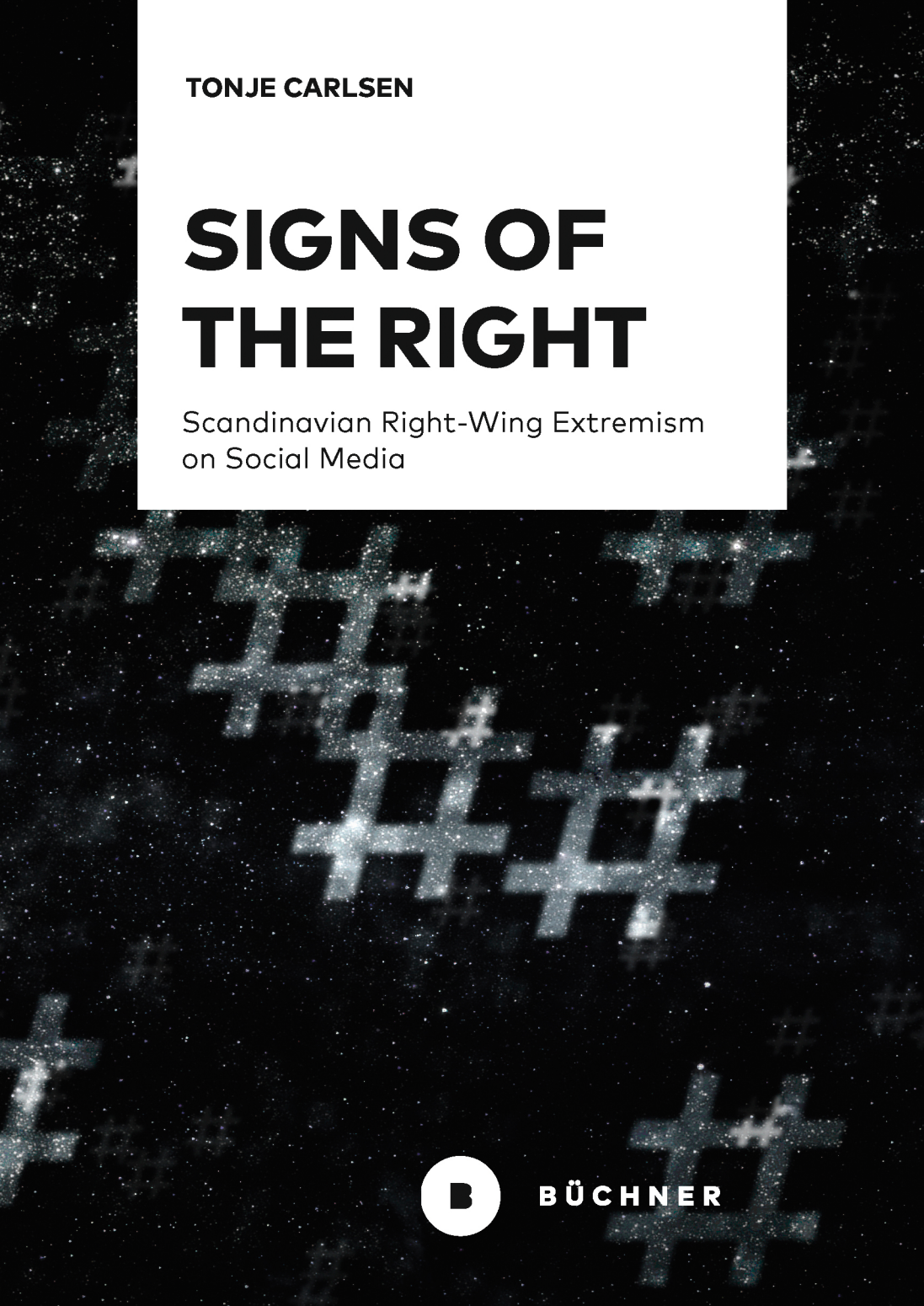
TONJE CARLSEN

SIGNS OF THE RIGHT

Scandinavian Right-Wing Extremism on Social Media



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Tonje Carlsen is a teacher in history, social science and English. She studied history within a master's program for teacher education and wrote her thesis about the semiotics of right-wing populism in Scandinavian social media.

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As teachers, my colleagues and I are constantly concerning ourselves with the children and teenagers, and even more so with the world they have to grow up in. Indeed, these past three years with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza have given even more reasons to educate and raise awareness among our youngsters. The truth is, as we often discuss during our lunchbreaks, that many Norwegian children are oblivious to the privilege of being born in this country. Unfortunately, this ignorance sometimes manifests as dangerous ideas in some people; ideas that we teachers sometimes pick up on, while they at other times go under the radar. While it would be unfair to place this responsibility on teachers alone, one of my greatest fears is to see a former student on the news, having committed acts of terrorism. This work is meant to raise awareness on the dangerous ideas that are being spread by right-wing extremists, often on social media, in Norway and Sweden today and I hope that none of my students will ever identify themselves with such movements.

This work stands as my contribution after having studied history and social science for five years at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Nord University in Bodø, Norway. During these past five years, I have had the pleasure of learning from and studying under the supervision of many talented and passionate scholars, whom I have come to admire greatly.

I wish to thank my wonderful supervisor, Frank Jacob, who has guided me throughout the whole process of writing this book. I thank you and appreciate all the time and effort you have put into helping me, and for making the process truly enjoyable.

I also wish to thank my mother and father who have encouraged and supported me these past five years. I am extremely grateful for your continuous support and motivating words.

Tonje Carlsen

Contents

1 Introduction

@Bao Pilsen: Sorry, but it's difficult not to be racist when it's people from Arabic races that run around and destroy cultures in ungratefulness.

@Jimsallabim1: ready for war.

@User3778058354940: Sweden needs to grow balls. Throw the lot out. Funny that Muslim countries don't want them.

@Clyde Smith: Liberals destroyed Sweden with mass immigration. Good job now you're paying the price!

@Freddiebloggs: Just another cesspit thanks to the WOKE Government.

@Dee: Third world human waste.

@Bella_08: They're all animals. They have low class always fighting always killing, always wanting war. Fuck them it's all coming to an end anyway.

@Michaeldoescringe: Save Europe.

@User1917018910414: Sand niggers.

@Brenda 69: Sweden. Where every single girl lay down with a blackie and tarnished their bloodline forever. Mixing blonde with mud.[1]

1 Figure A: @FedUpGenX, "Stockholm 1955 versus 2023," see the appendix for comments.

These are the most liked comments, among 2,527 others, under a TikTok video that compares life in Sweden's capital, Stockholm, in 1955 and 2023. A comment section like this may be shocking to read, but it is not in any way unique. Anti-immigrant, anti-liberal, xenophobic, and racist remarks are all a regularity in right-wing extremist discourse and interactions. Since Sweden began taking in refugees and immigrants from the Middle East, right-wing extremists there, like in many other European countries, have been claiming that the nation-state is in "crisis," and that Europe must be "saved." This was also the essence of the infamous manifesto published by the Norwegian far-right terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, which was titled "A European Declaration of Independence." The attacks in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, and the political summer camp of the Norwegian Labor Party on the Utøya island, put Norwegian right-wing extremism on the map. While this incident shocked the vast majority of Norway's citizens, some were inspired by Breivik's actions, and the Norwegian terrorist is regularly praised by right-wing extremists around the world.

Today, right-wing extremism appears to have gained quite a solid foothold in the Scandinavian countries. Freedom of speech, freedom to organize oneself, and the freedom to demonstrate are all democratic rights that can inadvertently create an environment ripe for the rise of such a movement. Consequently, right-wing extremist organizations have established themselves in both Norway and Sweden. In Norway we find the anti-Islam organization SIAN (Stop the Islamization of Norway), whose members concern themselves mainly with Muslim immigrants. In Sweden, and the other Nordic countries, we find the Nordic Resistance Movement, which is an anti-immigration organization. We also see that far-right political parties have gathered more votes at national elections since the immigration "wave" and the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015. In Norway, the far-right party "Fremskrittspartiet" (The Progress Party), has become quite popular, especially in the peripheries. In Sweden, "Sverigedemokraterna" (Swedish Democrats) have become a competitor among the country's two largest political parties.

Right-wing extremism and its supporters somehow exist on multiple levels and platforms in Norway and Sweden: as ordinary people online on social media platforms, who use the anonymity of the internet to express radical thoughts that are publicly prohibited; as members of far-right organizations, who actively support the movement; and as supporters and voters of right-wing political parties, who use their voting rights to support anti-immigrant demagogues. This is a cause for concern, and this is reflected in the Norwegian police's annual national threat assessment for the year 2024, where right-wing extremism and Islamist terrorism are regarded as the two biggest threats after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The police conclude as follows: "When it comes to right-wing extremism, this threat will be highly affected by young adults and minors who are being radicalized via right-wing extremist digital arenas. Experiences from Norway and other countries show that some of these individuals can develop an intention of committing acts of terrorism."[2]

In order to control and monitor this development, it is crucial that studies on online right-wing extremism are being conducted. This is necessary for both Norway and Sweden, two countries where we see that right-wing extremism appears to be well settled. The question is, however: What exactly do right-wing extremists in Norway and Sweden concern themselves with today? What are the defining characteristics of this type of right-wing extremism? How do right-wing extremists define threats and communicate them among each other? Lastly, how and where do these aspects come into view, and in what way are they presented or coded?

2 PST, "Nasjonal Trusselvurdering 2024," accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.pst.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024_uuweb.pdf.

1.1 Research Questions

My main research question follows these initial considerations and asks: what are the defining aspects of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism today? How, why, and where are these aspects presented and how are they actually communicated? To what degree do the codes and semiotics of Scandinavian right-wing extremism also differ between the two countries?

Because Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism are influenced by the introduction of social media, I also aim to examine the significance of this. I will consequently also try to critically reflect on the following issue: What role do social media platforms play in right-wing extremist activism in Norway and Sweden? Where is far-right discourse being posted and what type of content is being published?

1.2 Selection of Literature

In this study I have used a selection of literature that has provided me with a theoretical framework, a historical overview, and a methodological toolset. The first section of literature is a combination of theories on *nationalism* and theoretical reflections on right-wing extremism. Nationalism theory appears to me as a natural and obvious choice, as this force of human history is a central part of right-wing extremist movements. This theoretical section will outline and discuss various works, including books and articles written by authors from different periods of time. Most central to this section are discussions regarding definitions on the terms *nation* and *nationalism*, which have proven themselves difficult to apply universal definitions to. While many authors have furnished this ongoing debate with valuable insights and concepts, Benedict Anderson's contributions are central to this work. His conceptualization of the nation as an "imagined community" (1983) is discussed in depth alongside concepts developed by Ernest Renan, who defined the nation as "a soul, a spiri-

tual principle" (1882). Secondly, theories on nationalism emphasize the importance of history, which is made apparent throughout the analysis of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism within this study. Nationalists concern themselves with the nation's common legacy, giving history an important role in defining one's nation. A key concept here is the *national narrative*—The stories that are weaved together to construct the backbone of a nations collective-identity, which also form the building-blocks of these movements, which is reflected upon by the historian Stefan Berger (2007), among several others. Lastly, works that consider nationalism's exclusionary aspect play a key role both in the theoretical section, but also throughout my analysis. Nationalists' tendency to imagine the nation as limited encourages a constant debate around which persons and groups belong inside and outside boundaries of the nation. Many historians and social scientists have contributed novel ideas to this discussion, most relevant being the concept of the "Other."[3] Regarding the theory on right-wing extremism developed within this study, a wide variety of literature is utilized to explore the diverse aspects of these movements on a general level. Among the most central works here is Bernt Hagtvet's "Right-wing Extremism in Europe" (1994), which examines several common features of European right-wing extremism. The second section of literature forms the basis for a brief overview of the *historical development* of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden. This selection of literature consists of two prominent explanations for the rise of the far-right in these two countries: an ethnic absolutism and the connectivity brought about by the internet. The face of ethnic absolutism in Norway and Sweden is determined by its clear Islamophobic tendencies, which several authors outline—most notably Skenderovic and Späti (2019) and Chris Allen (2014). The second

3 See Frank Jacob and Cartsen Schapkow, eds. *Nationalism in a Transnational Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021) and Jan Werner Müller, "The Politics of Fear Revisited," in *Nationalism and Populism: Expressions of Fear or Political Strategies?,* eds. Cartsen Schapkow & Frank Jacob (Berlin/Oklahoma: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 11–24.

explanation for the development of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden stems from the emergence of the Internet, and specifically social media, which is a relatively new feature from a broader historical perspective. The literature that I have used here discusses various ways in which right-wing extremists have come to adapt to our "digital age," the most central works here being those written by Andrea Rizzi and John Griffiths (2016), Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens and Logan Macnair (2019), and Bruce Hoffmann (2019).

The third and last section of literature contains the works that provide the *methodological toolset* of this study. As will be elaborated upon in this section, a part of this work is a study of the *semiotics* of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremist social media content. Semiotics, which can be defined as the study of *signs* and sign systems, provide a useful framework when studying the combination of images and texts and interpreting the message behind them. Central to this selection of literature are semiotic concepts introduced by Roland Barthes, which have been summarized by Hélène de Burgh-Woodman and Jan Brace-Govan (2009), in addition to Marcel Danesi (2009) or Umberto Eco's definitions of semiotic terms (1976) and Sebastián Barreneche's understanding of how semiotics can be used as a way of "othering" (2023).

1.3 What Gap Have I Filled?

Even though a substantial amount has been written about the far-right in both Norway and Sweden, and equally about the online presence of right-wing extremists', there appears to be a lack of material on the Norwegian and Swedish far-right *after* the introduction of social media platforms.[4] This study intends to put forth novel insight regarding the apparent significance of this, as I argue that the

4 International Centre for Counter Terrorism, "Bibliography: Internet-Driven Right-Wing Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (2020): 168–189.

introduction of social media as a platform for activism has brought about substantial changes in how extreme ideology is spread. This could also change the different characteristics of various movements around the world. Secondly, this study hopes to shed light on how these extremists use semiotics as a tool and as a way of spreading far-right ideology to recruit people. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a more extensive insight into the role that social media plays in spreading extreme ideology in the context of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden—two countries in which such movements are increasingly recognized as threats to national security.

1.4 Method: Semiotic Analysis of Social Media Content

Since a large part of the study examines the use of social media, an analytical toolset was required to better grasp how extreme ideology is spread online. Consequently, my choice of method is a *semiotic analysis of social media content*. Because this study examines right-wing extremist rhetoric, it could be argued that critical discourse analysis constitutes a better fitting methodology. In this regard, I would argue that this has become a natural part of my discussion overall, and that the semiotic approach is unique and has its strengths; it is well suited when studying social media activism specifically due to its focus on images and texts, and ensuing interpretations of them. As aforementioned, the purpose of semiotics is the *interpretation* of *signs* and sign systems. In the context of social media, signs can be understood as anything that can be regarded as a written or spoken form of communication. This is primarily what social media consist of: images and texts. This applies to both the sender and the recipient—the sender publishes something with the intent of communicating a specific message, while the recipient either interprets the message as it was intended by the creator or not, depending, among others, on whether both share the same semiotic code to cypher and decipher the message properly.

In order to get an overview of the different aspects of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden today, I have chosen to observe and gather data on the online activity of these movements. In the process of collecting said data, I spent an extensive amount of time on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X (previously known as Twitter). The majority of the activity observed was found on TikTok, followed by Instagram, X, and then Facebook. The respective online platforms provided the material I have used to find examples that concern the spread of right-wing extremism on and through social media. I also searched for white nationalist subreddits on Reddit; however, many of these users had been banned, and I found it difficult to locate the far-right side of the platform. It is possible that content such as this is hidden, which can be achieved through private accounts and groups.

