a matter of individual freedom rather than collective responsibility” (Hughes et al., 2021: 7). Indirectly, ‘Mette Ciao’ also claims to ask legitimate questions which are refused by the government (Hughes et al., 2021: 8). The song clearly expresses four out of five additional RS as suggested by Koehler (2023: 14). Maybe it does not actively call its audiences to join MiB, but indirectly the desire to support the movement is communicated since they dare to take up the fight. In any case, ‘Mette Ciao’ presents MiB as a strong and undeterred community, ready to act against the oppressive government with great courage, with a clear sense of that ‘enough

is enough' and that red lines have been crossed. 'Mette Ciao' is not a direct call for recruitment into MiB, yet indirectly portrays the heroism and noble cause of the movement, which therefore appears as a righteous community with a strongly developed "solidarity, camaraderie, and loyalty", as Koehler suggests (2023: 14). The song does not convey a direct wake-up-call but praises the courage of MiB to take the fight to the streets of Copenhagen since the government has gone too far.

'Frihed' does not elaborate many rhetorical strategies as suggested by the Codebook yet is clear about its appeal to the audience that "when injustice turns into law, resistance is a duty" (Space Girl Music, 2021a), framing the situation with 'Epic Significance' since the (exaggerated) "threat is profound" (Hughes et al., 2021: 7). The chorus of the song, "wake up", can be interpreted as a rhetorical call to the global movement of 'Sleeping Giants' to "rise up and take back the power over their own lives", even if limited to Denmark (Hughes et al., 2021: 7). However, since Space Girl Music has translated the song to other languages, there is at least a wider European ambition involved. Concerning Koehler's additional codes as outlined above, 'Frihed' is not a recruitment song, nor does it convey a sense of community for a countermovement. Yet it falls clearly (and literally) into the categories of 'Wake Up', 'Courage' and 'End of Patience'.

'Vi är fria' is a self-assuring hymn for brave truth-tellers who "understand everything" and "have truth" and "meaning", which is part of doing own research since "we not any longer are tricked" (Lundquist, 2021). The song is also engaging heavily in the strategy of love-bombing, where "allies and fellow 'truth-tellers' are showered with affirmation, accolades, validation, and compliments" (Hughes et al., 2021: 8). One of the aims is to motivate them to take control back over their lives as "one, a unified, grassroots groundswell against evil" (Hughes et al., 2021: 7). The song itself cannot be interpreted as a tool for recruitment, yet indirectly it conveys images of a group highly concerned with its own integrity and creative expression and thus is framed as attractive to others. The sense of community conveyed by lyrics and music videos is extraordinarily strong. Whereas no clear call to 'Wake Up' as suggested by Koehler, the collective 'we' is in possession of knowledge that has allowed them to see through distortions of truth and meaning. Courage is reinforced together with a statement of that deceit has crossed a red line.

'Dom vill ha dig' opens with a sarcastic comment on that "they say it is a joy to live in these times", yet freedom is under profound attack (Hagwall and Hagwall, 2021). Extensively describing diabolic deceit we are exposed to, it is now time to switch sides, to "tear down the curtain" and "let the light" of truth in. The personal quest for knowledge will set you free, since "if we only sat down, we would get answers" to our questions (Hagwall and Hagwall, 2021). That these struggles are of existential proportions clearly emerges from the lyrics. The audience is addressed as "capable of, or even obligated to participate in this epic quest for justice" (Hughes et al., 2021: 7) and perhaps not

on a global scale, but still described as a sleeping power able to overthrow the tyranny of the malicious mighty. To get “the vaccine syringe into the blood” is depicted as an infringement of fundamental rights and abuse of enormous moral proportions. The “experiment” is even made with the children, “without asking the father”, an argument that both appeals to the image of pure and vulnerable children and parental (here: paternal) authority undermined by measures in public health (Hagwall and Hagwall, 2021). Human dignity is neglected by false intentions and high, yet misguided ideals leading to divisions, narcissism, and envy, “social distancing on an inner level” (Hagwall and Hagwall, 2021). The entire song is framed in a dramatic musical fashion, mixing classical music, male rap, and female angelic accompaniment, thus pushing what is called the ‘Panic Button’, sparking “alarm, disgust, confusion, squeamishness, anxiety, or dread in audiences” reinforced by “ominous music [...] used to indicate that viewers should be worried or mistrustful about what is shown to them”. The evil machinations of the global elites “are depicted in ways that evoke fear and/or disgust” (Hughes et al., 2021: 8). All of Koehler’s additional rhetorical strategies are represented, even if the wake-up call is not expressed explicitly. The lyrics invite its audiences explicitly to join the community which can see through the smokescreen of lies, united in its courage and fed up with the machinations it is exposed to.

