Queer Joy, Queer Killjoy: Queerness, Nation, and Affect in the Reykjavík Pride Parade 2000–2019

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Abstract:

In recent years, "queer joy" has become a prominent topic in queer circles in the West. It refers to a defiant sense of joy felt by LGBTQ+ people in the face of an increasingly hostile environment. However, the political use of queer joy has a troubling history. In Iceland, the LGBTQ+ movement has worked under the banner of joy since the turn of the century. This is encapsulated in the Reykjavík Pride Parade, which has, since its inception in 2000, been referred to as "The March of Joy". This march has been a massive success. Recent parades have seen up to a hundred thousand people participate, a fourth of the Icelandic population. During the same period, the legal and social status of some Icelandic LGBTQ+ people has improved vastly. Employing a queer-historical and affect-theoretical stance, this article analyses the problematic side of this development. It traces how the national celebration of LGBTQ+ people's joy has shifted the Icelandic national imaginary, strengthened Icelandic (homo)nationalism, and contributed to a forgetting and erasing of the past. While drawing some LGBTQ+ people into the national imaginary, joy has excluded others, both critical, non-homonormative queers and immigrants stereotyped as at once backwards, joyless, and homophobic. This shows both the potential power of queer joy and the dangers inherent in its political use. Queer joy, if it is to have its intended effect, must be radical, intersectional, and defiantly queer from the start. Inspiration for such queer joy may, we suggest, be drawn from the figure of the queer killjoy.

Keywords: queer, joy, affect, nation, Iceland

Introduction

On 17 August 2019—Pride Day in Reykjavík, Iceland's capital—a queer activist, Elí Hörpu og Önundar, was arrested by the police. According to a news story published the same day, Elí[1] had been on their way to join the Reykjavík Pride parade, wearing a pink mask and holding a sign reading "Queer Liberation", when they walked straight into a group of police officers. They grabbed Elí and told them they were in an area that had been closed off in preparation for the parade. The police officers ordered Elí to take off their mask, whereupon they said they recognized them as a member of an organization called No Borders Iceland, a refugee aid and anti-racism collective. Elí had been arrested at the organization's demonstrations before and was, the policemen said, "always trouble" (V. Ö. Pétursson 2019b).[2]

The police officers ordered Elí not to protest the Pride parade. Surprised, Elí denied they had any intentions of doing so. The policemen then demanded ID—despite previously stating that they knew Elí—which prompted them to reach for their phone in order to film the policemen and to call the organizers of the Pride parade for aid, "since there had been negotiations with the police about their presence, that

it shouldn't be this conspicuous, not to speak of them arresting queer people", Elí stated in an interview. However, before they could use their phone, the police officers attacked them, threw them onto the ground, handcuffed them and put them in a car; Elí was driven to a police station, booked, and released with an admonition not to try to "protest near the March of Joy (ice. *gleðigangan*)", as the Reykjavík Pride Parade is popularly known. Instead, Elí was told, they should just "enjoy the festivities" (V. Ö. Pétursson 2019b).

Why was Elí arrested? The news story quoted anonymous sources as to the reason: the police had received a tip that a group of activists intended to stage a protest action by laying down in front of the parade and halting it. This had led the police to increase its presence around the parade grounds. Elí's arrest was used to justify these measures after the fact: in a statement released on the same day, the Reykjavík police claimed that Elí's arrest had been for "attempting to disrupt the parade". Elí flatly denied this in an interview and remarked that "it's horribly painful to be queer and to be arrested on this day, just for who you are, not for something you're doing" (V. Ö. Pétursson 2019b; 2019a).

Later, Elí won access to the police report of their arrest. To their surprise, they found out that the tip to the police had come from the very people they had tried to call to their aid that day: the organizers of the Pride parade. As Elí said in a later interview:

> It seemed to have been [the police's] intention to arrest me all along, and the Pride organizers were full participants, if not responsible. I saw in the police reports that the organizers of Pride had contacted the police and had a special meeting with [them] explaining that they were afraid for the safety of the march because of me and some other comrades. That was the biggest slap in the face. I also didn't feel support from the Icelandic queer community at all … it seemed like [they] didn't really care, or didn't see it as a big deal … the Pride [Organization] committee themselves, they never really showed me any interest and have denied all my requests of accountability (Würmann 2021).

The story of Elí's arrest deeply troubles and problematizes a popular understanding of recent Icelandic history. Since the turn of the century, Icelanders have tended to represent Iceland, to themselves and others, as a "queer paradise"—a country where LGBTQ+ people enjoy an extraordinary and exemplary social acceptance and legal rights; where the world's first openly homosexual Prime Minister was elected in 2009; and, most important of all, where the "March of Joy", the hugely successful annual Reykjavík Pride Parade, draws up to a hundred thousand spectators—a quarter of the country's population (Ellenberger 2017). But how does this square with a queer person's arrest at the 2019 march "just for who [they are]"—an arrest made at the urging of *Hinsegin dagar* ["Queer Days"] itself, the NGO organizing the parade? And how come that the Icelandic LGBTQ+ community did not come out in support of the arrested?[3]

The key to answering this question may lie in the Reykjavík Pride Parade's peculiarity: its self-identification, in its very name, with the emotion of *joy*. The policemen's insistence that Elí not "protest near the March of Joy" seems to indicate a discursive dichotomy, a pairing of opposites. Protest and joy, it is implied, cannot go together. Elí, who was "always trouble", embodied the one and so could not join in the other; Elí might be queer, but *not in the same way as the March of Joy*. Thus, Elí's case raises questions about the relationship between queerness and joy.

These questions have implications beyond Iceland. At the time of writing, the relationship between queerness and joy is much discussed, but seldom critiqued, in the queer blogosphere and press. "Queer joy" has become a prominent term, referring to a defiant joy felt and displayed by queer people

in the face of an increasingly hostile climate—an act of affective resistance aiming at social change ("The Queer Joy Project" 2023; "Queer Joy" 2023; "Celebrating Queer Joy" 2023; "Queer Joy Manifesto" 2022). Cultivating such joy may seem an uncontroversial goal. However, we believe that Elí's arrest hints at an inherent danger in using joy to further the political goals of LGBTQ+ movements. Queer joy is more complex than it seems. This article aims to understand how.

In order to do so, we will attempt a genealogical-historical and affective study of the Reykjavík Pride Parade and its identification with joy. Starting from the problematic offered by Elí's 2019 arrest, we shall work backwards in time and ask the following questions:

1) From what conditions did joy emerge as the emotion most identified with the parade?

2) What were the social effects of that identification between 2000 and 2019?

Subsumed under these two overarching questions are more specific ones: How does the emotion of joy *work* in the parade, i.e., what does joy *do* in it? How does it *transact*, i.e., how does it pass back and forth between the spectators of the march and the marchers? What emotions were pushed out of the frame through the parade's identification with joy? What does that erasure do? And finally, how did all this play into Elí's arrest?

We will proceed as follows. After discussing theory and methodology, we will make use of recent research in Icelandic queer history in order to draw the background of the emergence of the March of Joy at the turn of the century. Next, we will move on to the effects of that emergence in three short chapters dedicated to three discursive tropes we have identified in Icelandic public discourse around the March of Joy from 2000 to 2019. Then, we will return briefly to Elí's arrest and review it in light of our findings before drawing our conclusions.