I assume that the work of moderators of these platforms can partly explain the access to white nationalist forums and users. This has certainly made collecting material a challenge, as both posts and entire accounts are continuously being deleted and banned from the platforms for violating the platforms' guidelines, hence why most of my examples that are attached in the appendix are links to screen recordings and screenshots, rather than links to the direct source. In contrast, TikTok has developed a reputation for having "lazy" moderators, which appears to be at least partially correct based on the expansive amount of data I was able to gather from this platform. I was often quite surprised at the content I found on TikTok that had not been deleted. Simultaneously, as is expanded upon later in this work, online right-wing extremists appear to have found ways to avoid getting banned through implicit discrimination.

When deciding which examples to use to best illustrate the trends that have become apparent throughout the process of data-collection, I have developed two main criteria: examples that represent the *overall impression* of content published by Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists, and creators who do not necessarily have a big following.

Firstly, in terms of examples, I have attempted to use media formats which represent the "natural" flow of content that appears on people's social media platforms. This is important, because I seek to find out what *type* of content is being published by far-right creators. On TikTok, for instance, there is one page where you can see content posted by other accounts that you follow, and you have one page termed "for you," where you see a selection of content that the platform's algorithm believes to appeal to the user. Common to all four platforms is the media format of "memes," which either appear as an image or a text, or as a combination of both. When searching for this type of content, I have found that this media format is popular with right-wing extremist creators. A possible explanation for this is that memes allow creators to hide their intention behind the style of the format. This argument is further confounded by Eline Zenner and Dirk Geeraerts in their article "One Does Not Simply Process Memes: Image Macros as Multimodal Constructions" (2018). Here, the authors argue that *intertextuality* and *network individualism* are key concepts when understanding how memes work, writing that "many memes only make sense when the recipient has sufficient experience with Internet memes."[5] In utilizing this format, extremists eliminate viewers that do not understand how to interpret memes or are unable to decipher the respective semiotic coding used for the combination of image and text. Older people, for example, will be less likely to understand the intended meaning of the posts, if they are to encounter them. This means that more mature, and possibly more critical thinking people, are unable to provide their perspective on such content due to their lack of experience with online platforms or shared meme content.

Secondly, when it comes to the creators, I have chosen to present some that in no way stand out among other right-wing creators. I

5 Eline Zenner and Dirk Geeraerts, "One Does Not Simply Process Memes: Image Macros as Multimodal Constructions," in *Cultures and Traditions of Wordplay and Wordplay Research*, eds. Esme Winter-Froemel and Verena Thaler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 172.

wish to see what content is being published by "ordinary" people who do not really identify with right-wing extremist ideology but use the anonymity of the internet to also post respective contents that appeal to the right-wing community. These people may possess radical opinions but are otherwise seemingly ordinary. They post content about a topic they are passionate about, much like other creators on these platforms. In many respects, they would probably not consider themselves right-wing extremists despite participating in replicating, sharing, and spreading such outwardly extreme content. These creators do not necessarily have many followers and are not prominent figures in the Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremist communities. As written by the Norwegian police in their annual threat assessment, young adults and minors are especially prone to getting exposed to right-wing extremist content in digital arenas. Because of this, I believe it is fruitful to study the activity of and between seemingly ordinary people—people, who might remain "under the radar" of the security forces and fall into a process of radicalization.

This study aims to examine both the organized part of the Norwegian and Swedish far-right, and *private* actors. I believe that only with this divided focus, can this work begin to engender a representative picture of what right-wing extremism looks like in Norway and Sweden today.

1.5 Description of Structure and Intent

This study consists of four main parts. The first part examines nationalism theory, which will make up the theoretical framework for this study. Gaining an understanding of the various characteristics of nationalism will provide me with a basis of terms and concepts that will be useful when studying the Norwegian and Swedish far-right. The second part is a brief outline of the historical development of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden. It is crucial that we first understand how these movements have come to exist and grow in the

first place before we reflect on where they stand today. This section aims to examine how these movements first commenced, on what basis and for what purpose. Additionally, this section seeks to assess how these movements have changed over the years, whether they have been affected by certain developments and whether they have faced any challenges. The third part looks at how right-wing populist leaders use social media as a way of campaigning. This section is especially relevant because a large part of this study takes place in digital spaces. Here I will examine how and for what purpose specifically right-wing populists actively use social media as a form of communication. The fourth and largest section of this work consists of my own analysis. In this section, I will be presenting the main elements that I have identified as essential to Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism, namely 1) *references to history*, 2) a focus on *masculinity*, 3) a focus on *whiteness* and 4) *references to the race war*. In these four sub-chapters I briefly outline some theory on the respective aspects, first on a more general level, then in the context of right-wing extremism, before finally presenting the trends that I have located within my own study. In order to get a representative picture of the far-right in Norway and Sweden today, I have chosen to examine both online and real-life right-wing activism. Even though a large part of this study aims to fill the literary gap regarding right-wing extremism and social media in the Norwegian and Swedish context, I mainly question what the *defining* aspects of right-wing extremism in the two countries are today. In order to do this, it would not suffice to focus exclusively on online activity. Therefore, parts of this study move beyond the field of the internet, for instance to documentaries made by people outside of these movements, and to other real-life circles in which these people are active.

2 Nationalism Theory and Right-Wing Extremism

Theoretical discussion on the subject of nationalism has sparked a lengthy debate across different academic fields. First and foremost, the creation of universal definitions as well as establishing exactly what the contents of nationalism should be appear to be the prominent focus of these discussions. It is also clear that the meaning of nationalism not only changes depending on *where* we are in the world, but also throughout *time*. Therefore, as Czech historian Miroslav Hroch once stated, "the sheer quantity of partial findings and sophisticated theories appear to have turned the issues of nation and nationalism into a very chaotic terrain, within which researchers often find it hard to orientate themselves."[6] It is my intention in this first part of the study to outline what I consider to be the most important aspects of the theory of nationalism. First, I will review the problem regarding universal definitions: Why does a definition of nationalism pose as such a challenge for researchers, and how have suggested definitions influenced the ways in which we think of the nation, nationality, and nationalism? Second, I will examine the different aspects of nationalism: various forms of nationalism, and elements that define it. Third, I will be presenting some critical perspectives on nationalism. Since a rather large portion of the literature on this subject consist of the redefinition of nationalism, questions have arisen regarding the nature of nationalism: is it inherently bad or problematic? In the final part I will shortly present theory on right-wing extremism as an introduc-

6 Miroslav Hroch, *European Nations: Explaining Their Formation* (London: Verso Books, 2015), 1.

tion to the subject of this study. My aim is to be able to connect the theory to the radical-right-wing groups that are increasingly emerging in Norway and Sweden.

2.1 Defining Nationalism

In his 1991 edition of *Imagined Communities*, Irish-American social scientist and historian Benedict Anderson makes numerous changes to the original version published in 1983. With an impressive degree of self-critique, Anderson claims that his former work consisted of "serious theoretical flaws" and premature conclusions.[7] The work was further revised in 2006, which stands as the most recent update. The preface illustrates one of the many challenges with defining nationalism: how do we define a concept that not only is difficult to grasp, but also changes with time?

The question is, therefore, not only limited to *how* we define nationalism; we must also question *why* the development of a definition is so challenging. Anderson proposes an answer in the form of three paradoxes that focus on the *nation*, *nationality*, and *nationalism*. Firstly, the question regarding the *nation* is: What is a nation? Here, the nature of the nation becomes an apparent issue. On the one hand, the nation is an objectively *modern* artefact and is understood as such by historians. On the other hand, the nation is subjectively considered as an *antiquity* by nationalists. Is the nation "new" or "old"? Can it be defined objectively and, if not, how do we create a sufficient definition for an abstract concept? Secondly, there is the matter of *nationality*. One way to understand this concept is as a socio-cultural term. Anderson describes this as how everyone in the world "has" a nationality, just as they *have* a gender. Simultaneously, nationality, in its concrete manifestations, becomes a particularity. The Norwe-

7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, sixth edition (New York/London: Verso Books, 2006), 13 of preface.

gian nationality, for instance, is, by this definition, "one of a kind." Third, and lastly, there is *nationalism*. Nationalism appears to have become a "black sheep" of -isms, and while it evidently holds great political power like other ideologies, Anderson faults it for its "philosophical poverty." Especially the lack of "grand thinkers," as there are "no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or Webers," is considered to be a flaw. He suggests it would be more sensible to categorize the term along others such as "kinship" or "religion," instead of "liberalism" or "fascism," especially since nationalist elements can be identified in both of the latter as well.

Another explanation as to why it has been difficult to apply a universal definition to nationalism stems from the everchanging understanding of the term, which varies significantly from the early contributions on the subject to today's interpretations.[8] Paul Lawrence has written an influential work on the theory of nationalism, where he covers this topic. In his 2005 book *Nationalism: History and Theory*, Lawrence presents the historical development of nationalism and its theoretical discussions, showing what these early debates consisted of and how these have changed with time. If we look at the earliest contributions, Lawrence highlights the tendency to see the nation as a *pre-existing* historical element.[9] The nation is, by this definition, a natural state, therefore implying that a certain area belongs to a particular people. The early debates of the 19th century consisted, according to Lawrence, mostly of a discussion on whether or not nations should govern their own affairs: "nationalism" with a small "n."[10] An abstract understanding of the nation was, in other words, not up for debate yet.

If we look further ahead at the 20th century, theories on nationalism fall into the category of "classical modernism." The effect of the Second World War on academic studies of nationalism cannot be understated, as theorists and historians began to challenge the pre-

8 Ibid., 5.

9 Paul Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 32.

10 Ibid.

existing idea that the nation is *fixed*. Lawrence refers to an analysis executed by historian Hans Kohn, who points out a distinction between two forms of nationalism. The first form of nationalism, found in France, Britain, and the USA, was described as rational and fundamentally political. The other form of nationalism, "which could be found, unsurprisingly, in Germany," was irrational and first and foremost cultural.[11]

At the same time, theorists began to question the nature of the nation. Historically, it was argued that the concept of the nation was a prerequisite to the formation of nationalism, however with the contributions from the political scientist and philosopher, Ernest Gellner, this view was greatly challenged. Gellner, in his work *Thought and Change* (1964) claimed that it was, in fact. the other way around: "It is not the aspiration of nations which create nationalism: it is nationalism which creates nations."[12] This claim called for more research on the subject of nations and nationalism, which leads us to what Lawrence calls the "modernist" approach. A common aspect of these theories—which were part of the academic debate on nationalism from the 1960s onwards—is the general belief that nations and nationalism are "the products of specifically modern processes like capitalism, industrialism, the emergence of the bureaucratic state, urbanization and secularism."[13] Despite agreeing on this one aspect, historians and theorists diverged onto different paths when it came to focus-areas. According to Lawrence, some theorists, such as Paul Brass, focused on the political aspects of nationalism, while others, such as Michael Hechter, focused primarily on economic factors.[14]

One contribution to this debate, that arguably changed how we think of nations and nationalism, was made by the previously men-

11 Hans. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background*. (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 339.

12 Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, (1964), 174.

13 Lawrence, *Nationalism*, 160.

14 Ibid.

tioned political scientist Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities* argued that the nation was entirely *imagined*, thus completely disregarding the notion that a nation could be a fixed, natural, historical actor. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community, which is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[15] "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[16] In other words, the nation is a *social* construct.

Another factor that has further complicated the process of creating universal definitions is that theorists and historians have interpreted the terms differently, not only throughout time but also depending on where they were in the world. Miroslav Hroch considers this in *European Nations: Explaining Their Formation* (2015) by comparing linguistic meanings at different points in place and time. For instance, in 18th century English linguistics, the term "nation" referred to a people who were governed by the same ruler, whereas in German linguistics, the nation referred to culture and language, and sometimes even to a shared past.[17]

This also seemed to be the case with "nationalism" since the term is so closely linked with "nation." According to Hroch, "nationalism" has long been interpreted according to how the term "nation" has been understood. Therefore, "nationalism" was closely linked to the state in English literature yet linked with culture and language in German literature.[18] Despite having had different understandings, scholars have attempted to formulate different definitions for these terms. One contribution is that of French historian Ernest Renan, who defined the nation in *What is a Nation?* (1882) as "a soul, a spiritual principle." He claimed that the most important aspect of the nation is a common legacy in the past, in addition to a desire to

15 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.
16 Ibid.
17 Hroch, *European Nations*, 3.
18 Ibid., 4.

live together in the future.[19] According to Renan, it is, therefore, the *consent* that makes the nation a reality—much like how Anderson claimed that the nation is a product of our imagination.

While there still is no universal definition for these terms, there appears to be a general consensus among scholars, that the nation is a social construct. There is, however, reason to believe that these interpretations will change with time, just as they have in the past. It is interesting to consider how preconditions and premises will change: how will we define the nation, and what role will the nation have? With this in mind, theorists and historians will likely have to keep revisiting their works—much like Anderson.

2.2 Aspects of Nationalism

Moderate and Extreme Nationalism

There are many aspects to consider on the topic of nationalism. In this section I will outline some of those that one could argue are the most essential. In their 2023 work *Varieties of Nationalism,* authors Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor claim that "nationalism is the most powerful political ideology of the modern age."[20] Being one of the driving forces behind events such as the Second World War, it is also no surprise that nationalism has come to be associated with the atrocities of the Holocaust. Thus, I argue that it is crucial to distinguish between *extreme* or *radical* forms of nationalism and more *moderate* forms of nationalism.

19 Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, in Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992), accessed April 21, 2024, http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf.

20 Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor, *Varieties of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 1.

In their 2021 anthology *Nationalism in a Transnational Age*, German historians Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow distinguish between two types of nationalism. Type I nationalism, on the one hand, pertains to nationalism that is typically tied to pre-state nations. This type of nationalism is generally directed at the process of state-building itself. Type II nationalism, on the other hand, is found in post-state nation-states. This type of nationalism is characterized by an overexpression of nationalist ambition for external expansion or internal homogenization, leading to rather radical nationalist expressions, in particular represented by right-wing extremists. These movements could be directed towards an internal minority or to an external "competitor."[21] We can imagine that type II nationalism might pass as radical nationalism if it leads to the persecution of certain minorities, however, this cannot always be the case as not all expressions of nationalism in post-state nation-states can be regarded as extreme.

While there seemingly is no clear-cut distinction between radical and moderate forms of nationalism, I suggest that the difference between them can be distinguished by their effects. To illustrate, Mylonas and Tudor take the example of the ongoing war in Ukraine and claim that nationalism, in this context, has had the opposite effects on the Russian people in comparison to the Ukrainian people: "[I]f Putin's concept of Russian nationhood motivated the war, Ukrainian nationalism has united the Ukrainian people in a more inclusive understanding of nationhood and spurred on the defense of the country's newfound democracy."[22] Firstly, we can understand nationalism that encourages aggressive expansion, war and violence to be an extreme form of nationalism. Putin is not only willing to kill for an extension of the Russian territory but also accepts and expects his people to die for it. Secondly, we can understand nationalism, which stimulates a

21 Frank Jacob and Cartsen Schapkow, "Nationalism in a Transnational Age: An Introduction," in *Nationalism in a Transnational Age: Irrational Fears and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride*, eds. Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 4.

22 Mylonas and Tudor, *Varieties of Nationalism,* 4.

stronger sense of brotherhood between the people of a nation, as a moderate form of nationalism. However, in the case of the Ukrainian war, is it right, or as simple as to claim that Ukrainian nationalism has exclusively led to solidarity and brotherhood? Are they not also both killing for and dying for their nation? When does nationalism become extreme? Are moderate forms of nationalism always free of violence, even when it is out of our control? Again, this illustrates just how difficult it can be to distinguish between the two forms, at least beyond the theory.

