

8. AFFECTIVE VISUAL RHETORIC AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF THE FAR-RIGHT ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA

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Introduction

Recent studies have discussed the role of social media as an essential arena for the spread of nationalist-populist, anti-immigrant and far-right ideologies (e.g., Hatakka, 2017, Mudde, 2019; Udupa and Pohjonen, 2019). It has been suggested that the success of these political movements is connected to their skillful way of adopting digital technologies and, moreover, their adoption of digital communication cultures from memes and trolling to clever exploitation of online algorithms (Tuters and Hagen, 2020; Doerr, 2017; Topinka, 2018; Titley 2019). Furthermore, scholars have suggested that discursive styles adopted by right-wing actors build on affective framings that predominantly seek to elicit negative emotions (e.g., Salmela and Von Scheve, 2017; Mishra, 2017). It has been pointed out that the circulation of such discourse in society has emotional, behavioral, and normative effects, as it increases prejudice, supports outgroup derogation, pushes the limits of legitimate speech, and shifts antidiscriminatory norms in the long term (e.g., Bilewicz and Soral, 2020; Soral et al., 2017; Udupa and Pohjonen, 2019).

Existing studies have explored the far-right discourse in political outputs and media performances (e.g., Moffit, 2017; Ellinas, 2010), but also in online communication such as websites and blogs (e.g., Atton, 2006; Sakki and Pettersson, 2016; Pettersson and Sakki, 2021) or social networking services (e.g., Hakoköngäs et al. 2020; Maly, 2019). Most of these studies focus on the textual dimension of the content (cf. Hakoköngäs et al. 2020; Sakki and Pettersson, 2021). However, political discourse is increasingly expressed and shared in visual formats from photographs to videos, infographics and memetic image macros (e.g., Marchal et al. 2021; Amit-Danhi and Shifman, 2018). Such forms of communication are supported by the interfaces and algorithms of social media services; many current social media services

are built around visual content (e.g., Instagram, TikTok), and it has been suggested that visual content performs better on social media (Lie and Xie, 2020). Following Serafinelli and Villi (2017), it seems that these technologies push us—and political actors—to think in terms of visibility.

Indeed, aided by technological platforms, we live in a predominantly visual culture (Evans and Hall, 1999; Leaver, Highfield and Abidin, 2020). The circulation of visual content is considered to be an essential part of social media use (e.g., Carah, 2014), but also an increasingly important feature of digital political discourse (Fenton, 2016; Nussbaum, 2018; Byford, 2018). Images are considered to bear political significance because they can easily condense and circulate complex meanings that might be difficult to express in words (Proitz, 2018). They are considered powerful elements of persuasion, as they elicit personal engagement, create memorable experiences, and carry the aura of authenticity (e.g., Joffe, 2008; Byford, 2018). Furthermore, through their ambiguity, they become objects on which affects are easily attached (Blair, 2004). Through sharing, circulation, and repetition, they become objects that accumulate value and collective emotions. This logic is referred to as affective economy by Sarah Ahmed (2004a).

This chapter discusses the growing yet varying role of visual communication in the discourse of the far-right movement. Previous studies have focused on the role of memes and online videos in promoting far-right viewpoints, attacking their opponents, or securing political success through online communication (e.g., Hakoköngäs et al. 2020; Topinka, 2018; Massanari and Chess, 2018; Heikkilä, 2017, Ekman, 2014). This chapter adopts a broader perspective on the various forms of visual discourse by building on three previously collected datasets and case studies that focus on Finnish far-right actors and the visual dimensions of their presence on social media. First, we explore the visual affective practices on the Soldiers of Odin Facebook group as invitations to feel belonging in a collective. Second, we discuss the visually constructed authenticity in the YouTube videos by two prominent anti-immigration movements. Third, we look at the role of online images as network-weaving objects as they are circulated in social media to mobilise affects.

The cases are representative of new kinds of far-right and anti-immigration movements who emerged around the so-called European refugee crisis in 2015-2017, when an unprecedented number of people sought asylum in Europe (e.g., Castelli-Gattinara, 2018). In 2015, Finland received over 32,000 asylum applications, nearly ten times the usual annual averages. As a result, refugee and asylum policies became central political issues. These debates built on the already prevalent and normalized anti-immigrant rhetoric in political discourse, which followed the success of the populist anti-immigrant Finns Party in the national elections in 2008-2015 (Hatakka, 2017; Pettersson & Nortio, this volume).