Theory

Our approach is that of queer history, where we are inspired by the work of Laura Doan. In her rich book *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality and Women's Experience of Modern War* (2013), Doan traces the history of queer history, which has its origins in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of what Doan calls "ancestral genealogy": lesbian and gay scholars' search for models and predecessors in the past, emphasizing similarity and continuity. In the 1990s, with the rise of queer theory, this direct identification with past figures was problematized as identity categories, such as "gay" and "lesbian", were seen as modern social constructs (which is, of course, not to say they are not very real). Inspired by this view, a new historical approach to queerness in the past and present came into being, inspired by Michel Foucault's seminal first volume of The History of Sexuality series (1976). Doan calls this new approach "queer genealogy". It employs Foucault's genealogical method (on which more below) to highlight discontinuities and dissimilarities between sexual identities of the present and sexual subjects of the past, thus historicizing, de-naturalizing, and disturbing what is taken for granted, or presented as normal, in the present (Doan 2013).

While queer genealogy has often been presented as the opposite of its ancestral counterpart, Doan argues that the two have much in common. Both work from modern sexual identity categories, though queer genealogy does so negatively; this subtly binds them both to the history of nineteenth-century sexology from which the categories spring. While condemning neither practice (indeed characterizing both as essential to queer history as a whole), Doan also calls for a new "queer critical

history" that "seeks to destabilize not simply the homo/hetero binary but the logic of oppositionality itself". The historian should go to into the archive without, as far as possible, basing their intentions on preconceived notions of sexuality, deviance, and normality; instead, they should let themselves be surprised and disturbed by what they find. In analysing the findings from the archive, the queer critical historian is not *recovering* a past that had been "hidden", but *creating* a past in the present that had not existed before. The aim is not to describe "what actually happened", but to question current historical givens by presenting alternative histories out of the archive (Doan 2013, 18).

To aid this kind of approach, Doan usefully distinguishes between two different research objects of queer history, i.e., between two meanings of the word "queer". For Doan, "queerness-as-being" refers to queerness as an identity, as something one *is*, while "queerness-as-method" refers to queerness as a questioning or a disturbing of norms, as revealing power-structures and upsetting stable identities. Queerness-as-method may be used to question queerness-as-being (Doan 2013; see also Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005). In queer critical history writing, one must keep both meanings of the word "queer" in mind and play them one against the other, so revealing not only what the subjects one may write about felt they *were* but also *how and why* they came to feel that way; what structures, affects, and attachments led them to that point; and how such attachments may *change* subtly over time. Our goal is to do this in the Icelandic context through our queer-as-method focus on how Icelanders came to identify themselves with the emotion of joy through the March of Joy, leading to a change in their understanding of and relationship with queerness (as-being) and the nation itself.

Theories of nation and nationality are vitally important for such an analysis, for the March of Joy has become seen and constructed as a *national* event in Iceland, one symbolic of the national body and soul (Ellenberger 2017). While the definition of the nation is contested territory (Hutchinson and Smith 1994, 15, 47–48, 132–33), Anderson's conceptualization of the nation as an "imagined political community" has become the go-to definition and the one we employ in this article (Anderson 2006, 6). While imagined, the nation, for Anderson, is very real; however, his characterization emphasizes that the nation belongs to the realm of creativity and change. It is "conceived in language", so its definition and its borders are inherently volatile. One "could be 'invited into' the imagined community" and, consequently, also excluded from it under the influence of criss-crossing discourses of nation, belonging, knowledge, and truth (Anderson 2006, 145).

Today, in the West, the imaginary of the nation is dominated by neoliberal ideology. We see neoliberalism, per Michel Foucault, as a "general art of government" aiming at modelling the "overall exercise of political power … on the principles of a market economy". Hence, neoliberalism intervenes "on society as such", so that "competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and at every point". In such a society, subjects come to see themselves as "human capital" to be managed (by themselves and others) for growth and profit (Foucault 2008, 131–33, 145–49, 223–30). This strongly affects the imaginary of the nation, which, under the influence of neoliberalism, is imagined as including those who succeed in growing their "human capital" and excluding those who do not; this overlaps with, and may even supersede, pre-neoliberal technologies of inclusion/exclusion such as those based on race, class, citizenship, sexuality, and so on (Brown 2015; 2019; Lee 2012; Duggan 2003).

Connected to this development, there has been a growing inclusion, especially since the 1990s, of some LGBTQ+ people into the national imaginaries of neoliberal, Western nation-states. Since the turn of the century, scholars working in queer theory and queer studies have turned a critical eye toward these

processes (Eng 2010; Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005; Petersen 2012; Puar 2017; Warner 1999). Lisa Duggan gave them a name, *homonormativity*, which she defined as a neoliberal politics of "gay normality" emerging in the 1990s that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them", achieving this by limiting the scope of LGBTQ+ social movements to fighting for normative, state-given rights to marry, join the military, and so on (Duggan 2003, 50).

Jasbir Puar (2017) developed this concept into what she termed *homonormative nationalism*, or *homonationalism* for short. This gives name to the appearance in the West in the 2000s of new discourses presenting the homonormative inclusion of some queer people into the national imaginary as a sign of national progress and superiority over others, internal or external. This idea of superiority rests on *sexual exceptionalism*, i.e., the discursive construction of a given nation's extraordinary freedom in sexual matters, granted both to its normative heterosexual and its homonormative LGBTQ+ citizens, the latter validating and strengthening the privileges of the former. Through the same process, non-normative others are pushed to the margins of the nation and beyond. This creates a dichotomy in the ways that queerness appears in the contemporary West. On the one hand, queerness functions as a regulatory regime, privileging some queer subjects (white, gay and lesbian, able-bodied, neoliberal, consuming citizens) who are increasingly protected by the state and associated with life; on the other, queerness appears as a "queered darkening", or radical othering, of racialized bodies pushed out of the frame of life through homonationalism (Puar 2017, xx–xxi).

Puar develops the concept in a U.S. context characterized by the War on Terror and notions of American exceptionalism. When applied to other contexts, such as that of Nordic welfare states like Iceland and its national celebration of "queer joy", homonationalism changes character. As noted by scholars, a "Nordic exceptionalism" has long been prevalent in discourses in and about the Nordics: a notion of the special freedom, equality, and rights enjoyed by the citizens of the Nordic nation-states of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland, presented as models for the rest of the world—especially for racialized others. This also has the effect of erasing the long history of Nordic racism and inequality (Bjerring-Hansen, Jelsbak, and Mrozewicz 2021; Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022).

Scholars have also found that Nordic exceptionalism has become the basis for a special, Nordic kind of homonationalism. Through it, the Nordics claim superiority over national and racial others on the basis of their supposedly exceptional tolerance for and legal recognition of LGBTQ+ people, especially when it comes to marriage rights. Conversely, this homonationalism has the effect of excluding immigrants from the national imaginary, stereotyped as culturally homophobic, backwards, and incompatible with tolerant, progressive, Nordic ideals of equality (Jungar and Peltonen 2016; Petersen 2011; 2016; Vilhjálmsson 2024). This forms an important background to the Icelandic March of Joy, a national event vital to Icelanders' self-representation of their country as a "queer utopia", exceptional in the world and indicative of superiority over others.

