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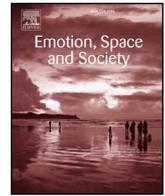
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Civil outrage: Emotion, space and identity in legitimisations of rural protest

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1. Introduction

In early 2012, it became known that the local public emergency ward in Dorotea, a small town of ca 1.500 residents located in the rural county of Västerbotten in the Swedish North, was to be closed down. If the decision were carried through, the residents of Dorotea and the surrounding villages would have a distance of about 50 kilometres to the nearest emergency ward, depending on where in the municipality they lived. For many, this meant that enough was enough. For decades, rural areas in the Swedish North have been struggling with out-migration, service cutbacks, and welfare retractions, e.g. closures of local businesses, schools, grocery shops, postal services, and health care centres. In protest of the decision, and on the day of its implementation, some of the residents of Dorotea responded by occupying the health care centre where the emergency ward was located. The occupation, which was declared to be unlawful in December 2014, lasted for over three years until the county council finally promised that the emergency ward should remain. The occupation came to be known under the name “The Dorotea uprising” (*Doroteaupproret*).¹

Although the occupation had strong local support, it also received criticism, prompting participants of the occupation to legitimise their actions. The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the legitimisation strategies used by the occupiers when they were subsequently interviewed about their experiences. Four strategies were identified that respectively stressed the protest's general utility, local representativeness, moral righteousness, and orderliness. The main argument of this paper is that such strategies have something to say not only about rural space and identities, and the power dynamics and asymmetries that produce them, but also about the role of emotions and moralities. Our starting point is that emotions and moralities are culturally productive and direct our gaze in important directions (Ahmed, 2004). On the basis of our empirical data, we agree that emotions and moralities were important driving forces behind the mobilisation (Davis et al., 2012), and, drawing on Brown and Pickerill (2009a), we also suggest that they are caught up in normative constructions of space, citizenship and protester identities that rural protesters must deal with if they want to be taken seriously.

The “civil outrage” in the title of this paper is an expression that holds double meanings (cf. Silber, 2011). First, it tells about the feelings

of outrage, anger, and indignation that united many of the local residents as *citizens* as they decided to protest a decision that they felt was taken above their heads, and that was ignorant of their needs. Second, “civil outrage” might be interpreted as a *polite* and *mannerly* protest, as opposed to a violent one. As we shall see, both of these aspects were central for how the occupation was legitimised.

In what follows we first offer a brief literature review and describe the methodology of the study on which the paper is based. We then describe the identified legitimisation strategies and how they were manifested in the data. Finally, we discuss the results by focusing on the participants' efforts to make the occupation come forth as “civil”.

2. Perspectives on legitimisation, emotion, space and identity

Concepts such as “legitimation” and “legitimation strategies” have been employed within various research fields, including the study of multinational corporations (Vaara and Tienari, 2008), organisational mergers and acquisitions (Vaara and Monin, 2010), political rhetoric (Reyes, 2011), immigration control (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999), and identity formation (Hardy and Phillips, 1998). Generally, claims to legitimacy are interpreted as efforts to gain social acceptance for a practice that is controversial, and strategies of legitimisation therefore often emphasise how the practice might be necessary to reach desired goals (Reyes, 2011). Such strategies of legitimisation explain a practice, activity, or ideology by motivating, defending, and justifying it, always through the simultaneous exclusion of alternative understandings (Breeze, 2012) and always through allusions to what is “right”. Boltanski and Thévenot (1999: 215) argue that such references to what is “right” always include the evocation of wider “regimes of justice” or claims to universality.

Empirical studies have shown how strategies of legitimisation can be built on unquestioned notions of efficiency or justice (Eriksen and Fossum, 2004), on professed (e.g. religious) beliefs (Selli and Garaffa, 2005), or on notions that are difficult to question such as personal testimony and, not least, emotion (Tusting et al., 2002). According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2000), and from a constructivist perspective, such invocations of “universality” and “truth” inevitably produce universalities and truths.