In this chapter, we conceptualize the visual rhetoric of the far right as an important aspect of the technology-mediated affective economy of the political immigration question and digital racism.¹ As forms of affective practices (Wetherell, 2012), visual forms of communication are essential to the circulation of racist discourses in the contemporary, mediated society. We first review the theoretical approach of investigating visual rhetoric as affective, discursive practices in the mediated affective economy. Then, through the three selected cases, we demonstrate the affective practices concentrated to visual content by the Finnish far-right movements. We argue that instead of just accumulating negative emotions, visual discourse has a central role in the formation of these collectives. We conclude by discussing the importance of visual communication in producing anti-multiculturalist discourse and related social action, and the methodological issues that arise when shifting the empirical focus from textual to visual content.

Affective economies and practices

Recent research has emphasized the importance of affect and emotions in politics and in political communication. Effective messages are often framed affectively and build on figurative language (e.g., Burgers et al. 2016). They aim to bypass rational thinking by talking directly to the receivers' prejudices and basic emotions such as joy or fear (e.g., Bennett and Livingston, 2018). Due to their effectiveness, emotions and affects are, thus, a resource for those in power or those who are striving to accumulate power by generating social movements. Even though emotional is often constructed as the opposite of rational (e.g., Billig, 1991), modern psychology consider emotional and rational deeply intertwined (e.g., Zajonc 1998). Thus, emotions are integral for human decision-making and action. Emotions motivate people and support the formation of new groups and social action (e.g., Gould, 2010; Persson, 2017; Nussbaum, 2018). Thus, one way for political actors to exercise power is changing a society's emotional atmosphere or bringing out new "regimes of feeling" (Reddy, 2001). Scholars have argued that right-wing populist political leaders, in particular, have managed to rise to power by taking advantage of the emotional cultural "era of anger" that emerged as a response to modernity and globalization (Mishra, 2017; Ahmed, 2004b; Wodak, 2015).

¹ Racism here refers to prejudice, discrimination or marginalization of people and groups based on the belief of a race as a differentiating category. However, as argued by Song (2014) and Titley (2019) the concept of racism is constantly shifting and debated, which has led to question the existence of racism, its historical basis and severity in public debates (also Pantti et al. 2020)

In this chapter we understand both emotions and affects as part of the same continuum in a similar way as Ahmed (2004), who sees both connected with meaning-making processes. Such an approach considers immediate affective reactions as part of a larger emotional pool that also include emotions of sadness, joy, or hope. While emotions or affective states could be considered as individual, biological, or even primary psychological reactions (Damasio, 1994), they are also social in the sense that they are influenced by cultural norms, social structures, technologies and practices. Affects, thus, are also collective, which becomes visible in the compassionate, fearful, hateful, or ironic responses to public events (Nikunen, 2019; Wetherell, 2012). This social and cultural approach to affects and affectivity is perhaps most well-known through the work by the cultural theorist Sara Ahmed (2004a; 2004b), who conceptualizes affects not as psychological states but as cultural practices and relationships between human bodies and cultural signs. Later, Margaret Wetherell (2015; 2012) has proposed to bridge the gap between psychological and cultural accounts of affects by building on social psychological theories of affect and fostering a “productive dialogue” between discursive and cognitive approaches.

In this vein, Wetherell (2012) suggests that affects should be analyzed as *practices*. For her, affective practice is the “moment of recruitment and often synchronous assembling of multimodal resources” (Wetherell, 2012, p. 159) when humans, as both biological bodies and social actors, negotiate, evaluate, make decisions and communicate based on their personal experiences, social structures and cultural norms. Thus, affects are sedimented in social formations (p. 103); they are deeply intertwined with shared cultural and political understandings (Ahmed, 2004a; Nikunen, 2019; Wetherell, 2012). Affect, thus, is a distributed, relational and historical phenomenon, entangled in contextual settings of social life (Wetherell, 2015). It is precisely these entanglements and contextual embeddedness that make affects powerful. Ahmed (2004) highlights that affects become powerful and gain value through circulation. They appear in discursive form as signs, figures, objects and ideas, which then move in social relationships. In this circulation, affects and affective objects become shaped by conscious experiences and meaning-making processes.

Visual communication as affective practices

In many ways, the current media ecosystem not only mediates affects but also supports affectivity. Affectivity and affective attunements are essential to forming networked publics in digital environments (e.g., Papacharissi, 2005; Persson, 2017). Papacharissi (2015) depicts social media platforms as a

storytelling infrastructure that enables the feeling of being present and invites forms of affective expression. Moreover, these infrastructures support affectivity by enabling circulation and repetition of the signs and figures they are attached to, which accumulates affects' power (Ahmed, 2004a). Ahmed (2004a, 2004b) refers to this logic of circulation with the concept of *affective economy*. In the affective economy, racism and extreme nationalism gain power from collective, shared affects that acquire more value through repetition.