There are two peculiarities to Icelandic homonationalism as opposed to the rest of the Nordics. In the case of Denmark and Sweden especially, the immigrant group most excluded by homonationalism are people of colour, often of Middle Eastern or Arabic origin (Petersen 2011; 2016; Jungar and Peltonen 2016). In Iceland, that picture changes, no doubt due to the small size of that particular immigrant group in the country. Iceland's immigrants are overwhelmingly from Eastern Europe, which, scholars have found, has had a marked effect on the national other created by homonationalist discourses (Ellenberger 2017; Sólveigar- og Guðmundsdóttir and Skaptadóttir 2017; Sólveigar- og Guðmundsdóttir 2023; 2024).[4] The

second peculiarity is the association of Icelandic homonationalism with joy as embodied in the March of Joy, the implications of which we will develop below.

Neoliberalism and homonationalism are both intimately bound to progress narratives, i.e., to a future-oriented, linear, forward-looking temporality. As both Puar and David L. Eng show, the homonationalist nation sees itself as marching forward on the linear path of improving LGBTQ+ rights while rejecting its prejudiced past; neoliberalism strives to improve human capital, growing it, looking to future profit and longer life, not past loss and the prospect of death (Puar 2017, 27; Eng 2010, 38–39). In this temporal imaginary, stopping and looking back in sadness, anger, or shame—"feeling backwards" as Heather Love (2009) calls it—halts the forward march of progress and may blocks others on that path; this can be seen as a radical or queer act, creating the "strange temporalities" of "queer time" (Halberstam 2005, 1). Thus, joy is implicated in homonationalism, neoliberalism, and temporality.

The study of joy calls for an affect-theoretical angle. In this, we are inspired by Sara Ahmed, who has theorized affect as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 2010, 230); in neoliberal societies especially, these affects function as an intangible "energy" of gut feelings, instantaneous responses, and immediate attachments that increase in value as they circulate near-instantaneously from subject to subject (Chaput 2010; Ahmed 2014, 42–61). Through this sticky connection, affects can shape the "surfaces" of individual and collective bodies, including nations, and align subjects with these bodies though public discourses by creating a "we" and "the other" (Ahmed 2014, 1–19). So, affect theory allows us to see what emotions *do* in the world rather than what they *are* inside the individual; we may glimpse how emotions, such as shame, pride, joy, and happiness, can shape the imaginaries of nations and nationalisms, including homonationalisms.

In the queer context, shame and its corollary, pride, have enjoyed the most sustained attention (Sedgwick 1993; Halperin and Traub 2009; Ahmed 2014; Love 2009). Happiness has also been much analysed, especially its connections with neoliberalism (see, e.g., Cabanas and Illouz 2019). Ahmed, treating joy and happiness together, theorized that, for minority groups, striving towards joy/happiness means following "somebody else's goods": the goods of the neoliberal, cisgender, heterosexual, patriarchal, national majority (Ahmed 2010, 56). National inclusion through joy/happiness functions as a "straightening device", demanding that LGBTQ+ citizens stay in line with normative values and follow the correct "happy objects" (Ahmed 2006; 2010). While following on from Ahmed's findings, we have also found it useful to analyse the specifics of the emotion of joy as distinct from happiness. Here, we have found inspiration in Arnett's (2023) recent article on the psychology of joy.

Arnett sees happiness as a long-term, low-or-medium-intensity feeling of well-being, while joy is "an intense, temporary feeling of *elation* combined with an appraisal of *right relation* between ourselves and the world, a sense that there is an ideal fit between ourselves and the world around us at that moment", so that "in the state of joy there is a match between our identity and what we are experiencing" (Arnett 2023, 1, emphasis his). In moments of joy, there is a powerful identification process between oneself and one's circumstances, a process dependent on an idealization of both. Thus, joy affects our relationship with the world and our sense of self; it may influence our identification with the nation, with queerness, and with notions of normality. This, we argue, makes joy a particularly worthy object of study for both queer history and affect theory, for it allows us to question, not only modern sexual and national identities, but the historical and affective processes through which they come to "stick" to subjects and to *change* those subjects and identities.

Method and Sources

In this article, we will employ Foucault's genealogical method, so writing what Foucault called a "history of the present", i.e., the use of historical analysis to question, unsettle, and disturb unquestioned certainties of the present, so opening up possibilities of change (Foucault 1977; Rose 1999). We will follow David Garland's definition of the methodology as tracing "how contemporary practices and institutions emerged out of specific struggles, conflicts, alliances, and exercises of power"; thus, by "presenting a series of troublesome associations and lineages", one may reveal how "institutions and practices we value and take for granted today are actually more problematic or more 'dangerous' than they otherwise appear" (Garland 2014, 372). Thus, genealogy's goal is twofold. First, by "exposing that certain ways of thinking are not timeless truths but historical constructs, genealogy opens up space to think about them differently"; secondly, "by unravelling the social roots of certain ways of thinking, it pinpoints the way in which they lend support to possibly problematic or contradictory political and social regimes" (Saukko 2003, 116). Importantly, Foucauldian genealogy should include the genealogist in its gaze, since they do not stand apart from history or find it already there, waiting in the archive; they *create* history where none was before. Thus, Foucauldian genealogy is "not interested in the demonstration of historical truth; its objective is to determine 'the discursive conditions that contribute to the construction of what comes to be regarded as true'" (Doan 2013, 85, quoting Traub 2002, 28).

To do this, the genealogical method starts by identifying and describing a previously overlooked problem in contemporary conceptions of the world: in this case, the problem of Elí's arrest at the site of the March of Joy, disturbing the "truth" of Iceland as a "queer paradise" and the idea of "queer joy" as a liberatory force. It then looks backwards and attempts to understand and frame the historical emergence of the discourses from which the problem stems. This genealogy forms a counter-narrative, disturbing the previously reigning "regime of truth" while making no truth claims itself: instead, it aims to open up the field of possibility for change in the future (Foucault 2008, 19).

This involves gathering of a mass of sources for discourse analysis from which a limited representative number of examples is chosen to illustrate the findings. Our focus is on public discourse; hence, we have used public sources only. One is a 2021 documentary film about the history of the March of Joy, *Fjaðrafok* (Gunnarsdóttir 2021), along with a series of interviews with the march's organizers conducted for that film and published online on the archival website svonafolk.is. The official Reykjavík Pride journals, published annually from the year 2000, are also vital. Our largest repertory of sources, however, are articles from printed newspapers and journals found in the searchable Icelandic journal database timarit.is, collected through keywords such as *Gleðigangan* ("the March of Joy"), *Gay Pride, Pride,* and *Hinsegin dagar* ("Queer Days").

Through this process, an archive of around a thousand texts of varying length was created and skimmed. From these, around 200 were picked out for close reading on the basis of their *affective* content, as they specifically addressed and discussed the *emotions* associated with the Reykjavík Pride Parade. Analysing this smaller archive thematically, we identified three main discursive tropes structuring the emotional discourse around the march, namely 1) joy as a unifier; 2) joy as erasing the past and creating gratefulness for the present in its stead; and 3) joy as creating pride. Through the organizing grid of these three tropes, we will make our argument about the social effects of joy post-2000. First, however, we must provide the pre-2000 background and ask: from what conditions did joy emerge as the emblem of Reykjavík Pride?