In this paper, we are primarily influenced by studies that focus on

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¹ The name was the self-selected name of the occupation's Twitter account, which was quickly established and was used both by the occupiers themselves and the media.

the discursive aspects of legitimisation. This means that we focus on the legitimisation processes, the discursive strategies “through which legitimacy is established” (Vaara and Monin, 2010: 5). Our choice of the word “strategy” does therefore not only mean that we wish to highlight conscious and deliberate efforts employed by persons to optimise certain interests, but that we wish to pinpoint discursive directions, or evocations of specific discursive realms made by actors in specific situations. The strategies of legitimisation identified in this paper should therefore be perceived as beyond conscious defences of particular interests, and as constituted by, and constitutive of, certain conditions of possibility available within the context of the protest. In this, we align with studies that suggest that volunteering and commitment be understood primarily in relation to overarching cultural norms and values (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003), even though these are always intertwined with the specific motives that individuals might have (Hustinx et al., 2014). In this study, stories about people's individual motives for volunteering have been interesting primarily in terms of if and how they were used to explain and legitimise the protest as a whole.

During recent decades, interest has increased in the way protest and activism are informed by notions of emotion and space (Brown and Pickerill, 2009a), and how spatially situated emotions constitute incitements for political mobilisation and pathways for action, not least in rural areas (Woods et al., 2012). Within this strand of research, emotion is seen as contextual and relational across spaces (Askins, 2009), and as inherently political and connected to specific identities (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Bosco, 2006; Davidson and Bondi, 2004; Smith, 2000). Such identities may be in line with normative notions of a romanticised “activist identity”, but they may also be at odds with them (Bobel, 2007; Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Jupp, 2012; Neilson, 1999), making people feel obliged to legitimise their activist practices. This may specifically be the case with rural identities, which, although the meaning of rurality is a contested and indisputably complex one (Halfacree, 2010; Woods, 2011), are often perceived and symbolised as static and coherent (Edensor, 2006; Halfacree, 2012). Rural protesters may therefore find themselves to be caught between conflicting discourses.

Studies of protests have further suggested that oppositional responses are often connected to feelings of not being treated fairly (Cass and Walker, 2009). Such feelings have been evoked in protests to do with areas that are constituted as peripheral to (urban) centres of power (cf. Sjöstedt Landén, Ljuslinder & Lundgren 2017; Woods, 2006). Geographic space is here understood as always caught up in emotionally invested relations of responsibility and interconnectedness (Massey, 2004), not least between the people and the state (Parker, 2002). In this sense, national or local “citizenship” – understood as entitlement to rights, a set of duties, and as feelings of belonging to certain spatial landscapes (cf. Osler and Starkey, 2005; Wood, 2013) – are at stake when people join together in protest.

While attention has been brought to the role of emotion and morality in social mobilisation (e.g. Flam and King 2005; Hercus, 1999; Jasper, 1997; Woods et al., 2012), less is known about the legitimisation strategies used by activists to justify emotions and chosen measures, or about the role of “particular places and contexts” in this (Brown and Pickerill, 2009b: 27). This paper is an attempt to contribute to this area of research by studying how the efforts to legitimise a protest were related to notions of space and identity, and how they constituted both moral and emotional geographies.

3. Methodology

The case upon which this paper is based is the three-year occupation (2012–2015) of a cottage hospital in the small town Dorotea in the Northern Swedish county of Västerbotten. While the occupation had strong local support, it was also questioned and even criticised by some of the local residents. It was based on the voluntary commitment of people who were above middle age and who did not know each other

well, at least not in the beginning. Most of the active occupiers lived in Dorotea, but some came from surrounding villages. The relatively high average age was partly the effect of an explicit agreement, where people who were retired took it upon themselves to ease the burden for families with small children who had greater difficulties spending time at the occupation site and sleeping away from home.

The main data consists of in-depth interviews with 17 of the occupiers, including 7 men and 10 women between the ages of 42 and 89.² The interviews were conducted one year after the occupation ended, and therefore necessarily had to do with memories of the process and the feelings involved. But although the occupation was ended, the conflict was not. There was still a debate as to whether to accept the county council's offer to restore the emergency ward straight off, or whether there was still need for further protest. The interviewees had different opinions on this, but they were all involved in what was going on, and they all retold their memories of the occupation vividly.