Indeed, considering the growing prevalence of visual online content, exploring images and their circulation appears as central to the affective economy. Images have vibrant capacity to accumulate and carry meanings. Digital images, in particular, seem to be sticky surfaces where affects nest (Ahmed, 2004; Horsti, 2016; Byford, 2018), and bring urgency and visibility to issues they are attached to (Pantti, 2016). Through visual communication, complex social and political issues might be reduced to simplistic visual frames that promote certain problem definitions, causal interpretations or moral evaluations (Zelizer, 2010; Coleman, 2010). Visuals work to modify and amplify affect as audiences convert their affective understandings and assessments into visual expression (Proitz, 2018; Doerr, 2017; Joffe, 2008). Therefore, images are not just representations, but instead, networks of situated associations and affects (Carah, 2014). Through circulation, they contribute to the shared, affective discourses, thus highlighting the collective dimension of affective meaning-making (Nikunen, 2015).

The effectiveness of images and their circulation as a political tool becomes understandable via the concept of affective economy (Ahmed, 2004a). Images have even more power than texts to modify and activate collective affects because they can convert the abstract, distant and complex into the concrete, proximate and simple with affective significance for large audiences (Proitz, 2018), thus contributing to the normalization of certain discourses (Crosset et al. 2019). However, the force of the images does not only stem from their ability to simplify things. As Margaret Wetherell (2012) has stated, historically produced interpretative associations are an inseparable part of images. Images carry along with them the history of repetition of certain discursive connections and meanings that gives image circulation its power as a political tool. The members of far-right communities presumably share a similar interpretative frame for certain images, and the possibility to react and comment on social media reassures that everyone in the community comes to understand the joint interpretation.

In the context of right-wing politics, several recent studies have explored the different functions of visual communication. Studies with a qualitative approach addressing far-right images on social media have mainly focussed on small samples of certain pictures, tracing the routes of individual images and related

discourses (e.g., Horsti, 2016; Pantti, 2016; Byford, 2018). Some studies have explored the communicative value of YouTube for the far-right in building movement memory and political mobilization (e.g., Askanius and Mylonas, 2015; Ekman, 2014; Laaksonen et al. 2020). One prominent focus has been Internet memes that are used by far-right and alt-right groups as tools to crystallize the message in an easily shareable form that helps in reaching new audiences (Hakoköngäs et al. 2020; Crosset et al. 2019). As discursive signs, memes are strategically ambiguous (e.g., Tuters and Hagen, 2020; Shifman, 2013) and therefore fit well to construct the discourse of the *others* shown to be central for the far-right movement (Mudde, 2019; Sakki and Pettersson, 2016). They are also well fitted to visualize the heroic past of the nation emphasized by far-right actors (Hakoköngäs et al. 2020; Sakki and Pettersson, 2016; Nikunen et al. 2021).

In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the visual communication by the Finnish far-right as discursive, affective practices in the affective economy facilitated by social media platforms. For them, visual communication is a practice of assembling multimodal resources to build affective, social and political formations, which advance the political goals of these groups and through their persuasive power, take part in forming the general discourse of multiculturalism in the Finnish society. All three cases are reported elsewhere, but in this chapter, we revisit them with the lens of visual affectivity. All the material we report on is collected from public social media sites and thus considered available for research use (e.g., TENK, 2019). However, as the pictures often portray people, they are personal data and therefore require ethical considerations. This means, for example, that re-publishing the images would require permission from both copyright holders as well as the persons in the pictures. Due to the controversial nature of the actors studied, we do not have the required permissions. Furthermore, we acknowledge that re-printing them also takes part in their affective circulation. Therefore, we have omitted the actual images from this chapter but aimed to describe their content in detail.

Visual dimensions of Soldiers of Odin

Our first case study explored the collective dimensions of visual affective practice in the Soldiers of Odin (SOO, see Bauvois, Pyrhönen and Pyytiäinen, this volume) Facebook group. We looked at the visual affective practice of sharing visual content in a particular social context of the movement and the sociotechnical environment of Facebook, and the ways in which political ideologies are driven affectively through visual collective practices (Nikunen et al. 2021). While social media platforms shape and encourage certain forms of interaction, groups tend to establish their own particular practices and

affective styles over time. The starting point of the study was to explore how the SOO's Facebook site invites 'affective attunement' through sharing images: how affectivity in social media is connected to the visual and discursive meaning-making process, technological affordances and relations between users and communities.