Civic and Ethnic Nationalism

In addition to distinguishing between moderate and extreme forms of nationalism, we can also make distinctions through its conditions and motivating forces, specifically between a civic and an ethnic form of nationalism. In their article, "'They Have to Abide Our Laws … and Stuff': Ethnonationalism Masquerading as Civic Nationalism" (2015), authors Farida Fozda and Mitchell Low define the two terms. Civic nationalism is characterized by its ideological commitment to a common destiny and liberal values. In these cases of nationalism, there is a significant focus on the nations themselves: Who has the best nation? Secondly, ethnic nationalism is characterized by its illiberal, emotional, and "organic" values, as well as by being held together through ethnic conditions such as having a shared language, history, culture and tradition.[23] This form of nationalism is infamous for having been the ideological background of several ethnic conflicts and outbursts of genocidal violence—most infamously the Holocaust. Though it may seem as if they are fairly simple to distinguish in theory, this is not always the case in real life. However, Fozda and Low suggest that the two forms are mainly distinguished by their relationship with the

23 Farida Fozdar and Mitchell Low, "'They Have to Abide Our Laws … and Stuff': Ethnonationalism Masquerading as Civic Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no. 3 (July 2015): 524.

"Other." While civic nationalism can be just as exclusionary as ethnic nationalism, a distinction is found in the different criteria which are raised when questioning who belongs inside and outside of the nation.[24] Thus, the "problem" of the "Other" creates a sort of passage where civic nationalism slips into ethnic nationalism.

The Importance of History

Now that I have considered how nationalism differs in both intensity and the forces that motivate it, let us examine some further key aspects. Among many historians and theorists of nationalism, Ronald Grigor Suny stresses the importance of *having* a history: "Nations are articulated through the stories people tell about themselves."[25] National histories consist of the stories of the nation: the struggles, the golden ages, the victories, and the oppression. Most of all, this history tells the stories of a people and what they have achieved together. Norwegian historian Steinar Aas reflects on this in his chapter "Nationalism, Populism, and Norwegian Historiography" in *Nationalism and Populism* (2022) edited by Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob. Aas concludes that in the case of Norwegian historiography, historians have held a high focus on the democratic values delivered from the constitution based on equality, underlining the importance of the people: "The nation is the people."[26]

Evidently, history has been an important part of nation-building. German social historian Stefan Berger addresses this in the introduction to his edited volume *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (2007) in the use of history in nation-building. According to Berger,

24 Ibid., 525.

25 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 3 (2001): 866.

26 Steinar Aas, "Nationalism, Populism and Norwegian Historiography," in *Nationalism and Populism: Irrational Fears and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride*,, eds. Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob. (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 209.

the use of history had been key when constructing the nation and national identities: "Nation-builders everywhere agreed: their nation had to have a history—the longer and the prouder the better."[27] It was acknowledged that in order to create a true national feeling among a population, constructing a national historical consciousness was essential.

Writing the nation thus became a process of creating a national *narrative*. This meant picking and choosing which aspects of one's nation should be emphasized, and, just as importantly, which aspects to leave out. Berger outlines the changes in nation-writing from the early 18th century until today. From the early times of national history writing until the second half of the 19th century, historians typically wrote romantic national histories. Here, they would focus on the victories, the glory, the heroes, and how the nation crushed its enemies. By the time of the Enlightenment, historians started writing history, as stressed by German historian Leopold von Ranke: "wie es eigentlich gewesen."[28] With the new focus on source criticism and the writing of history "as it actually happened," romantic narratives slowly were replaced as historians set out to debunk historical myths earlier created by romantic historiography.[29] This is not to say that romantic narratives disappeared entirely—romantic elements still exist in national history-writing today and are an essential part of extreme nationalism.

Regardless of the changes, history remains one of the most important aspects of nation-building. It tells a story of who we are, in whose tradition we consider ourselves standing, and who we wish to be. David Lowenthal, in *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (1998), reflects on these topics and suggests we separate history from *heritage*. History lies in all details of the past, whereas heritage is

27 Stefan Berger, *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

28 Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1885), 60.

29 Berger, *Writing the Nation,* 38.

defined by the stories about ourselves that are passed down through generations; heritage gives us an understanding of who we are now, and an idea of who we wish to be in the future.[30] *Tradition* has also been pointed out as an important aspect of nationalism. I suggest this could be linked to the topic of heritage. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *Invented Tradition* (1983) explore the concept of tradition. Hobsbawm suggests that with the constant changes of the modern world, some might feel the need to secure unchangingness and a sense of stability in at least some parts of social life.[31] This could explain why, for instance, we celebrate or value specific dates, or dress in a particular way on some occasions. In this regard, tradition can be understood similarly to heritage as a part of who we were, who we are, and who we wish to be.

Borders: Literal and Metaphorical Boundaries

Another aspect of nationalism is the idea that a nation, regardless of its size, has a border—both in a *literal* sense when forming a nation-state, and in a *spiritual* sense. The most interesting takeaway comes with the latter. Anderson describes this when defining the nation as an imagined community by stating that nations imagine themselves as *limited*.[32] Here, there is a limit in which other nations lie beyond, further strengthening the idea of who belongs to the nation and who does not. Consequently, nationalists would likely not wish for a joint UN or a nation that encompasses the entire human population—this would threaten the nationalistic value of sovereignty, the right of freedom and self-rule, as well as the distinctiveness of the nation.

30 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London: University of London, 1998).

31 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

32 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

Furthermore, borders can be understood as a way of ensuring the effectiveness of nation-states and their politics. Karl W. Deutsch claimed in *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1966 [1953]), that in order for nation-states to work effectively, the consent of the population is paramount, and that this could easier be obtained by populations which share the same language, culture, and traditions of nationality. I would like to point out, however, that this claim was made in the latter half of the 1960s and under the assumption that nation-states were the most important political instrument for "getting things done."[33] Can this still be said to be the case today? Especially in the globalized world we live in? On one hand, some theorists have started suggesting that nation-states will disappear entirely. Globalization will surely lead to a higher degree of international cooperation, further strengthening international organizations such as the UN and EU. On the other hand, we are seeing attempts at protecting nations from either losing sovereignty or from other external influences. Consequently, the increasing number of nationalist movements has prompted some to question whether "the end of nations" was declared too soon.

"Us" versus "Them"

Regarding borders, I briefly mentioned how imagining the nation as limited creates a stronger sense of who belongs to the inside and who belongs to the outside of a nation. When a population possesses a strong national identity, they will likely be able to point out different defining characteristics of their nation. For instance, citizens of the United States might refer to the American Dream or freedom of speech as defining aspects of their nation. While an "us" versus "them" mentality may have positive effects, such as a greater feeling

33 Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication.* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 4.

of community and brotherhood, having a clear idea of who belongs inside and outside of the nation can also cause negative impacts, such as xenophobia, alienation of minorities, and even racism.

The Austrian social scientist Christian Fuchs writes in his work *Communication and Capitalism* (2020) that "[n]ationalism is a peculiar modern ideology that justifies the building and maintenance of nation-states," and that the existence of them creates a political and cultural "outside."[34] By studying the connection between nationalism, communication and ideology, the author attempts to get a grasp of how these "insides" and "outsides" take shape. According to Fuchs, we can generally put theories about nationalism into two groups: one in which nationalism is fetishized, and the other in which we find critical theories of nationalism. Nationalist theory resides in the former. Here, the nation is a natural aspect of society, a national group is fetishized, and outsiders, often referred to as the "Other," are often negatively represented. Additionally, we can find glorifications of militarism and warfare in more extreme variants, such as Essentialists that have a relatively pessimistic view of human nature.[35]

One question is what the driving factors are for deciding who does and does not belong to the nation. What drives us to make these decisions? American political scientist Daniel Druckman, in his article "Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective" (1994), suggests that *group loyalty* could be a defining factor. Specifically, Druckman explores how loyalty to a specific group can lead to hostility towards "outsiders," the creation of stereotypes, and how it influences collective behavior. Group and national loyalty seem to derive from a combination of human needs, as well as the affective and instrumental functions that a nation serves its citizens. Group and national loyalty are, according to Druckman, based on three main components: how strongly attached they feel to their

34 Christian Fuchs, "Nationalism, Communication, Ideology," in *Communication and Capitalism,* ed. Christian Fuchs (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020), 235.

35 Ibid., 238.

homeland (*affective involvement),* their motivation to help said homeland (*goal orientation*), and to what degree they gain identity and self-esteem through their national identification (*ego involvement).*[36]

Druckman bases his article on a 1969 study led by John DeLamater, Daniel Katz and Herbert Kelman titled: "On The Nature of National Involvement: A Preliminary Study." In this study, the researchers found out that people who are affectively involved here, who Druckman refers to as symbolic, are more likely to have a negative attitude towards outsiders. When asked whether or not an American citizen who moves to Russia should be allowed to keep his American citizenship, not one in the "symbolic group" said yes.[37] This goes to show that the "other" could be someone who previously belonged to the nation and that, according to some nationalists, leaving one's nation can be perceived as an act of betrayal, therefore not deserving the right to be seen as an "insider."

2.3 Critical Perspectives on Nationalism

Nationalism appears to have gained quite a negative reputation, as it often is associated with racism and violence. As has been demonstrated in this study, nationalism can be turned into a political ideology that bases its ideas on shared cultural features, such as language, history, tradition, religion, and ethnicity, which are understood as the backbone of the nation. While there are aspects of nationalism that can be seen as inherently positive, such as patriotism, solidarity and comradeship, nationalistic ideas have also been the driving force behind several horrific events. Does this make nationalism inherently problematic?

36 Daniel Druckman, "Nationalism, Patriotism and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Mershon International Studies Review 38,* no. 1 (April 1994): 44.

37 John Delamater, Daniel Katz and Herbert Kelman, "On the Nature of National Involvement: A Preliminary Study," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution 13,* no. 3 (September 1969): 342.

Academics have long sought to answer this question. For example, in "Nationalism, History and Ethnic Absolutism" (1990), sociologist Paul Gilroy expresses his concern with the academic field of nationalism. While firmly denying himself being against the writing of national histories, Gilroy voices his concern with national history-writing opening the doors to ethnic absolutism.[38] In particular, there is the idea that some ethnicities are superior to others, in addition to exclusionary national or ethnic belonging.

Some historians and theorists have also expressed concern regarding the "type" of nationalistic movements that are on the rise in certain parts of the world. Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob consider this in their previously mentioned anthology *Nationalism and Populism* (2022), where they claim that the rise of nationalism at the turn from the 20th to the 21st century has been accompanied by a stronger *populism*.[39] Populism can be defined as the will of a homogenous people opposing the elites in both political, cultural, and economic areas.[40] The authors write that, when combined with populism, aggressive nationalist movements can evolve into dangerous campaigns in which minorities become victims of false populist accusations.[41] For instance, the continuous accusations towards the Mexican people during Donald Trump's campaigning and presidency can illustrate this populist trend—there is always someone on the outside to blame for the shortcomings on the inside.

Furthermore, populistic nationalist movements appear to be even more exclusionary when deciding who belongs to the nation and who does not. Jan-Werner Müller writes in the second chapter of "The Politics of Fear Revisited" from *Nationalism and Populism* (2022) that

38 Paul Gilroy, "Nationalism, History and Ethnic Absolutism," *History Workshop,* no. 30 (Autumn 1990): 119.

39 Cartsen Schapkow and Frank Jacob, "Introduction," in *Nationalism and Populism:Expressions of Fear or Political Strategies?*, eds. idem (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 1.

40 Ibid., 2.

41 Ibid.

right-wing populists, when providing content to their idea of "the people," tend to turn to ethnicity when deciding who makes up the nation.[42] This means that not only do outsiders make up the peoples literally outside the nation-state, but also those within the nation-state that do not "qualify" as part of the nation. Müller defines these as the *particularly dangerous enemy* simply because they could pass as "insiders."[43]

In another work by Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow, *Nationalism in a Transnational Age: Irrational Fear and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride* (2021), the editors consider how *fear* plays an essential role in deciding who belongs to the nation. Highlighted is the desire for security and the power to control one's own life on the one hand and the fear of an outside that could strip away this security on the other.[44] The apparent trend here is an increase concerning this supposed threat of "the Other," immigrants, for instance, often being a victim of this trend. In radical nationalist movements, this might appear as hidden or blatant racism, for example, by creating false accusations that result in irrational fears.

2.4 Right-Wing Extremism

Finally, before we look into the subject of this work, I feel it is necessary to outline the main aspects of right-wing extremism. This is essential for two reasons: 1) right-wing extremists are always nationalistic, however, 2) nationalists are not always right-wing extremists. Right-wing extremists wish to rewrite the nation, reimagine what makes it up, as well as who belongs in it.

42 Jan Werner Müller, "The Politics of Fear Revisited" in *Nationalism and Populism:-Expressions of Fear or Political Strategies?,* eds. Cartsen Schapkow & Frank Jacob (Berlin/Oklahoma: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 15.

43 Ibid.

44 Jacob and Schapkow, "Nationalism in a Transnational Age: An Introduction," 1.

In his article "Right-Wing Extremism in Europe" (1994), Bernt Hagtvet outlines the characteristics of European right-wing extremism. I will mention some of the points made here, as they are relevant to the ensuing chapters of this study. First, he argues that right-wing extremists *reject representative governments*, including the liberal and democratic values which they are built upon.[45] This is expressed through the ridicule of liberal thoughts and ideas. For instance, gender identity has become a key locus of ridicule, as the debate regarding binary gender roles opposes the imagined homogenous nation, in which white, straight, masculine men are inherently believed to be superior. Second, right-wing extremists are *populists*.[46] As we have seen, they criticize the actions of the elites while claiming to speak on behalf of the people: they claim to be the *true* representatives of the people. By alluding to people's fears—"Will immigration truly lead to the extinction of my ethnicity?" or "Will immigration cause me to lose my job?"—right-wing extremists can gain support on the basis of false accusations, which in turn could lead to even more unease and hostility between groups. Third, right-wing extremists are aggressive *nationalists*.[47] In their sense of reality, nations exist in a hierarchy in which some nations are superior to others. This does not always seem to be the case in theory on nationalism. However, here, the relationship between "us" and "the Other" is further intensified, often as an expression of racism and xenophobia. One could say that it is the imagining of the superiority of the nation that defines this form of radical nationalism.

Last but not least, right-wing extremists *emphasize law and order* and do not reject the idea of violence as a means of achieving it. This could be linked with the aforementioned idea that the nation is fetishized in some nationalist movements. Military glorification can be an example of this and is further strengthened by the findings in

45 Bernt Hagtvet, "Right-Wing Extremism in Europe," *Journal of Peace Research 31*, no. 3 (August 1994): 241.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

Druckman's study, in which he showed that nationalists believe that the military should be an even bigger priority than individual freedom and national prosperity.[48] We can recognize this when looking at the two forms of nationalism I outlined earlier: while a civic form of nationalism probably would prioritize progressive values such as individual freedom and national prosperity, right-wing extremism might fit in with the extreme and ethnic form of nationalism. While military glorification does not necessarily correlate to violence in nationalist theory, it appears to be the case with right-wing extremism. For example, demonstrations across the Nordic region have involved aggressive and violent behavior, both from the aggressors and the offended. This demonstrates how violence feeds violence and could further explain why historians and social scientists especially look upon the populistic trend within nationalist movements with worry.