The interviews followed a semi-structured guide with thematic questions about the “life-line” of the occupation from the start to the present, including its organisation and relations and the interviewees' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. We wanted the interviewees to be free to elaborate and reflect on their experiences (Patton, 2002) and the thematic questions allowed them to introduce and talk in depth about subjects that they found interesting and important (Gubrium & Holstein 2003). Of course, this approach still meant that the questions asked and the interview situation as such impacted on what was said. Interviews are situations that are affected by the identities that are brought into the interview context (Manderson et al., 2006) and, just as fieldwork generally, they are imbued with emotion (Bondi, 2014). It was an important aspect of the research process to reflect on the effects of this (Procter, 2013).

Questions to do with legitimisation were not asked explicitly, but discussions still revolved around the interviewees' efforts to explain and motivate their participation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word.

In addition, and to get a broader and contemporary glimpse of the meaning-making around the occupation, we also analysed representations of the events in social media and the Swedish news press. Representations in the news press were found using the search word “Doroteaupproret” in the web-based archive Mediearkivet. This search resulted in 355 articles in the Swedish printed press between Feb 6, 2012, and Dec 29, 2015. The Twitter data comprised all 743 tweets by the account @doroteaupproret between Feb 03, 2012, and April 22, 2012, and included retweets and mentions.

The data was read closely, and themes related to the study's research questions were identified. Influenced by discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), we viewed the data as temporary fixations or articulations of meaning that were carried out within a specific context and in relation to certain perceived threats. This theoretical point of departure has been fruitfully deployed in studies of emotion (e.g. Wetherell et al., 2015) and is not unknown in studies of strategies of legitimisation. In accordance with Vaara and Monin (2010), we view legitimisation strategies as discursive resources that are themselves constitutive of legitimacy.

In the conceptual words of Boltanski and Thévenot (2000: 209), the empirical data as a whole consisted of situations that were “submitted to the *imperative of justification*” (emphasis in the original). The interviews, tweets, and news press representations were instances where the outrage had to be justified, both the protest in general and the occupation as a specific political measure. We themed the articulations

² It is difficult to pinpoint the total number of participants in the occupation because participation includes both those who spent nights on the occupation site, and those who supported the protest in other ways. The 17 interviewees had all spent nights at the occupation site, and told us that there had been a list of 71 persons who could come if needed. 33 persons spent the first night of the occupation on site, but then the number decreased to about 2–10 persons per night.

based on what regimes of justice they were evoking. Such regimes provided the frames for the four dominant strategies of legitimation that are described in the next section.

4. Legitimising rural protest

The interviewees seemed quite confident that what they had been part of was good and important. Still, they devoted a lot of time and effort to convincing the interviewer that this was the case. This was partly due to that not everyone in the local community supported the occupation. While most were in favour of keeping the emergency ward, fewer were convinced that occupation was the right way to go about protesting the decision to close the ward. Since the occupation was built on the premise of a conflict – between local residents and county council politicians, and the potential conflicts between residents – and because time had passed between the ending of the occupation and the interviews, interviewees had a need, and had also had a lot of time, to gather arguments in favour of their case. During the occupation, they had also developed an explicit strategy for how to occupy, and how not to, which furnished them with arguments that they used in the interviews. Four interrelated strategies of legitimacy were identified, and we refer to them in terms of general utility, local representativeness, moral righteousness, and orderliness.

4.1. Stressing general utility

A central argument that was often put forward to legitimise the occupation had to do with the benefits and positive wider effects that the occupation had, both for the individual participants and for the local community. Especially for older people, many interviewees told us, the occupation became a way to escape loneliness and to become part of a community. Some people, they argued, were not primarily driven by the wish to contribute to the occupation, but rather by a need to resolve a difficult life situation, and for that reason came to “hang around [the occupation site] and occupy” (Woman, 44). Notions of local cohesion and sense of community were constituted as important positive outcomes, and the interviewees told about how they used to serve coffee in the foyer in the health care centre during the occupation, and how visitors came around with cakes to share a coffee. “It was so nice to be there”, one woman remembered, “I felt so connected” (Woman, 68). Any conflicts about who participated actively in the occupation and who were less active were under-communicated.

In addition to an increased sense of involvement in community, the occupation was described as helping people to grow and learn new things, for example, by chairing a meeting, talking to the press, or operating a Facebook account.