Background

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Icelandic gays and lesbians started to organize and campaign for visibility, recognition, and legal rights. This campaign had a radical, "sexual-political" character, an in-your-face attitude, and a critical stance towards heteronormativity and bourgeois life. While the campaign—along with the AIDS epidemic—brought Iceland's gays and lesbians onto the centre stage of public discourse (whereas before, their existence was acknowledged only in a scandalous tone by the yellow press), it did not initially translate into success on the political stage. While the state and the city authorities of Reykjavík were in dialogue with the gay and lesbian community for AIDS prevention during the 1980s, no legal recognition accompanied the talks. Politically, Iceland's gays and lesbians were ignored (Benediktsdóttir 2022; Hafsteinsdóttir forthcoming; Vilhjálmsson 2022).

In 1991, neoliberalism came full force into Iceland with the formation of the first cabinet of PM Davíð Oddsson. At the same time, the Icelandic legislature started to change its attitude towards lesbians and gays. A parliament committee on the status of lesbians and gays in Iceland was voted into being in 1992, comprising representatives from both state and lesbian and gay community. The aim, according to MPs voting in favour, was to increase "the happiness of the citizens" and aid gays and lesbians in obtaining a "normal family life" (Helgadóttir 1992). In the committee's report, released in 1994, registered partnership, a limited civil marriage form, was put forward as the path towards this goal of happiness and normality. It would, the report said, make Icelandic gays and lesbians more "responsible" and help them "conduct their lives in approved-of manner"; it would combat AIDS in their ranks and invite them back into the nation, from which they had been "refugees" (Grétarsson 1994, 16–19). They would become new, neoliberal citizens, normalized and responsibilized for their own health and happiness (Ellenberger and Vilhjálmsson 2024, 7; Vilhjálmsson 2022; 2024; Hafsteinsdóttir forthcoming).

Over the course of the 1990s, in response to this warming relationship with the state, the gay and lesbian movement adapted into a more mainstream entity campaigning for social respectability and marriage rights. In the first half of the decade, the former radical view and the new accommodating view existed side-by-side, as may be seen in the first Icelandic Pride marches, held in 1993 and 1994. They were small, comprising around seventy marchers each, and had a clear protest aim. The marchers marched under the banners *Hýr og skýr* ("Queer and Clear") in 1993 and *Frelsisganga homma og lesbía* ("The Gay and Lesbian Liberation March") in 1994, with joy and marriage nowhere on the agenda. Instead, the marchers demanded legal protection from discrimination, inheritance rights, and increased representation in media and society (*Pressan* 1993; *Alþýðublaðið* 1993; Kristjánsdóttir 1994; Ólafsdóttir 1993). However, the march was not repeated in 1995, when legal reforms were on the way in the wake of the previously mentioned parliament report. The year after, registered partnership between same-sex couples became law (Vilhjálmsson 2022).

Once that milestone was passed, the Icelandic state took an ever-increasing interest in gay and lesbian Icelanders' legal and social status and rights. An official homonationalism emerged, where politicians came to represent Iceland as competing in a race for marriage equality with other countries, victory in which was a matter of national pride. The idea of this race normalized the discourse of Icelandic homonationalist superiority over others, bolstered the image of Iceland as a progressive, happy, equality-conscious nation, and recast marriage into an undisputed good for LGBTQ+ Icelanders, obscuring any opposition to it from within the community. In a subtle manner, this process also normalized neoliberal

ideas of responsibilization and self-entrepreneurship which became bound up with notions of homonationalist progress (Vilhjálmsson 2024).

Over the same period, media treatment of Icelandic gays and lesbians changed. They became prominent as interview subjects, usually portrayed in a positive light. Gay men especially tended to represent themselves in these interviews in neoliberal terms. When describing themselves, they focused on their acceptance into Icelandic society and how happy this made them; they described their ethic of constant self-work, their striving to be better; concurrently, they dismissed and erased any difficulties and prejudices they had faced in the past, referring them instead to their own prejudices against themselves, freeing Icelandic society from blame (Ellenberger and Vilhjálmsson 2024). Thus, homonormative gays and lesbians were not only represented as a part of the nation, but as a *model* for other citizens because of their focus on the neoliberal values of happiness, responsibility, and self-improvement (Adam 2005; Cabanas and Illouz 2019). This also has implications for the temporality of the new model citizens. As Puar argues, through the endless striving for national inclusion, the temporality of "model minority discourses is one of futurity, an endlessly deferred or deflected gratification" (Puar 2017, 27). Thus, model gays and lesbians looked forward to the happy future, never back.

This context is essential to understanding the emergence of the March of Joy at the turn of the century. In 1999, a grassroots group of gays and lesbians organized an outdoor festival in Reykjavík to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. As one of the organizers, Heimir Már Pétursson, later recounted, he was shocked when he saw that

> politicians from all parties showed up to participate. It was at that moment that I realized we had reached a turning point in Icelandic society when it came to attitudes towards gays and lesbians ... the social circumstances had changed; we were deeper inside the closet then we needed to be ... the next year ... there would have to be a parade, or a *gleðiganga* ["March of Joy"] as I suggested it would be called in Icelandic (Ágústsson 2016, 62).

For Heimir Már, who went on to become the chief organizer of the Reykjavík Pride NGO throughout the 2000s, the phrase emphasised a strong contrast with the small, protest-spirited Pride marches that had taken place in 1993 and 1994. As he explained in an interview, "our experience … of feeble demonstration marches [convinced us] to organize a March of Joy [*gleðiganga*]—not a demonstration march [*kröfuganga*]" (Guðmundsdóttir 2005). The March of Joy was to be "the complete opposite" of that; instead, "we were going to simply come all up in the nation's face" (Gunnarsdóttir, 2021, 11:30).

The March of Joy was to be "different … from any other [Pride] parade in the world", as another organizer put it. It would be "a family festival" where "we didn't want anything that was dubious", such as "nudity or anything like that"; instead, the "ideology" was to "take only positive things out into society, to never let anyone know about any resistance or any trouble we faced". Instead, "we would push [our message] out there using positivity and beautiful things;" this was "the key" to the march's success. As the organizer summed up: "the more people who *thought* everyone was happy with [the march], the more people *were* happy with it". A carefully tended discourse of joy around the march would, the organizers believed, fulfil its own promise (Þórarinn Þór 2020, 3–6, emphasis ours).

What kind of "resistance or trouble" was it that the organizers felt they had to hide? An example is given in the same interview. Before the first March of Joy, the organizers had rented costumes associated with the figure of the "Woman of the Mountains"—a nineteenth-century romantic nationalist

symbol, a female personification of Iceland and a fixture at nationalistic events such as the National Holiday. These were to be worn in drag at the front of the parade. However, when the costume renting agency found out about their intended use, they demanded the costumes back. The organizers, however, decided to keep quiet about this homophobic incident in order to safeguard the impression that everything was "fun" and "everyone is with us" (Þórarinn Þór 2020, 6–7). This was not the only case of image management before the first march. As Heimir Már explained, it was designed to have more floats than could be captured in a single camera shot; this would give the impression of an "enormous" parade on the evening news (Ágústsson 2016; H. M. Pétursson 2008).