48 Druckman, "Nationalism, Patriotism and Group Loyalty," 349.

3 Historical Development

When exactly did right-wing extremism begin in Norway and Sweden? In "Breivik's Mindset: The Counterjihad and the New Transatlantic Anti-Muslim Right" (2013), Toby Archer tries to answer this question. Archer argues that while some activists of far-right communities might claim their movements have roots in medieval times, the type of far-right extremism we see in today's Europe is a result of the 9/11 attacks, as well as the connectivity brought about by the internet over the last decades.[49] From a broader historical perspective, the history of a post-nation-state nationalism (type II) that is aggressive and right-wing extremism as a special form of the former that is relevant for this work, can be studied in a relatively short time frame.

However, the term *extremism* is nothing new. In his chapter "Lines of Development of the Extremism Concept in the Twentieth Century", Uwe Backes examines how the concept of extremism has changed over the years. In early mentions following the Russian Revolution in 1923, extremism was frequently linked with anti-democratic and anti-liberal political rhetoric. By the 1950s, extremism had found its way into German humanities and social sciences. Backes mentions one particular contribution by Peter R. Hofstätter, according to which extremists are to be understood as people who hold opinions that deviate significantly from the average attitude of a certain group.[50] By

49 Toby Archer, "Breivik's Mindset: The Counterjihad and the New Transatlantic Anti-Muslim Right," in *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism,* eds. Taylor, M., Curry, P., & Holbrook (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 173.

50 Uwe Backes, "Lines of Development of the Extremism Concept in the Twentieth Century," in *Political Extremes: A Conceptual History from Antiquity to the Present,* ed. Uwe Backes (London: Routledge, 2009), 157.

the 1980s, however, extremism had come to be associated with both the political right and the political left, creating a whole new set of discussions about political extremes.

Following the attacks on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 and the increased global fear of terrorism, right-wing extremist groups gained momentum as terrorism was increasingly associated with Islam. Considering the growing concern regarding terrorism worldwide, combined with the increasing activity of right-wing extremism, I argue it is important to study these movements to better understand where they come from, what conditions enable their growth, and why these movements are established. Acknowledging the historical development of these movements might give us a better understanding of the characteristics that we find within them.

3.1 Acknowledging the Conditions for Right-Wing Extremism in Norway and Sweden

Before I outline the historical development of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden, I believe it is important to discuss the differing conditions for its emergence in the two countries. I argue this is primarily due to the implications of the Second World War, in which Norway became a victim of German occupation whilst Sweden remained neutral.

During the morning hours of the 9th of April 1940, Norway was attacked by German troops despite having declared its neutrality. In just two short months the German invaders managed to gain full control over the entire nation-state. During the occupation, which lasted until the end of the war, Norwegian citizens had their lives turned on their heads. Immediate threats included the bombings of towns and infrastructure, food shortages due to rationing and the constant presence of the oppressive German SS. Particularly important is the fact that many Norwegians witnessed the gruesome treatment of prisoners of war in concentration camps that were built throughout the nation to provide forced labor for infrastructure projects.

In the aftermath of the war, the history of the occupation of Norway has been covered by numerous historians and social scientists. However, it has also become apparent that to this day, parts of this history are still under-communicated, as some topics, such as how Norwegian Hirdvakt-soldiers treated POWs, are heavily associated with shame. Anne Eriksen examines Norwegian's collective memory of the war and argues that within the Norwegian narrative of WW2, there is a clear black-and-white antagonization of the German occupant. There is also a big focus on resistance movements, highlighting the hero and demonizing the enemy whilst ignoring the parts of history which break paths with the narrative of the "good" Norwegian.[51]

Sweden, on the other hand, remained neutral during the war while avoiding invasion, and while the country played an important role as a safe haven for Norwegians and POWs who escaped the invader, Swedes never got to experience the war as up-close as Norwegians did. National socialist parties gained only a slight political foothold in both Norway and Sweden during the war. However, while Norwegian politics saw a backlash against national socialism and right-wing extremism in the post-war era, this was not the case in Sweden. Against all odds, various split-up Nazi and right-wing extremist groups successfully prevailed, a topic that has been well covered by the Swedish author Hélène Lööw in her work *Nazismen I Sverige 1924–1979*.[52]

I therefore argue that the collective memories of WW2 in Norway and Sweden have fostered different conditions for right-wing extremism to flourish. I also argue that in the case of Norway, the Norwegian WW2 narrative has made it more challenging for right-wing extremist sentiments not only to reach the Norwegian population but also Norwegian politics. In the case of Sweden, however, the lack of a narrative and collective memory of the war like that of Norway's might have made it easier for right-wing extremist sentiments to escalate.

51 Anne Eriksen, *Det var noe annet under krigen: 2. verdenskrig i norsk kollektivtradisjon* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1995).

52 Hélène Lööw, *Nazismen i Sverige 1924–1979* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2016).

3.2 The Roots of European Right-Wing Extremism

While it seems apparent that the main focus of right-wing extremist groups in Norway and Sweden today is often linked with contemporary themes, the roots of these movements can frequently be traced back to the interwar period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Bernt Hagtvet's article, "Right-Wing Extremism in Europe," explores the different characteristics of right-wing extremist groups in Europe today. The author further examines different perspectives on these groups: psychological, sociological, political, and historical explanations for their emergence.

By taking on a political and historical perspective, Hagtvet finds several parallels between today's European right-wing extremism and those existing between the 1920s and 1940s, i. e. German National Socialism and Italian Fascism. Firstly, such as fascist parties during the interwar period, right-wing extremist groups today are both populist and patriotic in nature.[53] They claim to be the "true" representatives of the people and express great pride for their nation—or at least the nation that they envision for themselves. Secondly, Hagtvet claims that right-wing extremisms in both time periods are authoritarian and violent in their practice. They disregard the liberal values of democracy and do not shy away from using violence as a means for accomplishing their goals. Thirdly, they advocate for the pre-eminence of their nation, as well as the repression of weaker actors.[54] They believe in the superiority of their own nation, possibly in an ethnic absolutist sense, while simultaneously believing that weaker actors—be it another nation-state or a certain minority, should be oppressed.

However, Hagtvet writes that one key feature of Racism and National Socialism in the 1920–1940s is not present in the type of right-wing extremism we see in today's Europe: an expansionist foreign policy.[55] Considering that Hagtvet wrote this in 1994, we might want to exclude

53 Hagtvet, "Right-Wing Extremism in Europe," 241.
54 Ibid., 242.
55 Ibid., 244.

Russia from this observation. We might also still choose to agree with this statement, as the work of many right-wing extremists is centered around "protecting" the nation from outside influences. However, we also see that some groups have expansionist ambitions, which is also reflected on social media. I will come back to this in the next chapter.

The comparable traits between these two movements, however, appear to stop here, and I suggest it is more fruitful to study right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden within a shorter historical timeframe, as there is one particular topic that can largely explain the contemporary emergence of these groups: Anti-Muslim sentiments.

3.3 The Origins of Anti-Muslim Sentiments

The terrorist attack on Utøya and the bombing of central Oslo on 22 July 2011 led to a massive scare among the Norwegian population. The 32-years-old Norwegian terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik, released a manifesto of over 1,500 pages just prior to the attack, explaining why and how he did what he did. The title of the manifesto, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence,* is a direct reference to the Battle of Vienna of 1683, in which Ottoman incursions into central Europe came to an end. However, this title has a more contemporary meaning in that it refers to the large amount of immigration from the Islamic world, hence the claim that Europe is in need of independence. Similarly, it has become somewhat of a normality to read about Quran-burnings taking place in Norway's neighboring country, Sweden, and these past few years have seen a rapidly changing tension between ethnic Swedes and immigrants from the Middle East. Right-wing extremism and terrorism, as such, have become a rooted fear in the minds of many. However, attacks like the one on Utøya have also led to the increase of right-wing extremist sympathies and anti-Muslim sentiments. I argue that acknowledging where these sentiments come from is crucial to fully understanding the right-wing extremism we see in Norway and Sweden today.

Studying the main idea of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden, it becomes clear that it is a reactionary movement, and that multiculturalism is the main concern that shapes its ideological traits. Since around the 1980s, both Norway and Sweden have become multicultural societies as a consequence of having received significant amounts of immigrants and refugees. The cause of this immigration can be explained by several factors, ranging from work-related issues to the influx of asylum-seekers. In 2022, Norway had 819,400 immigrants, whereas Sweden had 1,8 million in 2019.[56] Syrians make up the largest portion of immigrants in Sweden, and a significant amount in Norway as well, only surpassed by Polish immigrants who mainly come to work.

Immigration to the Nordic countries, sometimes referred to as a "wave," has, for the duration of the past two decades, come to be perceived as a *crisis* by many. This is documented by Mathias Tjønn's research "Norms and Policy In Times of 'Crisis'" (2025), where Tjønn finds that despite immigration numbers being comparatively low to 2015, the topic of immigration was often referred to as a "crisis" by the far right during 2016.[57] While the statistics did not reflect an actual state of crisis, the sway of public opinion during these years was greatly exploited for strategic reasons. However, this is not only visible in the attitude towards immigration among the population, but also politically with the emergence of right-wing parties: Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress Party) in Norway, and Sverigedemokratera (The Swedish Democrats) in Sweden. What is interesting is that in the discussion about "the immigration crisis," the topics of Islam and Muslims

56 "Demografi," Indications for integration 2023, Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet, last modified August 23, 2023, accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.imdi.no/om-integrering-i-norge/indikatorer-for-integrering-2023/demografi2023/. "Innvandring og innvandrere i Norden, 2016-2020," Demography/migration, Statistisk Sentralbyrå, February 28, 2022, accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/flytting/artikler/innvandring-og-innvandrere-i-norden-2016-2020/_/attachment/inline/d691d233-c109-43ed-98d4-bcded2c6963e:7311dcab5dace412d370dca3d4e4dce4d52f8839/RAPP2022-11.pdf.

57 Mathias Tjønn, "Norms and Policy in Times of 'Crisis'," in *Journal of Migration History* 11, no. 3 (2025): 376.

are bound to appear as part of the debate. Why is this? Chris Allen writes in "Islamophobia and the Crisis of Europe's Multiculturalism" (2014) that Islam and Muslims have become agents of blame in the debate on how and why multiculturalism has failed in Europe.[58] I suggest two reasons for this.

First, one can explain the intense focus on Islam and Muslims in the debate on immigration, as a consequence of the topic being recognized as an issue both by the right side and the left side of politics. Allen writes that while the right side has no trouble voicing and elaborating their thought on these subjects, historically this has not been the case with the left, which has been at the forefront of fighting discrimination and injustice. Still, across the European political landscape, we see hostility and prejudice against Islam and Muslims.[59] This might have led to a normalization of them as an issue concerning successful multiculturalism.

Second, another explanation could be the effect Islamist terrorism has had on the general population's attitude towards Islam and Muslims as a whole. There is no doubt that 9/11 has played a significant role in increasing these attitudes. In her article "Arabs and Muslims in the Media After 9/11" (2013), Evelyn Alsultany examines the media's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. Alsultany refers to statistics from the FBI, in which she had found that only between 2000 and 2001, hate crimes directed at Muslims and Arabs had multiplied by 1,600 percent.[60] In Europe, the 2005 London bombings killed 193 civilians, the 2015 Paris attacks killed 130, and the 2016 Nice truck killed 86. These have also contributed to an increase in hatred towards Arabs and Muslims in Europe. For some, continuous

58 Chris Allen, "Islamophobia and the Crisis of Europe's Multiculturalism," in *New Multicultural Identities in Europe: Religion and Ethnicity in Secular Societies,* eds. Erkan Toğuşlu, Johan Leman and İsmail Mesut Sezgin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 221.

59 Ibid., 222.

60 Evelyn Alsultany, "Arabs and Muslims in the Media After 9/11," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2013): 161.

Islamic terrorism might have given cause to oppose Islam, Muslims, and Arabs all the same.

3.4 Islamophobia

A term that has been used to describe these sentiments is *Islamophobia*. Damir Skenderovic and Christina Späti, in their article "From Orientalism to Islamophobia: Reflections, Confirmations, and Reservations" (2019), define Islamophobia as "distinct prejudices and stereotypes that result in indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions and related behavior and practices directed at Muslims or Islam."[61] When examining its origins, the authors claim the term had its breakthrough during the 1990s when it started circulating in debates about British multiculturalism. Additionally, authors began to express concern with the increasing hostility towards Muslims, which was referred to as Islamophobia. This term has become a key focus of the debate about European multicultarism, and is used by both sides of it.

On the one hand, Islamophobia is seen as justifiable in the minds of those who oppose themselves against Islam and Muslims. Skenderovic and Späti write that Islamophobes view Islam as unresponsive to change, irrational, and inferior to the West.[62] By this standpoint, hostile attitudes towards Islam are only reasonable and normal responses. If we look at the Norwegian right-wing extremist group SIAN (Stop the Islamization of Norway), their activity has been largely centered around public demonstrations and online activity. What is obvious is that members of groups like SIAN regard their Islamophobic rhetoric as completely reasonable and necessary.

61 Damir Skenderovic and Christina Späti, "From Orientalism to Islamophobia: Reflections, Confirmations, and Reservations," *ReOrient: The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 135.

62 Ibid.

On the other hand, Islamophobia is seen as an excuse for racism. Skenderovic and Späti claim that it is important to understand Islamophobia as a form of racism and as a phenomenon based on processes of racialization. In the 2019 documentary "Surrounded by Enemies," videotapes from a SIAN demonstration in Drammen, Norway, showed just how heated these demonstrations could get. Protected by the police and by the right to freedom of speech, the leader of SIAN, Lars Thorsen, was filmed as he interpreted the Quran in an aggravating manner, causing violent reactions from the crowd. When the audience responded to the speaker's Islamophobic allegations in the form of flying eggs and even rocks, SIAN members claimed that this behavior was only to be expected from Muslims, who they accused of being "animalistic."[63] Similarly, within the Nordic group Den Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (The Nordic Resistance Movement), also known as Nordfront, the lines between criticism of Islam and blatant racism are continuously blurred. In the same documentary as mentioned above, Nordfront clarifies that the end goal of their movement is to start a war of races, in the hopes that the white man is not "wiped out."[64] It is in these sorts of claims that one can begin to question what truly motivates right-wing extremism: is it really about religion, or is it actually about race?

3.5 The Power of the Internet

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Archer also argued that right-wing extremism in contemporary Europe is a result of the invention of the internet, and the many possibilities of communication that has come with it. Though the internet was officially launched in 1983, it was not until the mid-1990s that social media platforms be-

63 Viaplay, "Ytringsfrihetens pris," in *Surrounded by Enemies* (Published 2021), accessed April 21, 2024, https://viaplay.no/serier/omgitt-av-fiender?seasonNumber=1.

64 Viaplay, "Det farlige hatet," in *Surrounded by Enemies* (Published 2021), accessed April 21, 2024, https://viaplay.no/serier/omgitt-av-fiender?seasonNumber=1.

gan to appear. With the creation of Myspace, Facebook, X (Twitter), YouTube, Reddit, and, more recently, TikTok, it is safe to assume that social media platforms have increasingly become an essential part of our lives. This is partly due to the extensive possibilities that the internet offers regarding communication; not only can we communicate instantly with friends but also with people we have never met. Through social media platforms, we can find common interests with strangers and voice our opinions on topics we are passionate about, and if we wish, we can choose to do all of this anonymously. I argue that these preconditions form the perfect setting for extremist activity, whether it be right- or left-wing. It is, therefore, not strange that a lot of the radicalization happens online and that it is here where people tend to become a part of larger communities and join such movements. Evidently, right-wing extremists have been using the internet to spread their ideology for as long as it has existed, implying that these movements are likely well acquainted with its many functions.