We analyzed 286 images posted in the SOO Facebook group.² To understand how images evoke their affective character, it is important to analyze not only their representational level, but also how images become embedded and shaped in circuits of social practice. To do this we analyzed the representational level of the images (*what* is in the image), their mode (how images are *constructed, sourced and circulated*) and their reactions (how images are *responded* to with the emoji reactions Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry³). (Rose, 2014; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). We first categorized all images in different themes and then chose the three largest themes for further analysis: 1) Muslims/migrants 2) Vikings and 3) Self-portraits of SOO members. The three groups of images presented different affective repertoires and they also invited distinct emotional reactions.

The first group of images depicted stereotypical representations of Muslims and migrants as dangerous or bogus asylum seekers. The mode of these images was propagandist; they constituted selective, exaggerated, manipulative, coordinated efforts to influence perceptions of particular groups of people, Muslims and migrants (Cole, 1996). Their generic framing draws on a digital bricolage culture of memes, which produce associative and stereotypical ideas—general rather than detailed and contextual (e.g., Shifman, 2013). With memetic comparisons and visual combinations, the images sought to 'disclose the ugly truth' about Muslims and migrants as allegedly violent, primitive frauds. Posting and sharing these images visualised the group's ideological grounds and legitimized the SOO's role as protectors. Not surprisingly, propagandist images were reacted to mostly with anger and "haha" reactions. Anger and laughter appeared to respond to the claims inscribed in the representations, and as public responses, these reactions also fortified their affective feel.

The images in the second theme consisted of pictures of Vikings and their god, Odin. They draw on Viking figures as 'racially pure', representing superior strong white masculinity. The pagan cult of Odinism has

² Data was collected through the Facebook Graph API. The analyzed images were posted between December 2015 (when the SOO Facebook group was founded) and February 2017.

³ We understand that these reactions arise from a limited selection of emoticons and should not be interpreted as an exhaustive reflection of the emotions and affects in the group, but rather those supported by the platform.

rapidly gained popularity in North American and European neo-Nazi and far-right groups (e.g., Pollard, 2016). The mode of the images was mythical; drawings of ancient, ruthless Viking warriors operated on the level of fantasy. The images carried 'mythic essence': dark, dramatic drawings of objects and texts with a historical feel. The Viking imagery invented and naturalized the connection between the Viking warriors and the SOO. The mythic pictures were reacted to with hahas, likes and loves, but more importantly, they were least reacted to with angry emoticons. While other themes evoked clear affective responses, the mythic images were responded to with more subdued reactions and embrace.

The third theme was the most popular one consisting of images where the members of the Soldiers of Odin pose with their backs to the camera, showing the SOO logo on the back of their jackets. They convey a sense of joint masculine power and discipline with heavily built bodies and shaved heads. Posing in different places and settings, the images stressed the group's sense of presence: We are everywhere. The mode of these images was phatic: they functioned to strengthen and maintain social relations, a sense of us-ness. Their affective force lay in their appearance, standing one after another, fortifying a sense of unity and togetherness. Again, not surprisingly these images were responded to mostly with likes and hearts, thus demonstrating their function as a positive reaction towards the group, solidifying the sense of community.

On the whole, the study showed how images and their responses together amplified particular affective registers; the group incorporated different sensibilities of *propagandist*, *mythic* and *phatic* communication and reacted to these images distinctly. The clear differences in the reactions amongst the three themes illustrate how visual affective practice works. Each image theme attracted distinct reactions, whereas the group shared an understanding of how to respond with shared norms of interpretation. Visual affective practice was also furthered by the social media infrastructures, affordances, and platform policies such as an imperative of sharing, algorithmically enhanced networks of like-minded groups and space for community-building. Overall, the public sharing of images and their reactions operated as a collective visual practice reflecting and shaping moral values. This further demonstrates the importance of visual affective practice in political identity-building and the ways it is used to legitimize controversial, harmful ideas and activities, such as racism, as a collective, affective truth in a new media environment.