It was so incredible, it was like a small community in a microcosm, where people made the most amazing things and where you created everything from, I mean, friends for life to learning about computers, and to open up to others ... It's impossible to explain. It's something very, very special to have been part of (Woman, 44).

The occupation was thus described as something more than a protest against an emergency ward closure; it was made legitimate by its ascribed positive consequences, not least its social functions.

4.2. Stressing representativeness

Since not everyone in the local community took an active part in the physical occupation, those who did often legitimised their participation by stressing its representativeness (cf. Calhoun, 2013). Arguing that the occupation had strong support from the local population in Dorotea and the nearby villages was a recurrent and positively charged theme in the interviewees' descriptions:

Almost daily when I was at the store or just out, people called out,

‘Oh, what a great job you're doing, keep it up!’ [...] They apologized that they couldn't be there themselves (Woman, 68).

On Twitter, @doroteaupproret also received support through mentions from people from other geographic areas. This type of support was important, and people managing the @doroteaupproret Twitter account explicitly encouraged people to attract new followers: “445 followers, what do you say, would you help us get 500 followers before the weekend is over? You're the best, you can do it!” (March 16, 2012).

The support was also manifested by the emphasis that the interviewees' put on all of the material and financial support that the occupation received in the form of grants and donations. A refrigerator was lent to the occupiers from the local campsite, a freezer and personnel from a local company, projectors from the local school, stretchers and blankets to sleep on from the local fire department, and food to eat from a local store as well as from individuals supporting the occupation. Further, a local printing company helped with prints, various companies paid for transports, and the Home Guard had promised to help out if needed. The amount of gifts, loans, and donations was certainly used in the narratives to demonstrate that the occupation was representing local people.

Despite the support, participation in the occupation was also met with criticism. Some interviewees told about threatening e-mails and gossip where the occupiers were described as sectarian. Such expressions of criticism were generally met by the interviewees by belittling the critics, and by arguing that this was a question of a few individual persons. Together with stories about the strong support, the ways in which critique was dismissed served to legitimate the occupation as represented the will of the majority.

Describing the occupation as having “representative legitimacy” required that any suspicions that the occupiers represented particular interests had to be countered. “We were upset when it was described on TV as an uprising of pensioners. That's completely wrong. This engages the whole community”, one woman said to the local newspaper (*Lokaltidningen Feb 8, 2012*). Similarly, and importantly, “representative legitimacy” seemed to require that the occupation as such was kept separate from party politics. Dorotea had a history of social democratic rule, and many were disappointed that the social democrats on the county council had agreed to the closure. The situation led to suspicions that the occupiers had hidden motives, or that the occupation was being run by a specific political party. This was in turn seen as a threat to the legitimacy of the occupation, and it was decided that the occupation should be politically neutral: “We do not discuss politics. That has been forbidden, other than the politics of the county council of course” (Woman, 73). The claim to political neutrality even came to explicit use at one time when the occupiers were to be evicted from the health care centre. They then wrote a letter to the enforcement officer arguing that they were politically neutral with no political spokesperson. Through this manifestation of political neutrality, the threat of eviction was withdrawn. The incident made it clear that the occupiers were not party political representatives, but represented the local population claiming their rights. Just as the narratives about the emotional and material support from people who were not physically participating in the occupation, political neutrality was used in the narratives to increase the credibility of the occupation by constituting an image of local unity and broad emotional consensus.

4.3. Stressing moral righteousness

Another important strategy that was present in all interviews was to describe the events that preceded the occupation as an immoral betrayal and violation committed by insensitive, authoritarian, and ignorant politicians. In this sense, the decision to occupy was made legitimate as an appropriate reaction to an initial injustice.

I think it's a healthy sign that you don't just give up, but that you struggle to have a decent way of life, also here in the Swedish North

(Woman, 89).

The interviewees told about the initial feelings when the decision became known in terms of a collective shock, and that the common emotion was the residents' outrage. Shutting down the emergency ward was constructed as depriving the local residents of a basic human right, which thus gave the local population the moral right to act.

[The withdrawal of the emergency ward] is a violation, pure and simple. An assault against the population! The infirmary is a base ... a basic need (Woman, 73).