Here, we glimpse how the feeling of joy was curated, tended, and managed by the march's organizers in advance. Firstly, by giving the march an impression of large size, and thus of representing a sizeable part of society rather than a small group. This indicated inclusion in the national body—we are many among many—rather than angry outsider status—the few among the many. Secondly, by censoring nudity, confrontation, and provocation, lending the impression not of a critical, political march, but of a happy "family festival": apolitical, uncontroversial, and undemanding. Thirdly, by giving beforehand the impression of widespread, joyful acceptance. Hence, any naysayers would find themselves already on the back foot, with the impression that they were the odd ones out, out of step with the general sentiment—angry outsiders. This careful self-representation avoided pointing any fingers at the nation for its past exclusions of and prejudice against queer Icelanders while at the same time quietly taking up a place within its imaginary. It did this through joy: the marchers were to represent themselves to the spectators as happy and joyous, inviting the spectators participate in the emotion. They should feel already happy that they are there, in effect creating national inclusion through *fait accompli.*

This brings us to the eve of the first March of Joy on 12 August 2000 and the question of its social effects over the next two decades. As stated above, we have identified three main discursive tropes that emerged in its wake: 1) *Joy unifies*; 2) *Joy erases the past and makes us grateful for the present*; 3) *Joy makes us proud*. In the following chapters, we will examine how each of these tropes emerged and their various effects.

First, however, we should emphasize that we are not claiming that this was *intended or planned* by the march's organizers. The joy they had cultivated took on a life of its own as it "stuck" to already existing histories, values, and objects and created new discourses, ideals, and truths—a social process out of the organizers' control. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that these three tropes are but one of many possible ways of interpreting the data in our archive, which, like any archive, houses contradictions and paradoxes and is itself created and defined by an interested party, namely the authors. However, in the context of our theoretical and methodological stance of queer critical history, *any* historical interpretation is to be considered the interested creation of the historians doing the interpreting. We are not claiming to present facts or truths discovered intact in the already extant past, but constructing a *story* out of our archive which *creates* a new past in order to disturb the present.

1. Joy Unifies

In our sources, one particular historical moment stands out for the emotional intensity associated with it and the value granted it: When the marchers in the first March of Joy on 12 August 2000 turned the corner onto Reykjavík's main shopping street, where the spectators were waiting. In retrospective interviews, organizers and marchers described their joyful shock: "Around 12.000 people were waiting for us … one's heart stopped for a while and the tears rushed forth", Heimir Már recounted (H. M. Pétursson 2005, 4).

Another organizer said: “I barely knew a single face. Where did these people come from? I did not know my nation, but there it was” (Kristinsson 2007). “My jaw dropped“, said another, “it was a kind of out-of-body experience … I thought … of those who had died [of AIDS] and weren’t there … [and I thought] ‘OK, it was [all] worth it’” (Hjálmtýsson 2018, 9). One marcher remembered that she had “never seen so many smiling Icelanders at once … the marchers and the onlookers on the sidewalk—all smiling wide … [it was] an irresistibly good and warm feeling” (K. Jónsdóttir 2005).

The moment so powerfully constructed in our sources is that of an instant feeling of national inclusion and unity through the mutual feeling of joy. As another marcher described it, “joy shot me right through the heart“, but not her alone, for “there wasn’t an unsmiling face to be found … a thousand smiling faces anywhere you looked … I deeply felt the solidarity of my small nation, the recognition and support of all who came … I was grateful” (B. H. Björnsdóttir 2004). “National unity” had been created, an organizer maintained, which was “a very unusual and beautiful thing” (sdg 2006).

This unifying mood was fully shared by the media, where the march became associated with “solidarity, positivity and joy”, as a 2006 headline put it (S. V. Jónsdóttir 2006). Every Pride Week from 2000 on, the papers filled up with positive articles, opinion pieces, and editorials about the parade and life story interviews with LGBTQ+ people (though predominantly white, indigenous, cis gays and lesbians).[5] The general mood was well described in a 2006 Pride Day editorial in the country’s most read newspaper, which stated that “solidarity with gays and lesbians and their rights predominates throughout the nation”, all due to the March of Joy and the extraordinary “popular unity and family feeling” which surrounded it (Stefánsdóttir 2006).

This coupling of national unity with “family feeling” appears more widely in our sources. In an article in the 2007 Pride Journal, an organizer theorized that the extraordinary success of the march was due to the small size of Iceland’s population, which had created exceptionally strong family bonds. “The Icelandic family does not expel its own“, the organizer claimed, so that “when queer people in Iceland finally felt up to confirming their own existence [in the March of Joy] … the Icelandic family stood there, ready, as it had been conditioned to do. And what’s more, it asked to be allowed to participate in the search for a better life” (Kristinsson 2007, 37). Indeed, as the same organizer said in a later interview, “the gay and lesbian community has its share of the blame for how distant the Icelandic family was for so long. There was a time when we kept our people away from us, gave them little share in our love and emotional life ... the March of Joy became, unexpectedly, a way to break out of that pattern” (Ágústsson 2016, 63). So, the March of Joy was not only a marker of national inclusion but also a *family reunion*.

This, however, leaves open the question: reunion on whose terms? If the Icelandic family/nation does not expel its own, then anyone who feels expelled or excluded is foreign to the family/nation. It was always joyfully ready to accept you; therefore, if you stand aloof from it, it is your own fault, for which you need to take responsibility. As Arnett put it, “in the state of joy there is a match between our identity and what we are experiencing”; there is “an ideal fit between ourselves and the world around us at that moment” (Arnett 2023, 1–2). Emphasis, however, should be put on the world “ideal“. As Ahmed points out, “an ideal self … that belongs to a community … is produced as an approximation of the other’s being … the ideal is a proximate ‘we’” (Ahmed 2014, 106). The marchers found joy in approximating themselves to the ideal “us” of nation/family; conversely, the spectators found joy in the ideal of a more complete and joyous nation/family which included the LGBTQ+ community as represented by the march, a community which had shed any radical, protesting mien, instead recasting itself in terms of pure joy.

This reunion, however, was not on equal terms. The spectators, to use Ahmed's terminology, "came first", while the marchers were "following other people's goods;" it was the ideal, waiting nation/family that had to be approximated by the marchers, not the other way around. In order for groups to cohere, "some subjects are required to take up the happiness causes of others"; in the case of the March of Joy, that cause was joyous unity on the ideal nation/family's terms (Ahmed 2010, 56–58). But any such unity faced an obstacle: the question of what to do with the past, these very recent times of disunity, exclusion, homophobia, and AIDS. This problem was addressed in our second discursive trope.