Narrative tropes

In this section, the analysis of narrative tropes (NT) in the dataset is presented, 22 as listed by Hughes et al. (2021: 9–11) and additionally ten inductively identified by Koehler (2023:12). Table 4 below shows how eleven of those have been identified across the sample with some notable variations from the dataset analyzed by Koehler (2021: 10–1).

Table 4: Prevalence of narrative tropes (NT) as identified in the Codebook and their codes across the data sample:

Song	NT1	NT2	NT4	NT6	NT7	NT8	NT9	NT14	NT17	NT20	NT21
1	-	-	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x
2	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-
3	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-
4	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	X	x	x	x

NT1 = 1984!; NT2 = Alarmist Authorities; NT4 = Corrupt Elite; NT6 = Follow the Money; NT7 = Freedom under Siege; NT8 = Unaccountable Elite; NT9 = Heroes and Freedom Fighters; NT14 = Sinister Motives; NT17 = Rushed Vaccine; NT20 = All-or-Nothing; NT21 = Imminent Threat. Koehler identified ten additional NT in his dataset to which I added one further as below.

Table 5: Prevalence of narrative tropes (NT) as identified inductively by Koehler (2023:12) and in this article and their codes across the data sample

Song	NT1	NT2	NT3	NT4	NT5	NT6	NT7	NT8	NT9	NT10	NT11
1	-	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	-
2	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x
3	(x)	x	-	(x)	x	x	x	-	(x)	-	x
4	x	x	(x)	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x

1 = 'Fed up', 2 = 'Liberation', 3 = 'Masculinity', 4 = 'Propaganda', 5 = 'Empowerment', 6 = 'Patriotism / Nationalism', 7 = 'Action', 8 = 'Social', 9 = 'Resistance / Revolution', 10 = 'Manufactured Virus', 11 = 'Freedom'

The songs tell a story of empowerment, both of individuals and groups and relate to the need of liberation, action, and resistance against the propaganda exposed to. Three of the songs explicitly refer to 'Freedom', which can be described as a trope without commitments to any particular ends and no clear definitions. As Dyrendal notes in his study on Scandinavian anti-corona movements, autonomous claims of freedom and truth can be understood as "empty signifiers serv[ing] as place holders for conspiracist ideas: the notion of freedom constituted the opposition to the alleged state- and 'globalist' dictatorship, and the notion of truth represented the pandemic as either fake or a 'plandemic' caused by hidden techniques of a conspiracy" (2023: 275).

Rozenberg's song 'Mette Ciao' narrates a story of a corrupt and unaccountable elite "pushing an untrustworthy and potentially dangerous medicine" (Hughes et al., 2021: 9) together with exaggerated and repressive measures, breaking the law. This abuse of power threatens to strip common rights from the citizens. Consequently, "the people protesting public health measures are painted as the moral and ideological equivalent of Soviet dissidents, the founding fathers, and the Arab Spring all rolled into one" (Hughes et al., 2021: 10). MiB is styled as a heroic resistance movement opposed to the villains in government, taking to the streets and engaging in an existential endgame. Several of Koehler's NT add to the storytelling: liberation from the oppressive government is achieved by the masculine street power of organized 'Men in Black', "affirming strength, courage, commitment, or solidarity" (Koehler, 2023: 12). The song clearly agglomerates around the trope of 'Resistance/ Revolution' which explicitly "calls for direct action against the government to remove it from power" (Koehler, 2023: 12).

Space Girl Music and 'Frihed' narrates an even darker version of the tale in which the "COVID pandemic and all public health measures associated with it" represents "the final few steps toward a maximally repressive global government". The "authorities' warnings and measures against COVID are overblown" and a tool of the corrupt, crooked, and unaccountable elites to manipulate society, "dangerously misguided, stupid, or evil" (Hughes et al., 2021: 9–10). Freedom is clearly under siege, and it is up to brave heroes to reclaim it. The trope of "we have had enough" (Space Girl Music, 2021), mentioned explicitly in the lyrics, "expresses being fed up with the government's

anti-COVID measures” (Koehler, 2023: 12) together with empowering calls to active and resolute liberation from the regime on behalf of the national collective of Denmark.