The newspapers repeatedly quoted occupiers referring to that "we pay taxes to the county council, too" (*Folkbladet* May 22, 2015) and that "county residents deserve better than good enough" (*Folkbladet* Oct 10, 2012).

The strategy of moral legitimacy successfully created a discursive dichotomy between an ignorant ruling class of politicians and the local residents. Politicians were articulated with characteristics such as "ignorant", "authoritarian", and "immoral", and their decisions with words such as "unreasonable" and "preposterous". In the interviews, politicians were also described as conspiratorial in their supposedly conscious efforts to make life harder for the local population. Different stories were narrated to support this view – how past actions on the part of the county council itself had paved the way for their later decisions, how supposed statements of the county council about the reasons to shut down the emergency ward were so ludicrous that they undermined the whole credibility of the decision, and how the county council had consciously sabotaged the health care centre so as to create dissatisfaction among patients.

In contrast to insensitive politicians, the local population in Dorotea was described as compassionate, empathetic, and kind. The interviewees repeatedly talked about how people engaged in their neighbours' lives and helped out without requiring compensation. Through this contrasting between those in power and the Dorotea residents, a geographically invested dichotomy between "them" (there) and "us" (here) was created through which the local residents appeared as genuine and authentic. Their outrage when confronted with blatant unfairness from those in power was made reasonable, and their course of action – to occupy – was made morally legitimate.

4.4. Stressing orderliness

[We] were not to light a fire, not to use the hotplates and stuff. We could not have coffee makers. We were not to interfere with the medical care. We had to keep the toilets clean and ensure that no unauthorized persons were staying there. We could not lock the front door. And so on ... We continued for several years, and followed those rules (Man, 84).

The occupiers followed rules established by a security officer for the county council. The implementation of the rules was partly understood as an exhibition of power. One occupier was quoted in the local newspaper, commenting on the ban of using coffee makers: "They probably want to demonstrate who's in charge. But it doesn't matter, we just bring thermoses instead!" (*Västerbottens Folkblad* Feb 22, 2012). The interviewees were careful to emphasise that all rules were followed and that the occupiers did not disturb the patients or employees at the health care centre. This had been a point of criticism. For example, the local press reported that the head of the county council saw patient safety as threatened and that "you cannot seek medical care without the whole of Dorotea knowing you are there" (*Dagens ETC* May 2, 2012). For that reason, it was often described in the interviews how the occupiers organised themselves so that patients would not feel monitored. Interviewees also emphasised that the occupiers contributed to the health care centre's different activities and that they did not live off of publicly financed facilities:

Although we didn't pay any rent, we still did things. We shovelled snow. We scrubbed the floors, in the evening and morning. Provided our own toilet paper and things like that. And we took care of the plastic bags with equipment, sheets and stuff, that were delivered to the 'relay doctors'. So they [the doctors] came to us to get it. Even though we did not pay any rent we sure did things in return! (Man, 84).

It was central to the occupiers and for the legitimacy of the occupation that everyone involved acted "correctly". The participants were emotionally committed to underline how they took responsibility for the cottage hospital's activities that went far beyond the stated requirements, and they struggled to make the protest come forth as moral.

The occupiers further emphasised that the occupation was not only about sitting still. Besides helping out at the cottage hospital, they also worked hard gathering the information needed to argue in favour of keeping the emergency ward open.

We conducted a huge amount of research. My whole computer is full. So we have not just been sitting around (Woman, 73).

Descriptions of such work focused on travelling around the county to secure votes ahead of the referendum on the matter that was held in September 2013, incited by the occupiers. Occupiers also travelled to meet with politicians and to attend meetings of the municipal council, and they wrote debate articles and editorial letters to local newspapers to reach out with their message.

What we have called legitimacy through orderliness manifested itself through an eagerness to "play by the book" and to be able "to account for each and every penny". Early on the occupiers recognised the need to avoid any suspicions of economic improprieties, and therefore kept careful records in journals and cashbooks. It was further important to organise the occupation democratically; all should have the same degree of influence and responsibility, all decisions should be anchored in the collective, and there should be a transparency so that everything that was done during the occupation would be open to the public. There were to be no suspicions that the occupation was unorganised. In this sense, the occupiers complied with a common way to acquire respect, known from the early days of the Swedish reformist labour movement (*Nyzell, 2008*), and they managed to constitute the unlawful practice of occupation as an organised space.