3.6 Right-Wing Extremist Use of Social Media

In the article "Right-Wing Extremist's Persistent Online Presence: History and Contemporary Trends" (2019), authors Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens and Logan Macnair study the internet use of right-wing extremists' over time. The authors demonstrate that right-wing extremists were actually one of the first groups to engage in politics online, as well as one of the first to use online spaces as a platform for violent extremist purposes.[65] Only a year after the invention of the internet, right-wing extremists were already using classic bulletin board systems, in which everyone with a modern-day computer or dial-up telephone could get access to hateful propaganda.

65 Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens and Logan Macnair, "Right-Wing Extremist's Persistent Online Presence: History and Contemporary Trends," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (October 1, 2019): 3.

However, it was not really until the mid-1990s that right-wing extremist activities started flourishing, which was more a result of the creation of, and increased accessibility to, social media platforms. During these years, the authors especially highlight the utilization of websites and online forums. One example is that of Stormfront, a neo-Nazi group which has spread white nationalist propaganda on its website since 1996. Right-wing rhetoric would be spread in various propagandistic forms on websites and forums like this. For instance, documents and articles with genetic research would support their racial views. There could also be links to other like-minded websites and forums. The authors even point to dating sites which would be restricted to only white men and women.[66]

In trying to understand how right-wing extremists have used the internet to communicate over the years, inside perspectives can be regarded as valuable. VOX-pol, a European Union Framework Programme which has funded academic research on political online extremism, got insight on this when the formerly mentioned author Ryan Scrivens interviewed Brad Galloway, who had been active in the Canadian right-wing extremist movement for 13 years.[67] When asked about his time in the far-right community, Galloway responded by saying that when he first got involved in 1998, he mainly used the internet as a source for downloading and sharing "white-power music."[68] During the mid 2000s, he became more active on online discussion forums and would advertise and share other hate-forums to spread online activity. When asked if he believed that online right-wing extremist activity today is similar to the way it was when he was part of the community, Galloway stated both yes and no. "Yes," in the sense that they still make use of online forums such as Stormfront, but "no" in the sense that a lot of their activity appears to have

66 Ibid., 4.

67 Ryan Scrivens, "The Hidden Face of Hate Groups Online: A Former's Perspective," *Vox-Pol*, January 3, 2018.

68 Ibid.

moved to social media platforms, such as Facebook and X.[69] The fact that much of this activity has moved to more "mainstream" platforms could be regarded as quite concerning, as social media likely reaches different and larger audiences. There is a specific danger that their hateful propaganda might reach young, easily influenced audiences who have yet to develop their critical-thinking abilities fully. Bruce Hoffman, professor and expert on terrorism and counterterrorism, considers this in a website article. Hoffman writes that the internet and social media platforms "unite disparate, disgruntled individuals in an ideologically more cohesive echo chamber, which radicalizes, inspires, and motivates acts of wanton violence."[70]

Though the history of right-wing extremist activity is short from a broad historical perspective, a lot has changed in the matter of roughly just 30 years. From the few restricted options for sharing right-wing extremist activity that existed in the 90s to the seemingly endless possibilities for communication available today, right-wing extremist groups appear to have been provided with an ever-improving platform for their activities. Throughout this history, the internet has remained a popular space for right-wing extremists due to one key feature: the choice of anonymity.

3.7 The Power of the Anonymous

One reason why the World Wide Web has provided such a thriving platform for right-wing extremist activity is that it offers the option of *anonymity*. Anonymity, however, certainly precedes the age of the internet, with works often having been published without an author's name or under an alias. Authors have attempted to understand the effect anonymity has on texts. In their article "The Renaissance of Ano-

69 Ibid.

70 Bruce Hoffman, "How Serious Is White Nationalist Terrorism?" *Council on Foreign Relations* (March 29, 2019), https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-serious-white-nationalist-terrorism.

nymity" (2016), Andrea Rizzi and John Griffiths write that anonymity "unleashes the potential of a text" in the sense that when removing all knowledge of the writer, the reader is forced to respond critically and ethically to the text.[71] When applied to right-wing extremist texts and other activity, being anonymous takes focus off the person behind the screen, and encourages the reader to actually listen to *what* the poster's message is. This could be helpful when trying to recruit more people to the cause.

I argue that being anonymous also becomes an important precondition when sharing opinions that deviate from the average person. In the article "White Supremacist Use of the Internet to Fuel Racial Hate" (1999) published by the JBHE Foundation, the author writes that people who have white supremacist sympathies but lack the courage to publicly speak their minds, now have the possibility of taking in white supremacist propaganda in the comfort of their own home without being detected.[72] This is also the case with right-wing extremists. It is easier to share "unpopular" opinions online where you do not have to face the consequences of your actions. This also appears to be one of the main reasons why cyber-bullying has become such a big problem: hurting someone's feelings might not play as negatively on your consciousness as it would if you were to say it "straight" to someone's face.

Furthermore, also Brad Galloway highlighted anonymity as an important part of recruiting and activity altogether, saying that "[b]ecause I was trying to mobilize the movement and recruit people into organized hate groups, anonymity was key."[73] However, whether this is because having a hidden identity makes it easier to follow through when insulting someone—as suggested by the JBHE Foundation—or because anonymity is more effective at getting the mes-

71 Andrea Rizzi and John Griffiths, "The Renaissance of Anonymity," *Renaissance Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2016): 203.

72 JBHE Foundation, "White Supremacist Use of the Internet to Fuel Racial Hate," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 24 (1999): 81.

73 Scrivens, "The Hidden Face of Hate Groups Online," *Vox-Pol*.

sage across to the audience, as proposed by Rizzi and Griffiths, is difficult to determine. It could be due to a combination of both.

3.8 Right-Wing Extremist's Exploitation of the "Anti-Woke" Movement

Moving closer to the present day, the 2010s saw quite a cultural shift in how we think and speak of topics such as race and gender. These topics, which mainly had been part of the private sphere before this movement, were now moved into politics and the public sphere. In "The Long March of the Anti-Woke—And its Uncertain Destination" (2023), Blake Smith studies the woke-shift's recent backlash, which also fueled right-wing extremism. The author writes that while the woke-movement considered their thinking to be "common sense," conservatives regarded this cultural shift more as a "moral panic."[74] Smith recognizes the anti-woke backlash as a good thing, saying that it is no good that the cultural Left has infiltrated the school-system as well as academics. This, however, raises questions about Smith's agenda. That the anti-woke backlash is a "good thing" is a questionable statement, and the use of words such as "infiltrated" shows that the author is not only biased on the matter but also leaves an impression of hostility towards the cultural Left. Though Smith looks upon this response with approval, I suggest we might be seeing this response being misused by right-wing extremists who wish to exploit anti-wokeness for their own gain—especially on the internet. If you are an active user of the popular app TikTok, you are probably used to seeing anti-woke content, e. g. memes that imply or directly convey racist and/or homophobic content. Comments are usually formulated like this: "Too risky to repost," "You say what others are too scared to say,"

74 Blake Smith, "The Long March of the Anti-Woke—And its Uncertain Destination," *American Affairs Journal* 7, no. 3 (2023), accessed April 21, 2024, https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2023/08/the-long-march-of-the-anti-woke-and-its-uncertain-destination/.

"Based" (usually said when you agree with something controversial), and "W statement" ("W" is short for "Win"). This is also the case with Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremist activity. For instance, a TikTok video showing a picture of a black magnet which, upon swiping right, shows a picture of the Swedish map (still captioned as "black magnet"). Some of the most liked comments on this video say "du sa va alla tänkte" (you said what we are all thinking), "Europa for europeiska" (Europe for Europeans), and "Många apor" (Many monkeys).[75]

Generally, one can get the impression that speaking out against the woke-community is seen as a brave action. Even more so is ridicule of the Left, and criticizing democratic liberal values. The chances of being called a "snowflake" (in the sense that snowflakes are fragile) are quite high when openly supporting Leftist views. Still, what is concerning is that right-wing extremist groups might exploit the anti-woke movement and recruit people that just do not wish to be associated with the Left. They might ask, "Do you believe there is only one gender? Join us!" or "Are you tired of feeling ashamed for being white? We are white, and we are proud!" In this sense, right-wing extremist groups might become a beacon for people who seek similar minds. While we can generally agree that the cultural Left has become a problem, I believe it is important to acknowledge that one extreme should not be replacing another—the anti-woke movement might as well become just another extreme that contributes to further divisions.

3.9 Current Developments and Future Concerns with Right-Wing Extremism

I have now attempted to outline the short but complex historical development of right-wing extremism in Europe, with a particular focus on Norway and Sweden. The main reason for writing this is, how-

75 Videos B1 and 2: @idk & @oliver, "Black magnets," see appendix.

ever, the current situation regarding right-wing extremism across the globe. In the Norwegian police's security service's (PSS) 2024 threat assessment, the police concluded that along with extreme Islamism, right-wing extremism constitutes the country's most significant security threat besides the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Their biggest concern is that young people will be recruited to these groups via digital media.[76] Considering the short history of right-wing extremism in Western Europe, there appears to have been a lack of academic interest on the topic until recently. In his article "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe" (2016), Daniel Koehler writes that despite statistics showing a clear increase in right-wing violence in both the US and Europe, only a few studies have been conducted on this type of political violence. Koehler argues that this has led to a "dangerous level of ignorance and a worrying lack of expertise regarding the threat assessment of the far-right."[77] Other scholars appear to agree; Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Ravndal write in "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses" (2019) that the topic of right-wing terrorism has been "overshadowed" by large-scale Jihadist attacks, like 9/11.[78] The authors also raise their concern that the topic has largely been ignored because right-wing extremist attacks have mostly consisted of frequent incidents, but with fewer fatalities than Jihadist attacks. However, they specify that there have been incidents that have proven that lone actors are also capable of killing large numbers of people, which will be examined further later on.[79]

76 Benjamin Andersrød, Rikke Eckhoff, Martha Solli and Ajla Delic, "Skjult nynazist-nettverk bekymrer PST," *NRK*, March 18, 2024, accessed January 15, 2026, https://www.nrk.no/ostfold/pst_-nytt-hoyreekstremt-nettverk-har-etablert-seg-i-norge-1.16801282.

77 Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe," *PRISM* 6, no. 2 (2016): 86.

78 Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (September 1, 2019): 2.

79 Ibid.

These concerns appear to have led to an increase in studies on the topic. For instance, there has been made several attempts at tracing patterns in right-wing extremist violence and terrorist behavior. An example of this is the Norwegian RTV trend report, in which the previously mentioned author, Ravndal, documents incidents of right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe. In December 2023, a new dataset was released. This report presents 2001 incidents from 1990 until 2022, and considers a range of variables: fatality, country comparisons, perpetrator and target characteristics, choice of weapon, and organizational affiliations.[80] In a previous dataset, which accounts for incidents between 1990 and 2016, Ravndal presses the need for studies directed at Western Europe, as most of the already existing datasets consider RTV's in the US. Ravndal claims that these studies consist of incidents that have been registered haphazardly and which lack sources and substantial information, therefore making them virtually impossible to use effectively when in comparison to other cases of right-wing activity.[81] Only the dataset Terrorism in Western Europe: Events Data (TWEED) and Europol's annual report EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) document this type of activity in Western Europe.[82] Despite this, scholars across different fields appear to have gained interest in the subject. Historians have looked to the past in an attempt to understand where these sentiments come from, while psychologists have looked to the human mind for clues as to why some choose to join such groups. Regardless of having different points of interest when studying right-wing extremism, there appears to be a common consensus that these groups pose a societal threat. It is, therefore, not surprising that sociologists

80 Jacob Aasland Ravndal, Charlotte Tandberg, Simone Sessolo, Anders Ravik Jupskås and Tore Bjørgo, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990–2022," *C-Rex Research Report*, no. 1 (December, 2023): 4.

81 Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2016): 3.

82 Ibid.

appear to be especially concerned with the future of right-wing extremism in Europe.

Koehler considers this in the previously mentioned article, concluding that security agencies face difficulty tracking and getting ahead of these movements. Koehler claims this is due to right-wing extremist movements having developed tactics that largely get overlooked and misinterpreted by security agencies. Lone actors appear to make it more challenging to identify long-term plots, making right-wing terrorism and violence inevitable in some cases.[83]

Studying these groups also becomes difficult as there has been little transnational cooperation on defining and conceptualizing right-wing extremist activity. Consequently, like Ravndal, Koehler emphasizes that different cases of right-wing terrorism and violence have proven challenging to compare with one another.[84] Koehler also raises his concern that European right-wing extremism might work as a "blue-print" for the US. He especially highlights manuals and guidebooks that explain how to organize such movements, manifestos, how to use the internet to stir up hatred, all as specific acts that might get adopted by American right-wing extremists.[85]

3.10 Right-Wing Terrorism: A Fifth Global "Wave"?

With the increasing interest in right-wing extremism across academic fields, the question of *how* to study these groups becomes essential. In the previously mentioned journal *Perspectives on Terrorism,* Vincent Auger suggests in the article "Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?" that we might analyze right-wing extremism as "waves of terrorism," a theory pioneered by David Rapoport. Rapoport argued that the emergence of distinctive types of terrorist activities in different historical periods could be explained by new underlying political

83 Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe," 99.
84 Ibid., 86.
85 Ibid., 98.

and ideological forces. Rapoport could identify four "waves" of terrorist activity since the late 19th century: an "Anarchist" wave that began in the 1870s spurred on by ideas from the French Revolution, an "Anti-colonial/nationalist" wave that followed the First World War, a "Leftist" wave that lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s, and finally a "Religious" wave since 1979 as a consequence of several developments in the Muslim world.[86] Based on the theory of Rapoport, Auger debates whether or not right-wing extremism constitutes a fifth wave. In order to qualify as a "wave" right-wing extremism will have to meet four criteria, which can be identified as follows: an *expansion of activity*, a *triggering cause*, an *international character*, and a "*common predominant energy*."[87] Auger claims all evidence supports the argument that right-wing terror does qualify as a fifth wave.

First, Auger claims that studies show a clear *increase in right-wing extremist activity*. For instance, the 2016 RTV dataset conducted by Ravndal documents this. Additionally, there are other datasets which illustrate this trend: the TE-SAT and TWEED dataset that documents European terrorism, and the US-based Global Terrorism Database (GDT) and RAND Worldwide Database of Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI).[88]

Second, Auger states that there is a clear *triggering cause* for the emergence of these movements. Immigration, especially from the Muslim world, can be linked with the increase in the activity of right-wing extremist groups, as shown by Koehler. We also see this in the rhetoric of such groups, for instance SIAN who calls themselves "Stop the Islamization of Norway."

Third, right-wing extremism is certainly *international* in nature. Auger refers to the previously mentioned work by Koehler, in which the latter addresses difficulties in comparing different cases of right-wing extremist activity due to methodological differences across the

86 Vincent Auger, "Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?" *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (2020): 88.

87 Ibid., 89–90.

88 Ravndal, "RTV 1990–2016," 3.

world. Auger concludes, however, that this does not make it less international in character.[89] We can also see the international characteristic in right-wing extremist activity. Breivik's manifesto clearly addresses the whole of Europe, despite his attacks taking place in Norway.