Affective authenticity of anti-immigration online videos

The pictures of SOO members posing on the streets was not the only dimension of visual narration connecting physical and virtual spaces during the so-called refugee crisis. Our second case example focuses on the video activism of Finnish anti-immigration movements; the ways in which they used online videos to stream and record their street activism during demonstrations 2016-2017 (Laaksonen et al. 2020). We investigated the YouTube presence established by two major Finnish anti-immigration movements, Finland First (Suomi Ensin) and Close the Borders! (Rajat kiinni!), and key figures associated with the movements. These Finnish groups have followed the international trajectory of YouTube becoming a dominant space for the far-right as alternative media (e.g., Ekman, 2014; Askanius and Mylonas, 2015). We used network analysis combined with qualitative analysis of the video content and genres to examine how YouTube was utilized by these emergent groups for movement building and promoting their views of the refugee question.

Our focus in the original study (Laaksonen et al. 2020) was on the forms and discursive strategies utilized in the anti-immigration video activism. Through the qualitative analysis we divided the videos into three main categories, based on their style, content, and function: documentation (live streaming and recording events), vlogs, and re-cuts (re-framed content, edited compilations of other material). Furthermore, by exploring the chosen message strategies we identified three central strategies of video activism: movement building through documentation, discursive controversy generation, and personal branding practices. The combination of genres and strategies interestingly builds on existing well-known genres from both mainstream television and from YouTube itself, thus generating a mixture of traditional media and platform logics. They construct not only the collective movement identity, but also emerging proto-political and political personalities.

The genre of documentation was most prominent in our data. It consisted of videos that reproduce the documentary reporting style of mainstream television, with an aim to authentically observe real events such as demonstrations and marches as they happen. The visual presentation often included an audio commentary that further framed the events shown visually. In particular, live-streaming and documentaries were used to mediate visual material directly from the Suomi Maidan sit-in counter-demonstration that went on for several months in central Helsinki, showing the quarrels the demonstrators had with the neighboring sit-in demonstration by the refugees and their allies, or with the police. These videos produced a visual archive for the collective identity of the movement, with an aim to promote affective inclusion for like-minded spectators and supporting circulation of not only the discourse, but also the visual experience.

As an immediate and affective practice, the videos extend the space and time of street action and foster discursive and affective participation remotely (also Ekman, 2014). By live-streaming their political struggle online, the anti-immigration activists presented themselves as victims of the too permissive immigration policies, but at the same time as soldiers defending the nation from the “dangerous, illegal immigrants”, inviting the online viewers as their witnesses. Indeed, a prominent discursive strategy in the videos, both in audio and visual material, was to create antagonism, otherness, and resentment towards the discursively constructed common enemy—the immigrants and the pro-immigration activists. By constructing the other, they also built their own movement and promoted us-ness similar to the case of Soldiers of Odin.

Thus, in their video practices, the anti-immigration activists clearly followed the discursive framing of the otherness that has been shown to be a prominent feature of far-right rhetoric (e.g., Sakki and Pettersson, 2016; Mudde, 2019). Visually, this was done, first, by video recording any events where there seemed to be immigrants or pro-immigration activists acting in an undisciplined manner, intruding the nationalists’ demonstration, or having debates with the police. Second, contradictions were frequently built by re-framing media content from the mainstream media by visual or contextual elements such as video titles, descriptions, or subtitling.

Another authenticity-enforcing genre prominent in our data were the vlogs: following the emblematic genre of YouTube, these videos typically featured an individual or a few persons talking to the camera in monologue style, inviting input from their viewers. Some were diary-like, long sessions filmed in a domestic setting, while others were more programmatic talk-show-style sessions with regular showtime and sometimes invited guests. The most established channel was the weekly YouTube talk-show branded as “Hate-speech FM,” which featured two hosts in a domestic setting, discussing current issues and commenting on national and international mainstream media reports in a talk-show style. This channel also had a branded visual identity with starting frames and overlay texts.

Aesthetically, the anti-immigration documentary videos were amateurish and unedited, lacking the stylized imagery and symbolism present in the Soldiers of Odin pictures or in neo-fascist videos (Ekman, 2014). The lack of post-production elements could be considered as one way of conveying authenticity, however, combined with genre styles that clearly borrow from existing media formats. This was particularly evident on one particular channel in our data that focused on streaming investigative journalism style documentaries from everyday situations where Finns were experiencing some kind of alleged injustice due to special rights given to immigrants or refugees. The affective attunement of anger

related to injustice can be a powerful feeling motivating social action (Nussbaum, 2018). Only the Hate-speech FM show differentiated from our material with its visually and structurally branded style—while the rhetoric still stayed faithful to the genre of rough, rude, and authentic language similar to the other videos.