‘Vi är fria’ is not heavy on NT as defined by Hughes et al. (2021) yet makes a strong statement of freedom perhaps not under siege but defended with reference to spiritual and eternal values. Those who are free and have “understood everything” clearly are on the right side of history. In addition, some of the NT identified by Koehler apply to Lundquist’s song, in particular ‘Liberation’ and ‘Empowerment’ of an indirectly defined Swedish national collective. ‘Vi är fria’ also explicitly calls for to turn “words into action” and claims ‘Freedom’ as a value without defining its ends (Lundquist, 2021). There is a variety to the tropes identified by Koehler, a story in which the victims of machinations have realized that they have been fooled and will no longer buy into what they are presented with (some form of unspecified untruth, no specific form of propaganda). The act of resistance rather belongs to defining borders between different knowledge regimes (internally and intuitively self-generated versus externally and institutionally imposed) and their respective interpretative hegemony.

The couple Hagwall’s song ‘Dom vill ha dig’ is constructed around a high concentration of NT, warning about an oppressive regime run by evil-minded puppet masters, hiding from its responsibility, aiming to enslave people, and stripping them from their rights. Against this threat of existential proportions, a resistance of the chosen few must be organized. Clearly both the vaccine and the virus are tools of the oppression. The song also expresses most of the NT as identified by Koehler. The situation has gone too far, liberating, and empowering action against the malevolent powers and their propaganda must be taken. Resistance must be organized, and (together with ‘Mette Ciao’) violence against the oppressor is endorsed. ‘Dom vill ha dig’ laments (and exaggerates) “the social impact of anti-COVID measures” (Koehler, 2023: 21). Underscoring a masculine theme, ‘Dom vill ta dig’ is a commitment to patriarchal rule in the family. Freedom is claimed yet its aims are not defined.

Discussion – Street Resistance, Diffuse Freedom Claims, and the Vulnerability of the Modern Self

Denmark – Street Resistance against the Corona-Dictatorship

Rozenberg’s song ‘Mette Ciao’ and its lyrics are intrinsically linked to the aesthetics of the Danish anti-corona protest movement ‘Men in Black’ (MiB). It provides MiB with a powerful and motivational anthem, styling its activism as defiance against a fascist dictatorship, by borrowing the Italian partisan song ‘Bella Ciao’, which has been described as a “portable monument for transnational activism” (Salerno and Warenburg, 2023: 164). MiB is taking up a fight and styles itself as a vanguard resistance movement, performing protest in an aesthetic borrowing from (violence-endorsing) soccer hooliganism and fan culture, burning flares, torches and effigies, singing in the darkness of the

night and clashing violently with riot police in blue light (Lindkvist, 2021). Although not conspiratorial per se, the elements of Rozenberg's lyrics and aesthetic also fit with several rhetorical components of conspiracy narratives (Önnerfors, 2021: 38–46) such as evil intent of governing elites, a strong dualism, scapegoating, the prospect of societal breakdown and the necessity to follow a radical vanguard of those who have seen through the game. All these ideas are furthermore communicated through strong medial expressions, a song evoking resistance and partisan fight against fascism blended with aesthetics of violent street activism. Space Girl Music picked up one of the chants of MiB and turned them into the main message and pulse of her song 'Frihed'. Their connection between both songs is underscored by that both artists have performed at rallies together. Unlike Rozenberg, Space Girl Music and her song moved across the Oresund to Sweden and was received positively, even resulting in a Swedish version of her song promoted actively by 'vakenpunktse'. Her lyrics and association with the conspiratorial milieu of her performances is explicitly located within a framework of conspiracy rhetoric.

Sweden – Fuzzy Freedom as Privileged Performance and Calls for a Conservative Revolution

Lundquist's song and its different styles of performance communicate a range of messages. They make claims on behalf of a strong collective 'we' which never will back down and instead grow as a group placed within heaven and earth, which is to be worshipped. The visual narrative conveys a sense of ecologism of a privileged white middle class, charged with esoteric undertones. The lyrics are saturated with vague spiritual messages and a long list of verbs of self-expression such as 'live', 'love' and 'dance'. What stands out as odd, yet as a possible claim to represent some form of unifying hymn, is the reference to the Swedish semi-official national anthem "Du gamla, du fria, du fjällhöga Nord". On a general level, Lundquist's followers, and the context within which he has been received with open arms, suggest that they belong to the 'conspiratorial' camp of Swedish anti-corona protest with a clear pipeline from organic wellness to organised vaccine hesitancy/resistance and further to more radical positions. This was the nucleus in the Swedish 'Freedom movement'.