Fourth and lastly, Auger argues that right-wing extremists have a clear *common predominant energy*. Bruce Hoffman wrote in his book *Right-Wing Terrorism in Europe* (1982) that right-wing extremists wish to "cleanse their respective countries of Communists, social democrats, and their liberal sympathizers, and to expel the foreign immigrants and refugees whom they regard as interlopers and parasites."[90] The latter point is especially visible in today's right-wing extremist activity, in the persistent work to stop the "white genocide"—a conviction shared by right-wing extremists in which the white man faces a danger of going extinct due to immigration and multiculturalism. To hinder and stop immigration, they resort to fear tactics and violent acts in the hopes of recruiting more people to their cause. Auger formulates their ultimate goal in his work: stopping the white genocide by provoking a "*race war*" in which the white man will prevail.[91]

89 Auger, "Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?," 90.
90 Bruce Hoffman, *Right-Wing Terrorism in Europe* (RAND Corporation, 1982), 23.
91 Auger, "Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?," 91.

4 Right-Wing Populism and Social Media

4.1 The Elective Affinity of Right-Wing Populism and Social Media

The concept of populism was only briefly covered in the second chapter. In this section we will be more closely examining right-wing populism and its relation to social media. Politicians, along with the rest of society, are increasingly taking to social media to promote their own views on current issues and world affairs as well as to spread their political agendas. While not exclusive, populist leaders are among those political actors who gain from the social affordances provided by social media and seem to be particularly capable to instrumentalize social media platforms in their election strategies. There is what has been called an "elective affinity" between populism and social media, in which there exists a natural correlation between the two.[92] The unique structure of social media allows much to be gained by populist leaders, especially those on the extreme end of the political spectrum, due to the bypassing of journalistic gatekeeping and traditional mass media norms.

This chapter will be examining the way in which populists, more specifically right-wing populists, can spread their ideology and political agendas through their use and engagement on social media. The chapter will furthermore outline populist communication strategy, and finally explore how Norwegian and Swedish populist use these strategies on their social media.

92 Jeroen Hopster. "Mutual Affordances: The Dynamics between Populism and Social Media," *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 3 (2021): 552.

4.2 Defining Populism

In the second chapter of this study, populism was briefly defined as "the will of a homogenous people opposing the elites in both political, cultural, and economic areas." Like with nationalism, finding a universal definition has proven itself difficult. Populism has been referred to as a "thin ideology" in populism literature. Political scientist, Cas Mudde, categorized it as a "thin centered ideology" in his work *Populism: A Very Short Introduction.* (2017), using a term originally coined by British political scientist Michael Freeden.[93] Here he explains that contrary to larger ideologies such as liberalism and conservatism, populism consists only of a few primary core beliefs.[94] In their article "Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology" (2017), Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel present five points that make up the ideological core of populism:

1. Emphasizing the sovereignty of the people,
2. advocating for the people,
3. attacking the elites,
4. ostracizing others, and
5. invoking the heartland.

They write that "a politician who uses these five ideological key elements engages in an illocutionary act of populism and, in this way, becomes a populist actor."[95] These points shall therefore be described in some detail here.

93 Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

94 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

95 Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel, "Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 8 (2017): 1111.

Firstly, populism emphasizes the will of the people and rejects the alleged corrupt elite. The absolute sovereignty of the people stands as the most central aspect, and it is the "demand for unrestricted popular power which distinguishes the ideology from its constitutional and liberal counterparts."[96] The elites are often accused of having deprived the people of their sovereignty, thus having failed the people. Populist leaders present themselves as the only solution to having restored the people's will, making the leader central to the ideology.

Secondly, since the people's will stands as the most central aspect of the ideology, it is paramount for populist leaders to advocate for the people. Though it is often left unclear exactly who constitutes as "the people," their needs are seen as inviolable.[97][98] There is something inherently good and pure within the people which must be protected from the corrupt elite. An important aspect here is that populist leaders work hard to build and maintain a close relationship with the people, continuously reminding them of the solution to their hardships.

Thirdly, in the process of advocating for the people and their sovereignty, populists attack the elite. This is done by attributing the "people's enemy" with words that spark feelings of distrust. The elite is accused of having abused their power, of compromising the people's rights, and overall blamed for the grievances and malfunctions of a system determined by and marked as democracy.[99] To whatever political, social, or economic problem which might arise, the elite is always to blame, as the populists are always the solution, although they remain unclear as to what an actual solution would look like and rather work with vague slogans instead of concrete proposals for change.

Fourthly, and one of the more unique aspects of populism, is the ostracizing of others. Within this ideology, the people can be distinguished in an "us" versus "them" sense, a narrative related to the idea

96 Ibid.

97 Maria I. Lorenzetti, "Right-Wing Populism and the Representation of Immigrants," *Saggi/Essays* 15 (2020): 64.

98 Engesser et al., "Populism and Social Media," 1112.

99 Ibid.

of an eternal struggle between "good" and "bad" that is also reinscenated or reframed within the semiotics of popular media, as it is shown in this study. The "other" is separate from the elite, but simultaneously seen as either favored by or working with the elite. Engesser et al. write that whereas the elite is considered as a danger from above, "the other" is considered to be a threat from either within or from outside.[100] This would for example be the case with immigration.

Fifth and finally, populist leaders gain popularity through invoking the heartland. The heartland is a romanticized idea or notion of the past and past events of the nation, like the "good old days" when everything was better as populists often tend to refer to this idea of a better past. Within populism theory, the past is represented in a glorified manner, in particular referencing days where maculinity was tied to glory and heorism. Instead of looking forwards, populist leaders look back in time to a mythical rendition of the past in order to create strong feelings of patriotism and nationalism. The elite is accused of having wrongfully strayed the people away from a society that in fact used to be glorious. Furthermore, the "other" is often included as being one of the many mistakes of the elite, as they are not part of the heartland and have betrayed their belonging by embracing foreign elements instead of protecting their own.

4.3 Right-Wing Populism

National populism falls within the category of right-wing populism and is the sort that is most interesting for this study. As the second chapter outlined, nationalists largely concern themselves with the preservation of their homeland and the people. In their work *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (2018), political scientists Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin define national populism as "an ideology which prioritizes the culture and interests of

100 Ibid.

the nation, and which promises to give voice to a people who feel that they have been neglected, even been held in contempt, by distant and often corrupt elites."[101] Populism occurs on both sides of the political spectrum; however, it is mainly the right and the extreme right that is of concern in this study. With this definition in mind, this section will continue to explore the different aspects mentioned above, before examining why populist leaders might take to social media.

Right-wing populists place the preservation of the nation's culture and traditions high, and it plays an important role in their campaigning.[102] Right-wing populist leaders often reference to the nation's past, often in an idealized form, to invoke the heartland. These renditions of the nation's history are not necessarily bound in historical accuracies, but are rather mythical recontextualizations. Maria Lorenzetti, in her work "Right-Wing Populism and the Representation of Immigrants" (2020) emphasizes the importance of "rewriting history" within the right-wing populist project.[103] Here she explains how populist leaders combine different political imaginaries and traditions, evoking glorified and idyllic ideas of the past, in order to create common ground with their "imagined community."[104] In the process of recontextualizing the past, a sharp division between the *real people* and an outside group is drawn. Right-wing and national populists' anatagonist outlook and the oppositional separation between "us" versus "them" is often expressed by their negative attitude towards specific groups. While rewriting history, these groups, be it immigrants or cultural minorities, often become the scapegoats who along with the elite, are to blame for the real people's grievances.

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101 Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican Books, 2018), 48.

102 On the relationship of populism and nationalism also see Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob, eds. *Nationalism and Populism: Expressions of Fear or Political Strategies?* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022).

103 Lorenzetti, "Right-Wing Populism," 65.

104 Ibid. On the concept of the "imagined community" see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

Right-wing populists present themselves as the only ones interested in and their political movement as the only option and solution for a neglected people. Eatwell and Goodwin describe the elite as an element presented as distant and corrupt. Lorenzetti emphasizes how populist leaders rely on conspiracy theories about the supposed cooperation between the outsiders and the elite: "A conspiracy between the two enemies, the elite, and the outsiders, is often envisaged to the detriment of 'the true inherently good people'."[105] Consequently, right-wing populists stress a more IN/OUT societal dichotomy, as opposed to left-wing populists who mainly concern themselves with the people being "underdogs" to a powerful elite, thus having a UP/DOWN perspective.[106] The elite is not only corrupt but might actually have been infiltrated by "them."

4.4 Why Use Social Media?

Populist leaders are increasingly appearing on social media and participating in public debates there. While this is not unique to populist leaders, various studies find that especially politicians with populist communication strategies capitalize on the network logics of social media.[107] This can partly be explained by how social media has given the people a more direct role in influencing the political and public sphere. Majid Khosravinik explores this in his article "Right Wing Populism in the West" (2017) and argues that "social media has affected norms of political communication in general and political activism in particular."[108] This is due to ordinary users not only being part of

105 Lorenzetti, "Right-Wing Populism," 65.

106 Ibid.

107 Sandy Schumann, Diana Boer, Katja Hanke and James Liu, "Social Media Use and Support for Populist Radical Right Parties: Assessing Exposure andSelection Effects in a Two-wave Panel Study," *Information, Communication & Society* 24, no. 1 (2019): 1–20.

108 Majid Khosravinik, "Right Wing Populism in the West," *Insight Turkey* 19, no. 3, (2017): 61.

the production of content, but also by being part of the consumption and distribution of it. Simultaneously, social media allows a flow of content that is not hindered by traditional gate-keeping practices as seen with traditional mass media.[109] The affordances gained by using social media for political gains will therefore furthermore be discussed according to the following advantages for populists: 1) social affordances, and 2) bypassing of journalistic gatekeeping.

One of the most important aspects for the success of populism in relation to social media stems from the participatory nature of the respective platforms. Politicians get a real-time insight into the people's opinion and can adjust their trail of content based on this. Nicole Ernst et al., in their article "Extreme Parties and Populism," (2017) emphasize the importance of direct access to the people's grievances in addition to the opportunity for close connection with their followers. Populist leaders are "self-perceived advocates and mouthpieces" of the people, making direct participation with the people an important strategy.[110] Jeroen Hopster highlights similar aspects in his article, stating that "social media allow for the real-time expression—and measurement—of the 'general will' of the people."[111]

This aspect can also be understood from a psychological and cognitive perspective. When populist leaders, and other politicians as such, engage with ordinary users on social media, a feeling of "social presence" is created. According to Ernst et al., this feeling can result in a stronger and closer connection between the populist actor and their followers.[112] Users might feel as though the populist actors are on the same human level as them, especially if their content is more personalized and breaks with people's perception of what politicians' lives

109 Ibid.

110 Nicole Ernst, Sven Engesser, Florin Büchel, Sina Blassing and Frank Esser, "Extreme Parties and Populism: An Analysis of Facebook and Twitter across Six Countries," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 9, (2017): 1350.

111 Jeroen Hopster. "Mutual Affordances: The Dynamics between Populism and Social Media," *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 3 (2021): 556.

112 Ernst et al., "Extreme Parties and Populism," 1350.

look like. An example, though not populistic, but that illustrates this function nonetheless, is a recent picture that was posted on Instagram by the Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen. The photo shows the prime ministers of Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway eating together around a dinner table.[113] The casual setting of the image is a stark contrast to the actual reason behind their gathering, which was in relation to meetings they have had regarding Scandinavian security relating to the war between Ukraine and Russia. The calmness of the photo is reflected in the comments, where users exclaim their gratitude and appreciation for having such calm and collected leaders during a time of deep concern for national security. If they are calm, so can we. Most importantly, they can be trusted.

Besides the social affordances that are gained, social media allow political actors to circumvent traditional mass media gatekeeping. Traditional mass media has got strong "entry barriers" in the form of editorial filters, where publishers and journalists have major influence on what content gets published. This obstacle has diminished with the introduction of social media, where users themselves are responsible for which content is getting published. In the case of populist leaders, Hopster emphasizes the opportunity for criticizing the elite, which would have been less than likely to pass the editorial filters of traditional mass media.[114] The absence of editorial filters also results in a greater diversity of political actors and opinions, which has served populist and radical movements well.

It is important to note, however, that despite users having power over what gets published, users do not have the power to decide which content gets engaged with. Hopster describes the digital sphere as therefore being increasingly fueled by an "attention economy," in which users largely adjust their content based on what is likely to gain

113 @mette, Instagram, January 26, 2025, accessed January 31, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DFTW3U1Mkph/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==.

114 Jeroen Hopster. "Mutual Affordances: The Dynamics between Populism and Social Media," *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 3 (2021): 556.

the most attention.[115] Platform algorithms select and sort the content and also learn what individual users find interesting: "In the internet age, information is plentiful and easily available. People's attention, on the other hand, is a scare resource, over which different media compete. The more attention they are able to harvest, the greater their value for advertisers."[116] Fortunately for populists, the algorithmic network logics of social media are well suited for spreading ideas, images, and narratives tied to an ideology. Populists in this regard also tend to push forward to intensify a feeling of crisis. There is sense of urgency in their communication, often with bold and memorable claims that resonate with large audiences. Consequently, the "attention economy" of social media works especially well for political actors who base their communication and content on sensational claims and emotional appeal.

4.5 Populist Communication Strategy

This section will outline different aspects of populist communication strategy. It therefore builds upon the four main points of populist communication strategy proposed by Sander Schwartz, Matti Nelimarkka and Anders Larsson in their article "Populist Platform Strategies: A Comparative Study of Social Media Campaigning by Nordic Right-Wing Populist Parties" (2022). These are negativity, emotionality, sociability and simplification.

With regard to *negativity*, Schwartz emphasizes the overly pessimistic perspectives on society and its members, in addition to the overall crisis rhetoric which was mentioned in the section above.[117]

115 Ibid., 557.

116 Ibid.

117 Sander Andreas Schwartz, Matti Nelimarkka and Anders Olof Larsson, "Populist Platform Strategies: A Comparative Study of Social Media Campaigning by Nordic Right-Wing Populist Parties," *Information, Communication & Society* 26, no. 16 (2022): 3221.

The overly pessimistic perspective is often expressed in the context of the elite and the "others." The elite is presented as corrupt, evil, and is often attributed with negatively loaded adjectives such as "exploitative," "selfish," and "arrogant."[118] The "others" are blamed for the nation's shortcomings, and the eviction of them as the road back to national glory. Donald Trump's profile on X is quintessential to this aspect. His negative portrayal of Mexican immigrants, the Chinese, and world leaders such as Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has major impact on his audiences. Portraying the Mexican people as criminals has normalized the stereotyping of minorities in the US. Naming Ukraine's president Zelenskyy a "dictator" and as "ungrateful" has further divided the American people on the matter of sending military support to Ukraine. Humans are as often swayed by their feelings, as by arguments. For many, especially young people, politics may be both difficult and tedious to understand. It may also be partly due to this that appealing to audiences' feelings might have such a strong effect—especially if a sense of unjust treatment or oppression arises. Therefore, negative perspectives pair well with idyllic promises, such as Trump's campaign "Make America Great Again."

The second aspect of populist communication strategy is *emotionality*, which focuses on sharing very positive or negative emotions, including appeals to feelings of patriotism.[119] The section above discussed the use of negativity in populist communication strategy, however, positive emotions also play an important role here. Invoking the heartland is a strategy in which populist actors conjure extremely glorified, idealized versions of the nations' past in order to create feelings of patriotism. As mentioned before, the heartland is set in the nation's past, but is not necessarily bound to historical accuracy. The purpose of the heartland is not to create historical awareness, but rather to: 1) justify the negative portrayal of the elite and the others, 2) to create a holding-point or point of reference for the direction the nation

118 Engesser et al., "Populism and Social Media," 1112.
119 Schwartz et al., "Populist Platform Strategies," 3221.

should be going to, and 3) to mobilize an oppressed people through feelings and acts of patriotism.