As an affective practice, the online videos were a form of emotional investment from the activists, building both us-ness and otherness and through them constructing and reinforcing controversies through the visual authenticity afforded by the live video clips. The videos became assembled as visual resources to the narrative of the far-right actors, bringing immediacy and a sense of realness to their political claims. They combined a feeling of authentic presentation, showing and archiving things as they happen with the credibility introduced by adopted media genres that the receivers are familiar with. Thus, they live by and make use of existing visual conventions.

Affective economy of circulating visuals

For the images to gain prominence and affectivity, they need to be shared and circulated in the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004a). Our third case study (Hokka and Nelimarkka, 2020) focused on the circulation of far-right and nationalist-populist images online by scrutinizing the image circulation of Finnish nationalist-populist Facebook groups⁴. The study showed how the possibility to circulate images among users and groups—a foundational feature of online platforms—creates space for implementing and spreading far-right rhetoric. Reacting to images, commenting on images, and circulating them are affective practices through which shared collective affects and emotions of far-right and nationalist-populist supporters, such as fear, insecurity, resentment and hatred towards perceived 'enemies' (Salmela and Scheve, 2017) can be expressed.

We first conducted a thematic analysis of the 7,607 images that circulated in the Finnish nationalist-populist Facebook groups. In the analysis, each image was categorized according to its theme. Over one third of the images (37.2%) were related to refugees and/or Muslim immigrants, in general, people of color that were represented in a stereotypical way. Less than one third (24.3 %) criticized institutions of

⁴ The size of the communities varied from a few hundred to nearly 64,000 users. Data were collected from February 2009 to February 2017 using Facebook API. Most images were posted in late 2015 and early 2016. In total, we collected 54,688 posts and 7,607 images.

the 'elite' such as the government and the EU, but also the leftist movements or politicians. Nearly 10% of the images presented could be considered as extreme 'nationalist', portraying either Finnish soldiers in the Second World War or the actions of the far-right groups themselves. Together these images strongly marked the 'outsiders' and 'insiders' of the nation: immigrants and/or people of color, feminists and 'leftists' were mocked relentlessly whereas 'white (male) warriors' or far-right activists were hailed as saviors of the nation and the white race.

Yet, a closer look into the online practices of image circulation revealed that not only the number of images is significant when analyzing the rhetoric of far-right images. Certain images are more 'sticky' than others as they grab users' attention in the constant flow of social media content and make them react (Paasonen, 2016). Thus, reactions, likes, comments and sharing indicate that the user has invested their affective attention to these particular images, and used their time to react by liking, writing a comment or possibly sharing the image. For this reason, we took three central images into closer investigation: 1) the most reacted image, 2) the most commented image, and 3) the most circulated image; and conducted a discourse-historical analysis (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009) to see which kind of images catalyzed feelings and actions.

The most reacted image depicted a demonstration by the Soldiers of Odin in the main street of the city of Tampere, Finland, in February 2016. Although the SOO Facebook group was clearly the largest community (over 60,000 members) during the research period, and politically significant as the previous case shows, SOO was not the most active community: three other communities had significantly more posts and comments despite their smaller size. In the image, the marchers are pictured from behind, which underlines their unity in their similar black jackets with the SOO logo. It is an image of men-as-soldiers that represents and intertwines masculinity, discipline, power, and nationalism as heroic virtues in front of the perceived enemy (see Mosse, 1996; Ekman, 2014; Miller-Idriss, 2017). The vast number of reactions demonstrates the affective force of the image and indicates which kind of images are most strongly approved by the Finnish nationalist-populist movement.

The most commented image was an image of the freshly crowned Miss Helsinki with the runners-up in January 2017. The post related to the image was written in English, indicating that the original sender, who probably was Finnish, wanted to reach international audiences. Even though the commenters apparently came from different countries across Europe and North America, they repeated the similar, racist interpretations of the image, either explicitly or ironically declaring the new Miss Helsinki as unfit to represent 'Finnishness' because of her dark skin color and mocking her appearance either as manly or

ape-like, so engaging in blatant dehumanization of her (Haslam, 2006). The comments illustrated how commenting works as an affective practice which enables expression of collective resentment and hatred. They also indicated how the affective economy of image circulation works on online platforms: the reactions and discussions related to images offer a space for far-right groups to create bonding between its members locally and transnationally by repeating similar messages and getting approval from other members.