5. Discussion: curbing the outrage

The occupiers justified the occupation, and the emotional outrage that precipitated it, through the four interrelated legitimisation strategies of utility, representativeness, moral righteousness, and orderliness. In this section, we argue that these efforts to legitimise the occupation were telling of a core issue that the occupiers had to both negotiate and perform: respectable citizenship. In struggling to make the occupation come across as legitimate, the interviewees negotiated essentialised notions having to do with rural space and rural identity. Returning to the double meanings of the expression "civil outrage", we now turn to how the chosen strategies of legitimation somehow aimed to curb the initial outrage, making it "civil" in the sense of polite and mannerly.

5.1. Toning down activist associations

From a performative point of view, the protesters became "activists" or "occupiers" through the very act of occupation. In its most basic sense, the occupation consisted of the bodies of local people laying claims to equal rights to care by placing their bodies in the place where such care would be given. This was a powerful and clear statement. Even without verbal clarifications, the assemblage of bodies in a public space reminded of the existence of these bodies and, in a way, implied that "we are not disposable" (*Butler, 2015: 18*).

This strong statement was recurrently toned down by the four identified strategies for legitimising the occupation. The strategies all directed the gaze away from the protest and onto the local *context*, highlighting that the protest benefitted the area more widely, and that it had strong support. The regimes of justice (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000) that were evoked through the strategies also seemed to be fundamentally bureaucratic in character. Even when evoking notions of morality, interviewees' discourse was dominated by questions of defining right and wrong, rather than the feelings the struggle over definitions gave rise to.

Despite the connotations that the word “uprising” holds, none of the interviewees talked about themselves in terms of activists. On the contrary, they were careful to point out the hard work and the structured ordinariness, even peacefulness, of the everyday actions of the occupation. They described meetings, information-gathering, making beds, cleaning floors, and coffee breaks. One woman laughingly told the interviewer what her daughter said: “But mom, what are you doing? Do you just sit there calmly and still? Get out, she said, pour petrol on the cars and set them on fire to make [the protest] visible. That's how it's done!” (Woman, 86).

Bobel (2007) has discussed distinctions between “doing activism” and “being activist”. Unpacking this distinction, she describes how “being activist” is a highly romanticised but also quite unrealistic ideal, which most have trouble identifying with because it demands sacrifice, putting up with hardships, and putting in ample time. Bobel argues that “the activist” is an identity that is often associated with men and masculinity, thus potentially excluding women from identifying as activists. We might add that “the activist” is also strongly associated with notions of both youth and urbanity. Interviewees neither complied nor identified with the stereotypical activist. In disidentifying with the stereotypical activist, the interviewees had to work harder to legitimise the chosen form of protest: as opposed to collecting names on petitions or writing letters of protest, which are both practices of what Norris (2003) calls citizen-oriented protest and activism, an occupation associates more clearly with what the stereotypical and typically younger and cause-oriented “activist” would do.

The disidentification with activist identity is all the more interesting as we learn that in the specific case of Dorotea there was indeed a history of political action. A hunger strike in 1973 against a municipal merger, and the formation of the local party “The Dorotea list” (*Dorotealistan*), were mentioned in interviews and were sometimes referred to as historical events that were telling of, and constituted, an active local political identity. Still, the recurring efforts to legitimise the occupation as civil are indicative of the importance to pass as a legitimate political protest, and as not being “just” a matter of rural outrage.

5.2. Downplaying emotionality

It was obvious from the empirical data that the suggestion and subsequent decision to close the emergency ward evoked strong feelings connected to notions of both citizenship and rural space. During the course of the occupation, these feelings were partly toned down. There were certainly still indignant and emotional outbursts in social media as well as in the interviews, but these did not dominate and were mostly related to more practical calls to attend a meeting or attract new followers. The four legitimisation strategies also effectively directed the focus onto more material objects. To be taken seriously, interviewees appeared to understand that feelings of outrage, so important initially, had to be tamed.