Both positive and negative emotions have the effect of generating motivation and engagement, something that populists need from a people that have grown accustomed to a corrupt elite. Schwartz et al. refer to various studies which all find that especially negative emotions are more effective in generating engagement and political mobilization.[120] For instance, populists actively use scare-tactics in order to generate the feeling of fear, e. g. by attempting to show crime statistics and linking them with immigration. This can also more simply be done by being selective in their choice of words, e. g. when naming immigration from the Middle East a "crisis" or a "wave." When it comes to emotions, populist communication strategy involves sharing negative emotions in the context of the nation under the elite's regime, while sharing positive emotion in the context of what could be if the real people had their will.

The third aspect is *sociability*, which focuses on colloquial and vulgar language, including name-calling, or sharing personal and intimate details from personal life.[121] It is generally the norm for political actors to use a relatively formal language when speaking to and engaging with their audiences. The introduction of social media has opened up new possibilities for how politicians, and especially populist actors, might choose to socialize.

Populist actors tend to be quite informal and vulgar when communicating and appear less concerned with "political correctness." Trump's name-calling is a good example of this. "Sleepy Joe" was a name given to Joe Biden during his presidency, after Trump claimed Biden could not keep up with the job. These digs are usually directed at the elite or the "others," often masked as jokes. Lorenzetti emphasizes this aspect in her article, and states that "[f]or right-wing populists, … the use of anti-intellectualism, and the rhetoric of 'com-

120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.

mon sense,' in an often coarse outspoken style crusading against the polished language of politically correct, are key for spreading their message to 'the common man.'"[122] Sharing personal and intimate details from one's personal life is also a way in which populist actors can gain the audience's trust. Politicians might appear as "larger-than-life" figures, and ordinary people may find it as difficult to relate to them, as they find it hard to believe that politicians can relate to the people. Sharing content that humanize politicians is an effective strategy for bringing themselves down to the same "level" as the people. Mette Frederiksen achieves this effect through her Instagram post which was mentioned previously in this chapter. While the prime ministers of Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway had just been discussing the national security of their respective countries, they, like the rest of the people, also sat down for an ordinary dinner at a normal dinner table.

Fourth and neither less important is *simplification*, due to which issues are presented as either black or white, nuances are disregarded and issues are spoken in absolute terms.[123] This aspect is essential to populist communication strategy, because 1) it allows populist actors to make bold claims that do not reflect actual relations, and 2) it is an effective way of appealing to mass audiences. Simplification involves reducing the complexity of an issue and often answering them with simple solutions. In populism, simplifications are often made in the context of distancing the "pure people" with the "other," e. g. by reducing minorities to stereotypical versions of themselves. Simplifications are also made when attempting to justify certain opinions or politics. Simple issues require but a simple solution: If all Mexicans are criminals, then just build a wall.

Evidently, simplification of complex issues can have quite dangerous effects on how audiences understand politics. Immigration is one such issue. In Lorenzetti's study, it is pointed out that Donald Trump's simplification of Mexican immigration has paved the way "for their

122 Lorenzetti, "Right-Wing Populism," 66.
123 Schwartz et al., "Populist Platform Strategies," 3221.

exclusion from the category of legitimate human beings, and the shifting of immigration from humanitarian issue to security threat."[124] Lorenzetti concludes her study with the following statement:

> "Oversimplifying the phenomenon, producing trivialized and decontextualized misrepresentations are instrumental in enacting racist exclusion. Presenting migrants as a fraud, as criminals who must be kept beyond a wall, and as undesirables that must be controlled, evacuated, and excluded produces what Bauman termed adiaphorization, i. e. considering migrants as outside of one's moral interests, causing *de facto* the legitimization of a social production of immorality."[125]

Indeed, there is a certain danger that populism might have a normalizing or justifying effect on people's lack of sympathy towards people in need. Simplification and bagatellization of other people's life situations can be a way of removing the experienced ethical obligations around politics.

4.6 Norwegian and Swedish Populism on Social Media

This study's aim is not to examine populist leaders' social media activity in particular, but right-wing extremist activity overall. However, it can be fruitful to get an idea of what role social media plays for populist parties in Norway and Sweden, as political leaders play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of nations. This final section of the present chapter therefore aims to outline trends found in case studies of the two countries; one by Bente Kalsnes in her article "Examining the Populist Communication Logic: Strategic Use of Social Media in Populist Political Parties in Norway and Sweden" (2019) and the other by Schwartz which was previously introduced.

124 Lorenzetti, "Right-Wing Populism," 87.
125 Ibid., 87–88.

In terms of studies that have been made on the Nordic countries after the introduction of social media, there is a fair amount of research on how the far-right has moved much of their activity from "the streets to the screens." However, Kalsnes points to the lack of studies on how Nordic right-wing populist parties strategically use social media, both in relation to their voters and to the news media.[126] Kalsnes consequently aims to examine the relation between right-wing populist parties and social media in light of the *life cycle model* which describes the relationship between the two in four phases: *the ground-laying phase, the insurgent phase, the established phase,* and *the decline phase*. *The ground-laying phase* is characterized by political and social discontent, in which the media pushes forward negative depictions of the current political situation, which in turn creates a political climate that engenders neo-populist discourse.[127] *The insurgent phase* is characterized by an abundance of media attention on the neo-populist movements, due to novelty, messages and rhetoric.[128] The media attention includes both good and bad reactions to the neo-populists.

The established phase is characterized by the public legitimization of the neo-populist movement. In this phase, media coverage of the movement has usually shrunk, due to the novelty having worn off. However, if the neo-populist movement actually challenges the political *status quo,* the elite media in particular will attempt to strengthen the support of the ruling political parties through negative media coverage. In the fourth and last *decline phase*, the relationship between populist parties and social media is characterized by their fading from the media. However, it is important to note that not all neo-populist movements experience going through this phase. Kalsnes claims that in the case of European neo-populism, few movements find them-

126 Bente Kalsnes, "Examining the Populist Communication Logic: Strategic Use of Social Media in Populist Political Parties in Norway and Sweden," *Central European Journal of Communication* 12, no. 2 (2019): 188.

127 Ibid., 190–191.

128 Ibid., 191.

selves in this phase because they still gather media attention and are fairly successful.[129]

Norway

Norway's closest resemblence to populism is found within the far-right party FrP (The Progress Party). Kalsnes places FrP in the *established phase* of the life cycle model, and as it appear in 2025, it still inhabits the characteristics of this phase. In 2013, the FrP got a position in government along-side the Conservative Party (Høyre), further legitimizing their position in Norwegian politics, while also proving that the FrP has moved beyond the insurgent phase. Kalsnes points to the party's history as an explanation to its popularity, having first emerged as an anti-tax movement in the 1970s.[130] According to TNS Gallup, Facebook is the most popular social media platform in both Norway and Sweden.[131] It is partly due to this that FrP has the most success reaching their audience through Facebook, something that also Schwartz's study finds. *Sociability* appears to be an important communication strategy for the FrP, while the party's social media profile focuses more on campaigning, their former leader's profile, Siv Jensen, had a more personal touch and appeared to be run by herself.[132] This also seems to be the case in 2025, even with the change of the party's leader—Sylvi Listhaug, who posted on 28 February a picture of herself making dinner with the caption "Soon tacos! Wishing you all a nice weekend ☺."[133]

On the matter of populist communication strategy, which Kalsnes claims to occur rather randomly and inconsistently, it is argued that the subjects of *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism* frequently occur

129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid., 193.
132 Ibid.
133 Sylvi Listhaug, Facebook, February 28, 2025. Post was deleted.

among FrP, and that somewhat surprisingly *exclusion of others* is less frequent than expected.[134] It is important to note that a lot of time has passed since this study was conducted, meaning that this conclusion might not hold up to the party's current activities. In terms of *emotionalization*, it looks like as if the FrP writes predominantly positive posts, focusing on advocating their policy.

Sweden

In Sweden, the SD (The Sweden Democrats), are placed in the *insurgent phase*.[135] The party has received a lot of media attention over the years, and despite the article being six years old and the study itself over ten, I argue that the SD still remains in the insurgent phase. This is because the party continues to receive a lot of media attention, in addition to the fact that other political parties in Sweden refuse to cooperate with the SD. Contrary to FrP's history as an anti-tax movement, the SD have roots in the neo-Nazi movement, what partly explains why other Swedish political parties are either reluctant to or down-right refuse to cooperate with the SD.[136] Unsurprisingly, Kalsnes argues that the *exclusion of others* and *anti-elitism* are subjects that often appear in SD's Facebook content.[137] Schwartz's study also states that, when comparing Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, Sweden is the only country where right-wing populist parties consistently dominate both on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.[138]

The SD's strategy involves more use of *emotionalization* than the FrP, at least with regard to the use of *negativity*. When referring to immigration, the FrP chooses terms such as "strict immigration policy" and "sustainable immigration," while the SD use the term "mass

134 Kalsnes, "Examining the Populist Communication Logic," 202.
135 Ibid., 191.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 197.
138 Schwartz et al. "Populist Platform Strategies," 3227.

immigration."[139] This places the immigration issue in a state of crisis that in turn generates feelings of fear. Similarly, the SD write more negative posts than the Norwegian FrP, focusing on attacking their political opponents, the media and the state of the Swedish nation.[140] Moreover, the SD uses humor and whit as a way of increasing their share count, e. g. by commenting on news stories with a sharp, critical and humoristic bite.[141]

Evidently, while the FrP and the SD share many of the same political concerns, their approach to social media differs on several points. The FrP, belonging to the established phase of the life cycle model, has a social media activity that reflect its legitimized position in Norwegian politics. This is opposite to the case of the SD who arguably still belong in the insurgent phase, and who's activity and popularity seem to be more dependent on bold and negative content. The result is that populist communication strategy occurs in an irregular pattern on social media.

139 Kalsnes, "Examining the Populist Communication Logic," 198.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid., 194.

5 Aspect 1: Historical References

Right-wing extremist activity appears to be flourishing online, as previously accounted for in the work by Conway, Scrivens and Macnair, as well as from the insights we get from the former right-wing extremist Brad Galloway. Right-wing extremist sentiments are on a political rise in Norway and Sweden, as seen with the far-right parties Sverigedemokraterna (The Sweden Democrats) in Sweden and Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress Party) in Norway. The Progress Party has been the fourth-largest party since the last government election in 2021 in Norway. However, it became the third largest party due to its popularity in the county elections in 2023.[142] In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats are the second biggest party, only surpassed by the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna).[143] Of course, as with the rest of Europe, right-wing parties have their place within state politics, but radical and explicit forms of activity largely remain within either organized groups or networks of private actors. For instance, due to major backlash from other Swedish parties, the Sweden Democrats have not been included in today's Swedish government despite earning 20.5 % of the votes.

However, in order to structurally analyze the elements that are present in Swedish and Norwegian right-wing extremist activity, we need an analytical tool set. In this study, I have chosen to apply *semi-*

142 "Valgresultat," Elections, Valgresultat, published 2023, accessed April 21, 2024, https://valgresultat.no/valg/2023/ko.

143 "Få oversikt over de svenske partiene," Altinget, last modified January 26, 2024, accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.altinget.no/artikkel/faa-oversikt-over-de-svenske-partiene.

otic theory to this subject, as its theoretical tools allow us to interpret the meaning and signification of *discourse*—which in short considers all written or spoken forms of communication and debate.[144] This theory is pertinent to this work as social media offers an expanse of platforms for communication—whether it is in written, visual or spoken forms. In addition, semiotics aim to interpret and understand the *meaning* behind images and texts, which one could say are the two building blocks of digital social media—a fusion between literate and visual culture.

In the chapter "Image and Text" from the volume *Image Studies: Theory and Practice* (2012), chapter-author Sunil Manghani argues that people have become increasingly visually literate throughout the 2000s and "images have become the central medium of information, and the role of language has become that of a medium of commentary. Images carry the argument."[145] This is interesting because it suggests that images have come to be perceived as more important in communication than before. This is also interesting because we can see this in action when scrolling through different social media platforms. In particular, so-called "memes" primarily consist of a combination of image and text, where the text has little significance without the image and vice versa. This is because there is often more to images and texts than what there appears to be at first glance; semiotic theory might provide the tools we need to uncover what lies beyond them.

144 Jørgen Dines Johansen and Svend Erik Larsen, "Discourse Analysis: Sign, Action, Intention," in *Signs in Use: An Introduction to Semiotics,* eds. Jørgen Dines Johansen and Svend Erik Larsen (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 56.

145 Sunil Manghani, "Images and Text," in *Image Studies: Theory and Practice,* ed. Sunil Manghani (London: Routledge, 2012), 60–61.

5.1 Semiotics

In his article "Semiotics of Media and Culture" in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics* (2009), Marcel Danesi explains the overall purpose of semiotics as follows: "The overarching aim of semiotics is to study semiosis (the production and comprehension of signs) as it manifests itself in human and non-human spheres."[146] The study of human semiosis has a cultural aspect, which we can categorize as *cultural semiotics*. Danesi claims that this discipline has proven itself to be particularly well suited as a framework for analyzing signs, texts and signifying practices used by the contemporary mass media.[147] Hence, why I have chosen to apply it specifically to the topic of online right-wing extremist activity.

Semiotics revolve around studying *signs* and the meaning and signification of them. One important contributor to this topic was the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco, who claimed that a sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign." Eco thus defined semiotics as "the principle studying everything which can be used in order to lie."[148]

Language also plays an important part in semiotics. The French theorist Roland Barthes has written valuable works on language and the study of signs, and his reflections are often referenced in the semiotic debate. In the article "Jargon as Imagining: Barthes' Semiotics and Excavating Subcultural Communication" (2009), authors Hélène de Burgh-Woodman and Jan Brace-Govan examine the role of language in subcultural communication, with a particular focus on language-use in marketing. Here, the authors outline the most essential point made by Barthes on the topic of language, i. e. that language has a multivalent meaning, and that the reception of language is entirely

146 Marcel Danesi, "Semiotics of Media and Culture," in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics,* ed. Paul Cobley (London: Routledge, 2009), 135.

147 Ibid.

148 Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (London: Indiana University Press, 1976), 7.

dependent on its recipient. The authors then go on to summarize two of the implications that this has on marketing.

1. Because language can have more than one intended meaning and is interpreted differently by each consumer (recipient), marketers can "go in search" of the meanings generated by subcultural consumers to gain further insight into consumer-driven discourse into which they must integrate.
2. Tailoring language to "fit in" with the targeted audience enables marketers to improve their accuracy and better the chances of their message reaching the right audience.[149]

Though this article explicitly relates Barthes' theory to marketing, I argue this might also be the case with other instances where someone wishes to promote something, even ideological sentiments. In semiotic theory, language is a form of spoken or written *sign*, and as mentioned above, signs are understood as everything that can be taken as something substituting for something else and which can be used in order to lie. Language thus becomes a narrative tool when used consciously, supposedly both by the creators and the recipients of a message. This is the main point in Marshall McLuhans's theory on media, who theorized in his work "Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man" (1964) that the media itself is the message, but the sender must also semiotically be able to decipher it. Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan similarly conclude in their article that by "speaking their language" (them being the recipients), marketers can reach a specifically targeted audience. In semiotic theory, this can be done by using *jargon,* which is specific discourse shared by a group across social and geographical borders[150]; I will return to this later.

149 Hélène de Burgh-Woodman and Jan Brace-Govan, "Jargon as Imagining: Barthes' Semiotics and Excavating Subcultural Communication," *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (2008): 91.