2. Joy Erases the Past and Makes Us Grateful for the Present

In the 2013 Pride Journal, there is a remarkable article by author and lesbian activist Lilja Sigurðardóttir. It is one of the few articles in the history of that publication that directly addresses the emotion of joy and confronts the question of its appropriateness. Lilja starts by relating the inspiration for the article, "a smiling man" at the previous year's festivities who remarked to her that "you [gays and lesbians] are always in such a good fucking mood!" With some irony, she notes that "this is correct … we're always having a party, any bitterness is washed down with a rainbow-colored cocktail and [our] demonstration march [the Pride parade] has only one demand: joy". Given the history of past prejudice, she asks, and those from the community who had died from AIDS and suicide, was this display of joy justified? Lilja argued that it was. The legal and social environment for gays and lesbians in Iceland had improved "to such an extent that our existence is nearly unrecognizable compared to what it was" (L. Sigurðardóttir 2013). This encouraged LGBTQ+ people to live in the present instead of the past:

> LGBTQ+ people in Iceland have chosen not to look back, not to dwell on the pain of the past, but instead to look forward, expecting the best of Icelandic society. The past cannot be changed but … we live in one of the best countries in the world as to the legal rights and social status of LGBTQ+ people … a society which is ready to listen … we need to give thanks [to that society] … with humility (L. Sigurðardóttir 2013).

So, while in the past, LGBTQ+ people's joy had been "a method for survival in unbearable circumstances", in the present it had become "just something to be enjoyed": at the March of Joy, "we let everybody enjoy it with us" (L. Sigurðardóttir 2013). Joy had been cleansed of its past and detached from its origins. It was no longer a defence mechanism used by LGBTQ+ people in a society which despised them. Now it belonged to all, bringing everyone together in a society that claimed to love the people it had previously despised. By giving up "feeling backward", i.e., no longer looking back to and bringing up a dark and shameful past, a blockage seemed to have been cleared on the common path of nation and LGBTQ+ community towards what Ahmed calls "national love": the always hoped for, but never quite achieved, loving acceptance of minorities by the nation and the concomitant desparate love of those minorities for the nation (Love 2009; Puar 2017; Ahmed 2014, 131).

This discursive trope had a strong effect, not only on the contemporary present, but also on the past. To quote another organizer, at the march, one "could forget the tears of the past" which "didn't matter anymore"; instead, one could "smile through the tears", these new tears of joy (K. Jónsdóttir 2007). The nation and the LGBTQ+ community thus came together in the oblivion of joy, one born out of suffering, but bearing no traces of its origins. This function of joy was widely noted. The author Sjón wrote an article in the 2014 Pride journal commending the LGBTQ+ community's "strategy" of "inviting one's fellow citizens to a moment of joy"; this was "the brave path of the conciliatory" and "a great gift to out small society". It had allowed the nation to move on from the prejudiced past, which had been "a bad time", not only for the LGBTQ+ community, but *also for the nation*: it had not been "content as it woke

up in the morning; it was not at peace with itself when it lay down at night" (Sjón 2014). In erasing the painful past, joy had healed the nation; through joy, it had become a better version of itself. As a Pride organizer put it, the March of Joy "was a ritual of reconciliation and forgiveness" (Ágústsson 2016, 63).

However, this act of forgetting was not all. Having erased the past, the LGBTQ+ community was represented as feeling *grateful* to the nation for its benevolence in the present. While this function of the trope was found from early on—in a 2004 interview, Heimir Már, the leading organizer, remarked that the Pride parade was about "show[ing] our gratitude by having fun and making others happy" (*Morgunblaðið* 2004)—it became much more prominent after Iceland achieved full marriage equality in 2010 (on which, see Vilhjálmsson 2024). In an interview from that year, one of the Pride organizers wanted to "show [everyone] what we've got here in Iceland. This is a festival of celebration and solidarity … we're showing the Icelandic nation how grateful we are that it has supported our human rights so conscientiously and so well" (G. Jónsdóttir 2010). In another interview from 2011, the same organizer said he was "infinitely grateful": "We [LGBTQ+ Icelanders] have met with more understanding here than anywhere else in the world … we are like one big family" (Bogadóttir 2011). Indeed, as two organizers wrote in the 2012 Pride journal, "through the March of Joy, we celebrate the victories won in the rights struggle … and express our gratitude towards our families and friends" (B. H. Björnsdóttir and Kristinsson 2012).

Psychologists have noted the link between joy and gratitude: "We feel gratitude accompanied by joy when we have received something we regard as good, and we view the giver as good, and we feel what we have received is beyond what we deserved" (Arnett 2023, 3). In this light, we again find an unequal power-relation in the joy of the Pride parade. From the start, but especially after marriage equality in 2010, the LGBTQ+ community was discursively constructed as the receiver of the gift of rights and acceptance from the good nation, a gift far beyond the wildest dreams of the community only a few years before—the gift of "national love". But, as Ahmed points out, national love by and for minority groups may be seen as "a form of waiting" which "extend[s] one's investment" in the nation; indeed, "the longer one waits the more one is invested". One needs to show more and more love towards the nation the more one is given by it, while "the failure of return extends one's investment" (Ahmed 2014, 131).

Further, neoliberal ideology enjoins subjects to take responsibility for their own happiness and life. Receiving gifts from the state or nation, then, is seen as a sign of weakness and undeservedness (Adam 2005; Ellenberger and Vilhjálmsson 2024; Türken et al. 2016). Thus, the Icelandic LGBTQ+ community had to take as given the goodness of marriage and nationality and show gratitude for these gifts of love. At the same time, these same gifts subordinated the LGBTQ+ community to the nation that had become its love object; in accepting them, it displayed its lack of fulfillment of neoliberal ideals. While displaying ever more gratefulness, it represented itself as more and more undeserving of the kindness shown it—but all this was hidden under the mien of joy. Having united the LGBTQ+ community and the nation, erased past hurts between them, and created gratitude instead, what did joy then mean for the happy, unified, healed nation?

3. Joy Makes Us Proud

In an opinion piece in Iceland's most read newspaper on Pride Day 2004, author Andri Snær Magnason offered an unusual insight by comparing the previous year's Pride festivities with 17 June, the Icelandic National Holiday, which celebrates Iceland's 1944 declaration of independence from Denmark. Andri Snær describes how he was much more affected by the Pride parade than he was by the 17 June festivities.

Once, the National Holiday had meant something: it had been defined by a “feeling of victory” and the participants had felt “proud and newly free“. Now, everyone had forgotten that spirit, but the Pride Parade offered it anew, for it had “most of the characteristics of a National Holiday”:

> Here, someone has grabbed a flag and carries it full of pride … here is a group … that has fought for a cause and won a victory and knows that freedom and independence are not to be taken for granted … there is the rainbow flag, a symbol of tolerance and diversity. Instead of the Woman of the Mountains, there is the drag queen, and you hear national anthems by Gloria Gainor … instead of the masculine symbols of the sailor and the farmer, there is leather and latex, and the heroic freedom fighters are alive, not cast in bronze … the meaning [of the day] is not drowned out in balloons, hot dogs and candy and they [the LGBTQ+ community] would never think of replacing the rainbow flag with red Vodafone flags, as happened on 17 June 2003. This flag still has meaning (Magnason 2004).

In an article from 2011, Reykjavík city councillor Hjálmar Sveinsson further developed this argument. Also comparing 17 June with Pride, he described the former as a “formal” event where members of the élite

> speak about the Republic and the Icelandic nation as if it was one thing: one body, one soul. The Woman of the Mountains goes on stage and recites a poem. But what does the Woman of the Mountains mean and what is she talking about? Many do not know … [the March of Joy] is much more colourful and much more popular … everybody knows exactly what it is about. It is a celebration of belonging to a diverse, liberal, tolerant, colourful society in the city of Reykjavík … ethnicity does not matter at all, neither does the nation-state. Ethnicity is exclusive, but the city is a living, changing society (Sveinsson 2011).