The third image that was most circulated among the Finnish nationalist-populist Facebook groups was a modification of Finland's coat of arms. The official coat of arms has a yellow lion on red background, but the modification had the same colors as the Finnish flag: blue and white, which are generally considered to be 'national' colors. The modification was accompanied with a Finnish text: "Finland first. We will not surrender, we will not give up". This clear, easy-to-share message was the likely reason for its wide circulation. The text referred to a claim of a constant threat to the nation, both inside the state (e.g. immigrants and other 'suspicious' groups) and outside (e.g. the EU or certain non-European countries). The claim is typical of extreme nationalist movements throughout Europe (Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Ekman, 2014; Sakki and Pettersson, 2016; Salmela and Scheve, 2017). The image works as a call to battle for the members of the far-right and nationalist groups. Its 'stickiness' and affective force is grounded on the shared fear against invasion by the mentioned groups and hatred against the enemy.

Yet, images were not only circulated between local groups. Rather, our investigation showed how image circulation on a transnational and global level fueled far-right movements. To track the movement of the over 7,600 images shared in these groups, we conducted a reverse search to find images similar to those on the communities.⁵ Image fingerprinting and similarity analysis was used to identify exact matches. To explore the transnational dimension, we applied automated language detection to examine the main site of each image URL domain and its language to identify Finnish sites and non-Finnish sites. The list was then manually curated to highlight large global platforms (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest, imgur), as on these platforms the language of the site would not correctly indicate potential users' nationalities.

The analysis of the image circulation from and to the Finnish nationalist-populist and far-right groups showed that the great majority of the images had been published on some non-Finnish, such as Swedish or British sites too, either before or after appearing on Finnish Facebook groups. The images from Finnish

⁵ This was done using the meta reverse image search service Incandescent (<http://incandescent.xyz/>).

websites and global platforms were in the minority. However, when we analyzed which images were most often shared on the Finnish Facebook communities, the significant role of global platforms became evident; the analysis revealed that an image also present on a global platform was shared more often in the studied communities than images from Finnish or non-Finnish sites. Therefore, global platforms seem to have a central role in image circulation in the cross-national context.

The results of the third study implicate the significance of image sharing and circulation for the far-right movements. Even though the analysis scrutinized the image circulation in Finnish far-right and nationalist-populist Facebook communities, our investigation offers a broader view on the affective practices of image circulation among transnational far-right movements. While the 'stickiest' images in the Finnish communities came from Finland, even these images were connected with the transnational far-right network either ideologically or through the platform features, such as commenting. Furthermore, the platforms themselves act effectively both as an image resource and as a publication channel. Thus, the local far-right, although motivated by local concerns, can use transnational and global image material to strengthen their supporter's ideological and affective stances.

Conclusion

Our three cases demonstrate the crucial role of visual communication for the far-right groups whose discourses are mediated in the affective economy sustained by social media platforms. Images work to amplify affective registers and sensibilities typical for the groups. This was particularly visible in the propagandistic, mythic and phatic communication styles present in the images shared in the Soldiers of Odin group, where the emotional reactions implied that there is a shared register of affective interpretations. Similarly, the modified coat of arms image that was the most circulated image among the nationalist-populist Facebook groups highlighted fear against invasion and love towards the own nation—both deemed central and sticky affective stances to the right-wing nationalistic discourse (see Sakki and Pettersson, 2016; Salmela and Scheve, 2017).

Visual affective practices, supported by social media infrastructure, support community-building of the like-minded across time and space (Byford, 2018). This was particularly visible in the shared visual-emotional repertoire in the Soldiers of Odin visuals, but also in the affectively framed YouTube communication by Suomi Ensin and Rajat Kiinni! Movements. The YouTube videos further worked to generate visual authenticity and immediacy for the movements' messages, afforded timeliness through

the streaming video practice. The third study proved how image circulation enables the functioning of affective economy that fuels the far-right movement as it creates a sphere for expressing far-right discourse as well as belonging to the 'white race' and the 'right' political group. Thus, the visual discourse of these groups acts as an argument for mobilization, identification and positioning (e.g., Joffe, 2008; Potter, 2012).

Further, visuals play a crucial role in constructing and positioning the antagonists, the deviant others (see Sakki and Pettersson, 2016; Crosset et al. 2019; Mudde, 2019). Among the images that circulated in the national-populist Facebook groups over one third were representations of stereotypical Muslim immigrants or refugees, and the second largest group represented elite institutions or leftist groups. Both groups were also discursively constructed as a common enemy throughout the YouTube material in our second study, by filming their actions with a stigmatizing commentary, and by generating derogating recuts of their appearances in mainstream media. Visuals, thus, play a role in legitimizing controversial ideas and harmful stereotypes as they become embedded in the collectively created, affective truth shared in these digital collectives, again essential for the discursive constitution of the collective negative emotions (e.g. Wodak, 2015).