Woods et al. (2012: 569) have noted how emotions are often enrolled to frame rural protests in the media and to explain rural protests as exceptional and uncharacteristic behaviour performed by otherwise “moderate, responsible and law-abiding citizens”. Some of their study's media commentators suspected that emotional expressions on behalf of rural protesters were calculated attention-seeking, and many

commentators used such expressions to dismiss the protests as impulsive and irrational.

Perhaps the fear of such dismissals was at the core of the perceived need to legitimise the occupation. Some of the critique directed at the occupation had been precisely about whether the occupation had gone too far. In a letter to the editor in 2012, the signature “Concerned democrat” wrote that from the first initiative there now seemed to remain only “a smaller hardcore group that casts suspicions and conjures up conspiracy theories” (*Folkbladet Oct 10, 2012*). Such dismissals were effectively countered in the interviews, through the employment of strategies of legitimisation to reduce suspicions of overly emotional and sect-like behaviours amongst the occupiers.

Some of the incidents that the interviewees told about concerned the internal discussions about the external communication. While some wanted the demonstrations to be more agitated and to espouse sharp political messages, the general attitude seems to have been one of focussing on the task at hand without emotional slogans or internal disputes. One interviewee remembered how the occupiers often said: “Let's take this calmly. We shall not succumb to accusing and yelling at each other” (Woman, 88).

Instead, the occupiers performed their protest in a respectable, democratic, and inclusive manner, and through the legitimisation strategies the occupation came across as quite civilised. There were no threats that the occupiers would take to “acts of desperation” (Woods et al., 2012: 580), and there would only be the continuous occupation with its civil and hard-working occupiers supported by a similarly civil and supportive rural context.

5.3. Critiquing and (re)establishing citizenship

Many arguments within the data concerned questions to do with *citizenship* as described as entitlement to rights, a set of duties, and as feelings of belonging to certain spatial landscapes (cf. Osler and Starkey, 2005; Wood, 2013). Interestingly, citizenship was variously related to the nation and to the local area.

Herlitz (1999:383) argues that the homestead movement in the Swedish countryside reflects a new form of popular participation in community life, similar to what is often referred to as new social movements (Larsen, 2008; Woods, 2003). These new forms of participation do not have their roots in party politics, but in a place ideology that constitutes both the objective and means of people's commitment. This change towards place ideology, Herlitz argues, has come about through a perceived lack of political understanding of the specific needs of the sub-municipal level.

In line with Herlitz' argument, the interviewees experienced a kind of hollowed citizenship as characterizing the countryside. From their point of view, their civil rights had been gradually eroded during recent decades, even though they had worked hard all their lives and still fulfilled their civic duties by paying taxes. They felt that they were treated worse than people in urban areas and that those in power disregarded their living conditions. In this sense, the welfare state-based contract between citizen and society, which requires public trust and confidence in authorities, was described as broken. Such perceived relations between people and the (welfare) state condition political strategies (Parker, 2002). The occupiers felt that they no longer had the same duties as before towards government and those in power, and that they did not need to be loyal to a society that had abandoned them.

It was clear from the data that in making the situation comprehensible, two opposing moral geographies (Smith, 2000) were produced. On the one hand there was the moral space of Dorotea, which was morally entitled to certain demands. On the other hand there was the immoral space of the county council, which was primarily associated with the urban centre, and sometimes seen as the nation's extended arm and representative of what was perceived as dysfunctional rural politics. Laying one's claims in the form of an occupation, where the physical bodies of the Dorotea population reminded of the existence

and indispensability of these bodies, also says something about how they already felt symbolically “unseen and excluded from identification with the position of the citizen” (Lundgren and Johansson, 2017: 79; see also Lawson et al., 2010). This feeling of invisibility, which was supported by a perceived negativity in media representations of rural areas (Lundgren, 2013), suggests that the protest should also be seen as a way of regaining self-esteem (Mischi, 2012).