In the trope here emerging, Icelandic nationalism is reconstructed for a new age. The traditional, rural, romantic-nationalist mythology of a virile nation of farmers and seamen struggling for independence and gaining it through unity and hard work had faded. However, the Pride parade repackaged the nation, bringing it to modernity, showing it in full colour, moving its focus point from the countryside to the city. It was a joyous “victory celebration” of national inclusion, packed with symbolism which reminded one of, but formally avoided, overt nationalism; so, it was free of the past, belonging purely to the present, espousing “tolerance and diversity” as the rallying points, the supreme values. This allowed one unproblematically and joyfully to feel national pride, and so, the Pride parade became, as a newspaper editorial put it, “in many people’s eyes, the true National Holiday” (Stefánsdóttir 2012; cf. Petersen 2011).

In newspaper opinion pieces, the emotional power of this new type of nationalist identification is clear. One journalist describes how she “was filled with a kind of national pride” when she watched the parade in 2012 and was “in tears when I think about the fact that Gay Pride’s [*sic*] March of Joy is one of the biggest events of the year in Iceland” (Hlynsdóttir 2012). Another wrote that “the Icelandic March of Joy is the most remarkable [Pride parade] in the world [and] Icelanders are the foremost nation in the world … I'm rarely as proud of being Icelandic as I am at Gay Pride [*sic*]” (B. Björnsdóttir 2011). Iceland’s most famous LGBTQ+ politician, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, just out of office as Prime Minister, wrote in the Pride journal in 2014 that “in the last few decades, Icelanders have, with a few exceptions, thankfully got rid of prejudice against gays and lesbians … we … are proud of Icelandic society today. We are proud of being Icelanders” (J. Sigurðardóttir 2014).

Yet despite its appeals to tolerance and diversity, this new nationalism necessarily had an exclusionary force, creating an “us” and a “them“. As the author Sjón put it, “we [Icelanders] have learned the meaning of the word ‘human rights’”, which meant that Iceland had become a model for “the many countries which still abuse homosexuals, bisexuals, and trans people among their citizenries. We know it

will bring them joy" (Sjón 2014). In a clear case of homonationalism, Sjón posits that Icelanders enjoy a special freedom in matters of sex and sexuality, not only granting the Icelandic nation superiority over others but also conferring on it the duty to export the products of that superiority to other, less fortunate nations (Ellenberger 2017). However, Icelandic homonationalism is peculiar in that these other nations are not only painted as inferior and backward in matters of law and social tolerance, but also in the realm of affect: they lack *the emotion of joy* itself. This is an *affective exceptionalism*, through which a nation is represented as feeling superior emotions to national others (see, e.g., a Lusophone case in Klobucka 2014; and a U.S. case in Ross 2016). But who were these others?

In our sources, one part of the world is strongly identified with this joyless, homophobic mirror-image of Icelandic homonationalism: Eastern Europe, which, as we have seen, is the birthplace of the vast majority of Iceland's immigrant population. Contrasting grim, Eastern European homophobia with Icelandic, joyous tolerance was a newspaper fixture during Pride week in the research period (*Morgunblaðið* 2008; *Morgunblaðið* 2013; G. Jónsdóttir 2013; Jónsson 2014; Ellenberger 2017). The discursive connection between joylessness, homophobia, Eastern Europe, and immigration is on glaring display in a news story published just before 2008 Pride, when a bomb threat against the parade was mailed to the media, featuring a homophobic message in English accusing gay men of spreading AIDS. Interviewed, one of the Pride organizers revealed that this was in fact far from the first such threat, but until now they had all been sent to the organizers themselves, who had kept them secret in keeping with the previously mentioned policy of maintaining a façade of joy around the march. Now, however, with the threat being sent directly to the media, this method had been bypassed; the aura of joy was threatened (Hlynsdóttir 2008).

Yet there was a solution at hand which could maintain the homonationalist mood. The organizer told the interviewer that "these days, people of various cultural backgrounds are showing up in this country as immigrants", many of whom "come from countries where great hostility reigns against gays and lesbians". The organizer named especially the countries of Eastern Europe, "many representatives [of which] live in Iceland" (Hlynsdóttir 2008). Thus, the bomb threat was disassociated from the nation and instead blamed on national others. The joyous unity of LGBTQ+ community and nation was kept intact, while the figure of the joyless, homophobic, Eastern European other was strengthened.[6] Further, this figure was represented as lurking around the March of Joy, waiting for the chance to strike at it: the news story's headline reads *Slegið úr leynum*—a phrase difficult to translate, indicating a cowardly strike on an unsuspecting victim from a place of hiding, a kind of stab in the back.

This discursive trope raised both national and affective borders around the March of Joy. The spectators and the marchers belonged inside, in their past-effacing, forward-marching, unifying, nation-building joy; outside were not only national others, but also affective others or "affect aliens", to use Ahmed's term, those who "are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world" (Ahmed 2010, 41–42, 164–72). Further, the national and affective others blend into one another: to be the one is to imply one's being the other. If one feels differently, or "backward", about the March of Joy—feels anger, shame, suspicion, or anything other than a "match between our identity and what we are experiencing" (Arnett 2023, 1–2)—one is discursively constructed as a national/affective intruder inside the joyous borders of march/nation. Importantly, this excludes both the Eastern European immigrant, the native-born homophobe, and the critical, non-homonormative, non-homonationalist queer; when it comes to the emotion of joy as constructed by these three discursive tropes, they are all aliens.

Queer Killjoy

This brings us back to our starting point: Queer activist Elí Hörpu og Önundar's 2019 arrest. How can joy, as we have characterized it, clarify their arrest? We have seen how the police identified Elí as "always trouble" for their activist work for the anti-racist refugee aid group No Borders. This implies that Elí may profitably be read through Sara Ahmed's figure of the "feminist troublemaker" who refuses "to follow other people's goods [and] to make others happy"; they cause trouble by "get[ting] in the way of the happiness of others". This makes them *killjoys*, hindering the enjoyment of others "simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising"; thus, the killjoy "'spoils' the happiness of others" by refusing "to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness" (Ahmed 2010, 60, 65). Importantly, "we can killjoy because of who we are perceived to be" rather for anything we actually do (Ahmed 2023, 225).

Through this figure of the feminist troublemaker/killjoy, we see how Elí was read and constructed as *always already* protesting, troubling, and disturbing merely by their presence, because of their previous protests against the Icelandic state's treatment of national others, i.e., refugees. Thereby, Elí became associated with a variety of othering signs and symbols: of intrusion into the national body, the misuse of kindness, an insistence on looking back at the past, a refusal to join in the feelings of the majority. In this "circulation between objects and signs" (Ahmed 2014, 45), the affect of anger emerged which "stuck" to Elí even if they were not angry—for, as we have seen, Elí was not protesting the March of Joy on the day of their arrest; on the contrary, they were on their way to *join in* it. Yet this was a subject position they were not allowed to assume. Elí was constructed as in themselves antithetical to the march: they could not participate in it *as a queer person*, because queerness had become associated with joy and Elí with the killjoy.