Investigating the affective visual practices by the Finnish far-right groups also sheds light on the transnational networking capabilities afforded by the images. It could be argued that images are more polysemic and ambiguous than text (e.g., Joffe, 2008), which means the sender has less control over the elicited emotions: the affective assemblage is a precarious structure and risky strategy for political mobilization. However, given the shared registry of affects evident through the emotional reactions given to images in the Soldiers of Odin group, it seems that the affective stances and related discourses are consolidated enough in the far-right movement. Furthermore, the traces of transnational network-weaving on YouTube shows that these affective and visual practices have the potential to connect the nationalist groups across borders and language-barriers. Image circulation, in particular, seems to create and sustain rightist and nationalist networks and connections that twist between local groups, transnational sites and global platforms. In this way the visual discourse and its circulation work as effective political tools to gather existing and potential supporters together online and unify the political message of the far-right supporters on a transnational level.

All in all, it is crucial how the increasingly visual communication on the social media platforms generates a supporting infrastructure of social mobilization. We suggest that the affective stances typical of the right-wing movements, such as anger, shame and feelings of injustice, accompanied with the heroic

nationalistic narratives, are particularly well suited for the affective, discursive and visual practices afforded and encouraged by social media. Most notably, the design and algorithms of the platforms seem to be well-suited for sharing and circulating images, reinforcing their affective stances. This is further supported by features such as the emoji reactions implemented by Facebook in 2018. Furthermore: while previous research has emphasized the centrality of negative emotions to the far-right movement (e.g., Salmela and Von Scheve, 2017; Mishra, 2017), our empirical cases demonstrate how they also have a generative role in the sense that they enhance the sense of community among the far-right actors online. The affectively framed visuals seem to play a fundamental part in achieving this, as also suggested, for example, by Joffe (2008).

Based on our empirical cases it could be stated that emotions and visual communication are an essential feature of the social formations that feed the attention and success of these movements. Indeed, it is not only a question of visibility or circulating visuals, but how these visual elements live and produce further life in their contextual settings: the visuals are reacted to, how they elicit identification, and how are they shared and circulated. They simultaneously operate by producing presence and immediacy, but also movement memory through a visual archive. Thus, they invite affective attunement with the far-right discourses and ideologies in the present but also in a historical continuum. Furthermore, affect and visual representation are deeply intertwined with political understandings and arguments central to these groups—in Wetherell's (2012) terms, in the assemblages of multimodal resources. This generates a call for a multifaceted exploration of these assemblages. As Fenton (2016) points out, the radical politics itself cannot be left out from the analyses of digital mobilization. Therefore, it is evermore important to study also the verbal and visual political discourses connected to nationalism, multiculturalism and racism, as well as the psychological mechanisms related to their reception.

Methodologically, however, studying visual content and its circulation in the digital environment introduces novel challenges for research, particularly when exploring large visual data sets. While there are established methodological approaches for studying image content and composition in qualitative research (e.g., Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), they are laborious and therefore only recommended for smaller sets of data. Automated methods to provide textual label objects that the visual recognition system "sees" on pictures are emerging and increasingly used by social scientists (Bosch et al. 2019; Naik et al. 2017). However, raw image labels only provide a rough perspective on *what* is on the image, and thus rarely directly answer social science-relevant questions (Naik et al. 2017). An alternative approach is to use images as raw data; this can be done to identify similar images via image fingerprints, like we did

to explore image circulation, sort images by colors or draw composite images to represent multiple images (Pearce et al. 2020). The benefit of these approaches is that they are native to the visual mode, whereas transforming the image into text labels reduces the representation.

Nevertheless, particularly from a psychological orientation, visual analysis calls for human eyes. Our studies all applied a mixed methods design. This shows our preference to include human interpretation in the analysis, following ideas prominent also in large-scale analysis of textual data (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Laaksonen et al. 2017). Furthermore, analysis of visual content on platforms cannot be separated from understanding the platforms, their affordances and context, which further highlights the need to bring in humans into the analysis. Finally, the landscape of social media is constantly changing. Many newer visual platforms offer fewer opportunities to automatically extract and track content. Therefore, tracing the visual communication by radical political groups becomes increasingly difficult, albeit it is ever more important for understanding their role in society.

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