It is, however, important to note that although many interviewees aired a kind of disillusionary view on what they expected from politicians and the state, county council, and municipality, they still held democratic ideals in high regard; their demands were directed towards representatives of the county council and local politicians, and they made explicit efforts to organise the occupation democratically and in a respectable manner. In this sense, the unlawful protest still produced democratic citizens. Contrary to some other examples where the object of protest has been given an appeal by being articulated with specifically rural interests – e.g. studies of the UK hunting lobby (Anderson, 2006) – the Dorotea uprising fought for what was described as a fundamental civil right that was shared by citizens regardless of their geographic place of residence. However, just as hunting may be staged as “that which distinguishes an entrenched divide between rural and urban dwellers” (Edensor, 2006: 494), so too may the claims for equal care. While they did not solely point to rural particularities, but rather to universalised needs and rights, the claims simultaneously made visible the different and unequal conditions that geographic areas live under.

Further, while the strategies partly produced separate moral geographies, distinguishing between moral rural inhabitants and immoral urban politicians, they also seemed to bridge this separation by evoking a regime of justice that comprised a universalised morality (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000). Even though criticism was directed at immoral decisions, the occupiers were confident that the morality of their claims as such would be shared by the county council. In this sense, the occupation may be viewed as what O’Brien (1996) has called a “rightful resistance” or a “critique within the hegemony”. Although deemed unlawful, the occupation was “a product of [...] opportunities created by the spread of participatory ideologies and patterns of rule rooted in notions of equality, rights, and rule of law” (O’Brien, 1996: 34).

6. Concluding remarks: civil outrage

The identified strategies of legitimisation portrayed the occupation as a respectable protest conducted by respectable citizens – a civil outrage in every sense. While respectability is generally theorised as a class-based and gender-sensitive power strategy (Skeggs, 1997) – a way for the working class to seek credibility by performing non-threatening and non-upsetting (gendered) identities – the respectability strived for in the data, also concerned and integrated geographic space.

Norrland – the Northern part of Sweden where Dorotea is located – is norrecurrently represented as the opposite of urban middle class and often comes to embody fantasies of the nation’s internal Other; rural, unmodern and uncivilised (Eriksson 2010a, b). By performing respectability – not breaking rules, playing by the book, downplaying emotionality, and even facilitating the activities of the occupied premises – the occupiers countered any associations with disrespectability, which would have risked undermining the seriousness and the political goal of the occupation.

In this paper, we have suggested that the efforts to legitimise the protest were telling of wider and emotionally charged relations of power that the studied area was entangled in. Dorotea was no doubt part of an emotional and moral geography where feelings of deprived citizenship had been at the core not only of the initial outrage but also of the Norrlandic self-image more generally; already before the occupation belonging to the local area implied an emotionally charged relation to the nation-state. Understanding the protest and the way it

played out therefore needs to acknowledge not only the reasons to protest, but also the way those reasons were inherently caught up in normative and emotionally charged constructions of rural space and identity.

Edensor (2006: 484) has claimed that although the meaning of rurality is a contested one, rural areas are often assigned significance as “that which remains the same in a changing world”. In the case here, the occupation was primarily understood as something “new” to the occupiers. Although Dorotea had the experience of a hunger strike four decades earlier, the practice of occupying was new to most of the occupiers; to them, it was not a performance of remaining the same, but a performance that challenged their views on rural identities. At the same time, the challenge was carried through because they wanted to remain the same. It was because they wanted to keep the emergency ward and because they defined it as necessary for life in the area that they decided to occupy. Regardless, it might be the case that it was the resulting new emotional connection between the occupiers and the confirmation of what civil outrage can actually accomplish that was the most important lesson. Against the backdrop of the common feelings of having been let down and left behind, such reminders are clearly valuable.

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Source material Twitter

@doroteaupproret, 743 tweets between February 03, 2012 and April 22, 2012.

Newspress

Dagens ETC, May 2, 2012. Ockupanterna Är Största Bekymret (Mats Karlsson).
Folkbladet, Oct 10, 2012. Doroteaupproret Fortsätter (David Rydenfalk).
Folkbladet, May 22, 2015. Första Mötet I Den Nya Lokalen För Upproret (Simone Granberg and David Sandström).
Lokaltidningen, Feb 8, 2012. Doroteaborna ger inte upp kampen om sin sjukstuga (Kristina Sandin).
Västerbottens Folkblad, Feb 22, 2012. Nya Regler För Ockupanter (Anna Bergman).

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