The mood of the song performed by the Hagwall-couple is diametrically opposed to Lundquist. There is no doubt that the powerful elites have plotted to suppress humanity. Corona aims to achieve division and dictatorship. The pandemic is just fabricated, and vaccines are a tool of Satanic subordination. 'Dom vill ha dig' is saturated with spiritual subtexts, pitching the contemporary state of corona tyranny against true humanity with clear gender roles and concepts of eternal beauty, good and evil. Yet the song is also hopeful that the tiny few who have seen the light will take up the fight in a final battle which promises palingenesis, cleansing and rebirth. Considering the odd frame within which the songs have been produced, they can thus be interpreted as a performance of a conservative revolution, restoring truth and beauty of the natural and spiritual order over the falsehood of contemporary secular powers (Bar-On, 2001: 333–51). Clearly an outlier case, 'Dom vill ha dig' still

demonstrates that Swedish anti-corona protest was open to influences from the far-right.

What are the Political Ends of the Protests in Denmark in Sweden?

What are the ultimate political ends of protest and resistance as expressed in the songs? Obviously, all songs suggest that any coordinated official efforts to mitigate the pandemic (true or invented) are wrong and must be reverted. Vaccination and vaccine passes are opposed. Governmental anti-corona politics and measures in public health are identified as a societal ill, a token of undemocratic regimes, the tools of a looming dictatorship or worse. None of the songs address realistic (and societal) alternatives to the mitigation of crises and pandemics or the need for transnational coordination of policies. Control and coercive measures are rejected. Instead, the protests are framed within diffuse claims of freedom without specifying its ends. Another issue relevant to the political dimensions of the songs is trust. There is little doubt that trust in existing political institutions and conventional forms of voicing critique and opposition in democracy is broken. Instead, violent resistance is idealized and those responsible portrayed as evil tyrants sowing hate and division. On a softer level of politics, trust in conventional knowledge regimes is eroded, which instead are accused of serving the nefarious needs of a power grab of sinister elites through deception, lies and manipulation. What also emerges is that knowledge (particularly about public health) ultimately resides intuitively within individuals and not with authorities or sources such as experts, politicians, or the media, the truth claims and interpretative authority of which are rejected. Instead, autonomous claims of freedom and truth are advanced. As political psychologist Barry Richards argues, we currently witness a strange merger of authoritarianism and libertarianism which mirrors a “vulnerability of the modern self” (2024) and/or a deep crisis of democratic decision-making which in its modern fashion highly relies upon expertise and scientific evidence. Populist rulers across the globe offer “a hyper-realisation of a certain kind of individualistic freedom” where the will of the people instantly is implemented (Richards, 2024).

Clearly, Danish, and Swedish anti-corona music expresses a dissatisfaction and impatience with the slow and conventional instances of societal decision-making and their coercive hard and soft powers, either they come as legislation or as epistemic interpretive hegemonies. Protest music and its performances can be seen as a “carnavalesque assertion of [...] individual rights” in which conspiracist explanations of politics are embraced, “rationalis[ing] suspicion of and antipathy towards authority of all sorts” (Richards, 2024). Yet paired with this libertarianism are totalitarian fantasies of punishment of those responsible for what is framed as repressive politics. Both Rozenberg and the Hagwall-couple endorse violence in confronting the political establishment.

But there is no clarity as to where political power ultimately originates, in an ambiguity between an idealised natural order and direct human action. Both positions clearly dream away any intermediary societal institutions of

conflict arbitration or solution. In this sense, both are open for unbound authoritarianism residing in forces beyond human negotiation or expressing the instantaneous will of the loudest minority (perceiving itself as the majority). In the latter position lies a preference for direct democracy which in turn can be instrumentalized by illiberal and authoritarian powers as source of legitimacy. As Richards argues: “when we remember that a virulent sense of grievance against an enemy or oppressor who must be punished is a regular feature of authoritarian culture, we start to see how the dividing lines between the libertarian mindset and the authoritarian perspective have blurred around COVID” (Richards, 2024). What are the dynamics of this “puzzling fusion”? To political psychologist Richards, “authoritarianism and libertarianism are the interchangeable products of the same underlying psychological difficulty: the vulnerability of the modern self” (Richards, 2024). Authoritarian movements offer the sense of belonging to a collective and a sense of safety. Libertarianism “proceeds from the illusion that as individuals we are fundamentally self-sufficient”. This independence means that we are not in need of the protection of authorities, a “fantasy of freedom” leading to the illusion of invulnerability. With either or both strategies, the vulnerable self can “ward off existential anxieties” (Richards, 2024). Such anxieties are expressed in all the four songs analysed in this article. Pandemic unease fuels reactions against the political establishment and its abilities to offer real security based on knowledge that can be trusted. Instead, we witness an instability of relationships in late modern political communities in which fuzzy claims of internal ‘freedom’ offer solace against dystopias of external and manipulative control.

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