Through this association with anger and protest, Elí "expose[d] the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy", to quote Ahmed, so that their "proximity [functions] as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere" (2010, 65–67). Elí was a reminder of a buried past, that of radical queer activism, protest, and refusal to conform to homonormativity, calling forth a range of emotions that might stick to both marchers and spectators: those of suspicion, shame, and anger about the past, such as the treatment of Icelandic gay men by state, media, and populace during the AIDS epidemic (on which, see Hafsteinsdóttir forthcoming). Thus, the ideal of the grateful LGBTQ+ community and the benevolent, giving, model nation was threatened. In this way, Elí was seen as potentially blocking the fragile transaction of joy between marchers and spectators taking place in the parade, so destroying the unifying work joy produced though that transaction. This not only pushed Elí to the margins of the national imaginary but also prevented them from being recognized or represented by the "joyous", forward-marching LGBTQ+ community, which consequently failed to defend them after their arrest. Joy had separated Elí from them.

Finally, the very name of the refugee aid activist organization to which Elí belonged, No Borders, associated them with border transgression of the nation imagined, through homonationalist discourses, as exceptionally joyous, open, and free. So, figures of national/affect aliens stuck to Elí, such as the Eastern European immigrant homophobe, the advantage-taking refugee, and the terrorist, all stereotypes characterized as abusing Icelandic joy and openness. In this way, Icelandic sexual and affective exceptionalism leads to a paranoid fear about Iceland's vulnerability to national/affective others. As Ahmed argues, such fear "restricts the body's mobility": if the body fears being attacked, it is brought to

an anxious standstill. Thus, fear invokes the "politics of mobility, whereby the mobility of some bodies involves or even requires the restriction of the mobility of others" (Ahmed 2014, 65–70). The suspected terrorist is detained so that the citizen may move freely.

This brings us back to the fearful fantasy of the Pride organizers: that Elí would lay down in front of the parade, so halting its mobility and, by extension, that of the joyous national body. In terms of temporality, this would symbolically halt the progress of the homonationalist nation as it marched towards the joyous future. In being forced to stop before the blockage of Elí's body, the nation would have no choice but to look back to the past to ask how this happened: towards the exclusions, the AIDS/HIV deaths, and the bad feelings that had brought it here, but which had been carefully buried in the forgotten past. In order to circumvent this threat, Elí had to be restrained by the police, charged with protecting not only the mobility, the borders, and the progress of the march, but through them, those of the nation itself.

Thus, joy served as an invisible, national/affective border wall, a neoliberal temporal orientation, and a strategy for regulating queerness. The regulated "queer joy" of the marchers needed protection from Elí's unregulated, killjoy queerness. Elí became a transgressor of both national, affective, and normative borders, dramatically showing up the homonormative, homonationalist "regime of truth" that had been built around the Icelandic "queer utopia".

Conclusion

In this article, we have aimed to show 1) the conditions from which joy emerged as the emblem of the Icelandic LGBTQ+ movement, and 2) the social effects of that emergence. As for the first question, we have traced how, in the 1990s, the Icelandic lesbian and gay community confronted the rise of neoliberalism, which opened up the door to national inclusion for LGBTQ+ people who adapted to homonormativity and neoliberal ideology. The state admitted lesbians and gay men as dialogue partners and gave them limited marriage rights, arguing that this would grant them normal family life and increase the happiness of the citizens. From these circumstances, joy emerged as the rallying point of the gay and lesbian movement at the turn of the century. Joy overrode or hid confrontation, provocation, and anger about the past while being fully compatible with neoliberal goals of individual self-improvement and the responsibilization of individual happiness. It offered a clean slate: a vision of a happy, uncontroversial, national unity. All this contributed to the great success of the March of Joy when it debuted in 2000.

As for the second question, we have shown how the discourses emerging from the March of Joy's success stressed a new, familial unity between nation and LGBTQ+ community as both became filled with homonormative joy. This put the LGBTQ+ community in the role of the humbled prodigal son returning home to his forgiving father, i.e., a subordinate subject position. This joy was also constructed as erasing the dark, prejudiced past and creating gratefulness in its stead, again putting the homonormative LGBTQ+ community in the subordinate position of directing its undeserving gratitude to the generous, giving nation. Finally, joy engendered national pride. It recast Icelandic nationalism for the twenty-first century, supporting a homonationalist narrative of Iceland's unique and exceptional inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. This also excluded national others, above all Eastern European immigrants, from the national imaginary; any homophobia found in Iceland could be redirected onto them, as they were characterized as lacking that specifically Icelandic, homonationalist kind of joy. Thus, the joy of the March of Joy emerged from the rise of neoliberalism and homonormativity in the 1990s and became a technology for both including, excluding, and regulating subjects in relation to the nation in the 2000s and 2010s.

Without a doubt, this development shows that the political mobilization of LGBTQ+ people's joy—"queer joy", if you will—can serve as a powerful tool for social change. However, there is a danger inherent in such use of joy, one implicit in the emotion itself. In requiring an "ideal fit" between our identities and our surroundings, joy makes subtle demands on both. It may affect our (national or sexual) identities, making them shift and change in the direction of the "ideal fit". Our surroundings, or our constructions of them, may similarly shift and change through this process, raising the question of who controls these surroundings and what rules apply in them. Finally, due to joy's "sticking" to bodies, objects, and collectivities, its effects are infectious; they spread easily. Joy has transformative power, but one implicated in, not free from, existing power relations.

Yet this is not to say that "queer joy" is *intrinsically* neoliberal, homonormative, or homonationalist. On the contrary, it is so only if it reorients the subject towards an ideal that has emerged on someone else's terms. If, from the start, one queers the ideal into something critical of the frames of nation, neoliberalism, and (homo)normativity—into something intersectional, critical, and radical—joy's transformative power may yet be of anti-neoliberal, anti-nationalistic, queer-as-method use. If anyone knows how to create that kind of joy, it is the queer killjoy.

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[1] A note on Icelandic names. The traditional Icelandic naming system is patronymic, meaning that there are no surnames. Referring to an Icelander solely by patronym is incorrect, as this merely tells us the name of that Icelander's father (or, in the case of matronyms, the mother). A traditionally-named Icelander is referred to either with both given name(s) and patro/matronym or, when context allows, with given name(s) only. This also holds in Elí's case, whose last name is matronym followed by patronym.

[2] This article is part of a research project, supported by RANNÍS, the Icelandic Centre for Research, called "From sexual outlaws to model citizens: The relations between queer sexualities and nationality in Iceland". It includes two PhD-projects. One, of which this article is part, focuses on the conditional inclusion of the model gay and lesbian citizen into the Icelandic nation 1990–2010. The other focuses on discourses of AIDS, foreignness, and nation in the 1980s and early 1990s (Hafsteinsdóttir forthcoming). All translations in this article are the authors'.

[3] Hinsegin dagar issued an official apology to Elí in 2022—three years after the arrest (Stjórn hinsegin daga 2022).

[4] At the time of writing, there is a change ongoing in Icelandic public discourse wherein refugees from the Middle East are increasingly becoming new image of the national other while Eastern Europeans disappear from view. However, in the data collected for this article, which reaches to 2019, Eastern Europeans predominate as the national other.

[5] In fact, nearly every newspaper source cited in this article was published during Pride Week.

[6] It was never revealed who sent the bomb threat, nor was there a bomb found.