150 Ibid., 94.

5.2 Right-Wing Semiotics

I briefly mentioned cultural semiotics above. In the article "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture" from the volume *New Literary History* (1978), authors Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspenskij study the connection between language and culture. Lotman and Uspenskij state that culture is understood to function as a *system of signs* in the semiotic study of culture.[151] Cultural semiotics thus is the study of human semiosis—the comprehension of signs and sign-systems in human relations. Sign-systems can be understood as sets of signs which are understood similarly between communicator and recipient, such as how a gesture might signal one meaning in one culture, while signaling a different meaning in another. One way to theoretically distinguish this is by applying the term *semiosphere,* which first appeared in Lotman's work. According to Danesi, the semiosphere describes cultures and how they are cognitively constraining as they regulate and enhance human cognition. This is because people who are born into specific cultures are imposed to already-fixed sign systems, which is likely to determine how they come to perceive the world around them.[152]

The semiosphere also consists of a more or less defined inside and outside, much like the "insides" and "outsides" of nations in nationalist theory. This results in semiospheres, or cultures for that matter, opposing themselves against other semiospheres. While this limitation does not necessarily or automatically include hostility between the spheres, some cases might lead to a more aggressive form of "othering." In *The Social Semiotics of Populism* (2023), Sebastián Barreneche aims to test semiotics' conceptual and theoretical apparatus to find out if it can be of useful in clarifying the nature of populism. Central to Barreneche's findings is right-wing populism's practices of othering

151 Yuri Lotman, Boris Uspenskij and George Mihaychuk, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," *New Literary History* 9, no. 2 (1978): 217.

152 Danesi, "Semiotics of Media and Culture," 135.

and of semiotic expulsion of groups that are imagined as not being part of "the people."[153]

In right-wing semiotics, the dynamic of othering consists of establishing boundaries between "us" and "them," and of culturalizing the "other" with traits and features that justify conceiving it as an enemy.[154] Barreneche examines the ways in which this is done by the use of language. For instance, he semiotically analyzes one of Marine Le Pen's speeches during the 2017 French presidential election. Here, the author finds excessive use of "othering," for instance in Le Pen's choice of words, which have a unifying effect when talking to the people, such as "*our* children" and "*our* country"—closing the distance between her and the people. Simultaneously, Le Pen's choice of words aims to create a strong sense of nationalism within the people, while offering a solution to "making France great again"—stop Islamic immigration.[155]

I will now look at two examples of historical references in Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremist activity and will use semiotic theory when analyzing the use of image and text.

5.3 Symbolism and Vikings

One of the most significant aspects of nationalism theory, is the need for "having" a history. Being an important building block when constructing a nation's narrative, history is an essential part of a people's national identity. References to history is therefore, unsurprisingly, found in many forms of right-wing extremist discourse.

The Nordic Resistance Movement (more commonly known as Nordfront) is a neo-Nazi movement in the Nordic countries which was established in December 1997. Nordfront's work revolves around

153 Sebastián M. Barreneche, *The Social Semiotics of Populism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 127.

154 Ibid., 85.

155 Ibid., 128–131.

stopping Islamic immigration to the Nordic countries, securing the purity of the white race, as well as spreading antisemitism. As accounted for in the previous chapter, some right-wing extremists have expansionist ambitions, something that is reflected in their goal of establishing a Nordic national-socialist republic consisting of the Nordic countries Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and possibly also the Baltics.[156] Let us take a closer look at Nordfront's logo.

Fig. 1: Flag of the Nordic Resistance Movement, https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Den_nordiske_motstandsbevegelsen#/media/Fil:Flag_of_the_Nordic_Resistance_Movement.svg.

Nordfront's logo seemingly depicts a simple runic letter: ᛏ as seen in figure 1. The rune sits on top of a tilted square colored in a stark green. The square is outlined in a black and white border, sitting on top of a green background with the addition of a white line running across horizontally behind the rune. I argue that their logo can be interpreted as a historic reference to both Nordic mythology and ancestry, as well as to 1940's Nazism.

In semiotic terms, the logo is *monosemiotic*. This is because it consists of only a single form, in this case, an *image*. In his article "The Branding of European Nationalism: Perpetuation and Novelty in Racist Symbolism," Mark McGlashan examines how racist organizations and individuals adopt symbols in order to realize discourses

156 Klas Lund, "Framtidens styre," *Nordfront*, March 4, 2010, accessed January 25, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20171224082536/https:/www.nordfront.se/framtidens-styre.smr.

that coincide with their particular ideological stances. In this article, McGlashan analyzes different racist images by using tools from semiotics. For instance, he studies the previously mentioned organization Stormfront and their logo. By interpreting the monosemiotic image, McGlashan highlights that several parallels can be drawn between Stormfront's logo and Nazi Germany's infamous swastika-insignia. While these references to Nazi Germany might seem quite obvious, McGlashan shows that modern far-right extremist organizations and individuals intentionally make their references less conspicuous to better "fit in" with the contemporary political (opinion, landscape, or (legal) norm).[157] To illustrate this, McGlashan looks at the logo of the Swedish political party *Sverigedemokraterna* (The Swedish Democrats), which is arguably the most far-right party in Sweden. The author finds that Sverigedemokraterna's logo, which takes the form of a *blåsippa* (blue anemone) flower, like Stormfront, has many nods to Nazi Germany, but in a much less obvious manner. Firstly, McGlashan points out how the blåsippa predominantly blooms in Europe, a symbol to the Swedish people that "naturally" belong there in contrast to Islamic immigrants from outside of Europe. Secondly, McGlashan points to the colors of the blåsippa, which consists of blue and yellow, which also happen to be the colors of the Swedish flag. McGlashan writes that the adoption of the image of blåsippan allows the conflation of ideas of nationality and fertility into a visual metaphor for Swedish nationalism.[158] Thirdly, McGlashan finds important interpretations of discourse on immigration when extending the flower metaphor, stating that "Cross-pollination with other flower species may alter the biology of the flower, a reference to the genetic makeup of individuals and, by analogy, to sociocultural distinctiveness."[159] Despite the strong use

157 Mark McGlashan, "The Branding of Euopean Nationalism: Perpetuation and Novelty in Racist Symbolism," in *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text,* eds. Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson (London: Routledge, 2012), 301.

158 Ibid., 308.

159 Ibid., 308–309.

of symbolism and references, McGlashan writes that Sverigedemokraterna's political branding has been much in line with that of other European nationalist parties. This also shows how right-wing extremist organizations must adapt and rethink their campaigning in order to "get a seat" in today's political landscape.

Let us return to Nordfront's logo. If you visit their website, Nordfront allows members to post articles, and in one titled: "Våre symboler" (Our symbols), the editors explain in their own words Nordfront's thoughts around the symbolism in their logo. The rune ᛏ is a reference to Týr, a god of war in Germanic mythology. In Norse mythology, Týr sacrifices his hand to the monstrous wolf Fenrir, linking him with characteristics such as sacrifice and bravery. The name "Týr" derives from the Germanic word "Tiwaz," meaning "god" or "deity." According to Nordfront themselves, the Týr-rune symbolizes bravery, offervilje (the willingness to be sacrificed), combat and victory; however the name itself could be a symbol of almightiness and power. The author(s) of this article idolize Týr and his sacrifice. They also claim that the image of the rune makes us turn our heads to our ancestors while we also look ahead at the conflicts "we are facing."[160] The tilted square is also a rune, being that of "Inguz": ᛜ. According to Nordfront, the Inguz-rune symbolizes: fertility, creativity, creative power, sense of purpose and focus.

The symbols sit on top of a green background, and according to Nordfront's interpretation, this is a reference to the connection with nature and "its eternal laws."[161] This "connection with nature" can arguably also be a reference to ethnic superiority and the idea of belonging and owning a specific piece of land, while simultaneously adding to the supposed "unnaturalness" of people with foreign ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, they write that the white border symbolizes their race, followed by the black border that symbolizes structure,

160 "Våre symboler," The Nordic Resistance Movement, last modified June 17, 2019, accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.motstandsbevegelsen.info/vare-symboler/.

161 Ibid.

order, hierarchy and discipline.[162] With the addition of the text in the article, the language used by Nordfront has the effect of "othering," but this is not as obvious when we consider the image of the logo in itself.

McGlashan argues that Germanic culture has been the subject of modern racist symbols, drawing lines to the study of Germanic runes, which became a prominent feature in the insignia of the Nazi SS and of several of its SS divisions.[163] The logo of Nordfront, similarly to Stormfront's, shares several design-features with the conventional Nazi military insignia. Both depict a symbol on top of a saturated color, outlined in white and black borders. While the infamous swastika has earned itself a somewhat iconoclast status, Nordfront's choice of the Tyr rune is a clear nod to Nazi Germany, which remains little acknowledged, as it is likely people who are either familiar with the meaning of runes or with the organization that will understand the intended significance of it—in semiotic terms, people within the semiosphere.

Their reference to history has different degrees of directness. In the case of mythology and ancestry, it is more obvious, as the runes are highlighted and the provided information is direct and concrete. However, when in reference to Nazi Germany, this symbolism is arguably much more hidden in the semiotic conventionalization. This might be due to similar reasons as those suggested by McGlashan—that modern right-wing extremist organizations need to adapt and rethink their activity and portrayal to fit in with the current political climate. However, this might also be explained by how our collective memory of WW2 influences the assumed feeling and reaction when one is confronted with Nazi-sentiments. Directly and plainly pointing to Nazi Germany is shameful rather than prideful and must therefore maybe be hidden from plain sight.

162 Ibid.

163 McGlashan, "The Branding of Euopean Nationalism," 303.

5.4 Military History and World War II

In the following section, I will examine some of the historical references that are present in right-wing extremist "TikToks" as another example of right-wing semiotics. The social media platform TikTok was launched in 2016 and gained popularity during the lock-down periods of the Covid-19 pandemic. Today, the platform has more than 1.1 billion active users, making it the fifth most popular social media app in the world.[164]

For this example, I have looked at one specific profile, Basedswede7, that in no particular way stands out among the rest of right-wing extremist content posted by otherwise ordinary users on the platform. One problem with gathering information and sources for right-wing extremist activity online is that moderators on different social media platforms tend to delete both the content of these profiles and the profiles themselves. Basedswede7 has, since I first discovered the profile, also been banned. However, after having tracked the activity of this profile for quite some time, I noticed that whoever is behind this account appears to be making new ones under a similar name (Basedswede17, Basedswede11).

In the first video from this profile, we see yet another reference to Nazi Germany and WW2. This can be categorized as *multisemiotic* (or polysemiotic), as it consists of both image and text—which is the classic format of a meme. This particular reference is portrayed via a popular TikTok trend (which I will refer to as the "greater-than trend") in which a user displays three slideshow images to the audience. The first image consists of a collage of items of different sorts (e. g. handsome men, jeans, or phones), which are all numbered (e. g. 10 images of different sorts of jeans that have been given a number each). The second image consists of only text, with the next, one or two numbers that are not listed in the first image, followed by a

164 Rohit Shewale, "46 TikTok Statistics for 2024 (Users, Creators & Revenue)" *Demand Sage*, January 9, 2024, https://www.demandsage.com/tiktok-user-statistics/.

"greater-than" sign. (e. g. 11, 12 >) The last slide shows an image of the next two jeans, which the creator insinuates to be superior to the jeans in the first picture.

In this post, the creator has attached three pictures to a slideshow. The first picture is an image of a style overview of men's jackets and coats. The jackets and coats are all numbered from 1–20. In the following image, we see "21, 22 >>>>>" on top of a black background. Finally, the last image is a photograph from the Museum of the Norwegian air-force, which depicts a display of one WW2 German Wehrmacht general's uniform, as well as a German private infantryman's uniform.[165]

From a semiotic outlook, fitting these references into trends allows creators to connect with other users on TikTok. The platform is famous for acting as a cradle for trend-making, viralizing long-forgotten songs, unhealthy foods, intricate dances, funny sayings, conspiracy-theories, challenges, and questionable "hacks." By fitting ideological discourse into already-existing and popular trends, creators "speak the language" of other users and are better able to gain the attention they seek. "Speaking their language" has become a popular marketing tactic, not only in sales but also in political campaigning. This is summarized well in the article "Twitter during the 2014 European Elections in Germany—Analyzing Politicians' Campaigning Strategies," in which authors Caja Thimm, Jessica Einspänner-Pflock and Mario Anastasiadis emphasize that "social media can serve as a technical infrastructure in which the communicative gap between the political sphere and the voters can be diminished."[166]

However, a vital aspect of these trends is the audience's assumed familiarity with their format, which is vital in order to understand

165 Video C: @knarkkaka, "greater-than trend," see appendix for video.

166 Caja Thimm, Jessica Einspänner-Pflock and Mario Anastasiadis, "Twitter during the 2014 European Elections in Germany—Analyzing Politicians' Campaigning Strategies," in *Tweets from the Campaign Trail: Researching Candidates' Use of Twitter During the European Parliamentary Elections,* eds. Alex Frame, Arnaud Mercier, Gilles Brachotte and Caja Thimm (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 197.

the post's signification—hence why a reference to the "superiority" of WW2 German military uniforms works so well with the "greater-than trend." In the introduction of this work, I briefly mentioned how the format of memes works well when trying to share something with a specific group. Zenner and Geeraerts write in their work that the significance and meaning of the meme can only make sense if the recipient is familiar with the "name" of the meme.[167] If topics such as Nazism are seen as something shameful to speak positively about, then racist discourse must be hidden from plain sight. Whether this is to avoid control by ever-watching moderators that threaten to take down your content or ban you from the platform or because it generally is associated with shame within the respective online community is sometimes difficult to tell.

The next video I have chosen is a collaboration between Basedswede7 (in this case under the name @patrioticswede) and Swedish-royalist (@swedishroyalism).[168] This video is one of many examples of these types of videos, where we find references to Swedish and Norwegian military history throughout the ages. In these videos, the creators have put together excerpts from "historical sources" (Wikipedia) that tell us about Swedish military history, combined with images of Swedish royalty throughout the ages and loud bass-dominating music. The images and texts come and go with the fast-paced rhythm of the music, giving you very little time to read the excerpts. The only thing you do have time to read is the highlighted "Victory" throughout the edit, which is likely what the creators intended the audience to be left with—that Sweden has won many battles throughout the ages.[169]

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167 Zenner and Geeraerts, "One Does Not Simply Process Memes," 177.

168 I wish to clarify in case there is any confusion around usernames/accountnames on TikTok: you have one accountname, which is the name you use when tagging someone with @, however, the username is your unofficial, changeable name. Basedswede has used a variation of "basedswede" in both his/her account- and username.

169 Video D: @Basedswede & @SwedishRoyalist, "Swedish military," see appendix.

The video falls into a category of TikTok-videos that can be categorized by their style of video editing. These videos combine different topics with loud dubstep-like music in an attempt to make said topic appear more appealing, interesting, or powerful than one might usually consider it. For instance, astronomical objects are often a displayed in these videos, making, for example Saturn appear ominous and powerful.[170] One could argue that these sorts of videos allow creators to better reach an audience that might not otherwise care about the topic that they wish to communicate. This effect is seemingly enhanced by TikTok's comment function, which allows the audience and creators to engage. When looking at the comment section of these videos, I would argue that the creators' use of language fits in with the "TikTok-lingo." For instance, the creators and audience communicate through shortened and trendy language: "W" and "Based." This language can only be understood if you already know that "W" means "Win" and "Based" means "honest and true to yourself," and is, as mentioned earlier, often used when agreeing with something controversial. This might be a good example of Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan's second implication of language use: marketers can better reach an audience by tailoring their language to "fit in."

What is visible in both TikTok videos that served only as examples here, and which also is my impression after having spent quite some time on the app, is that when referencing history, Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists tend to refer to military history of some sort. In some cases, they choose to focus on the actual events, such as the battles that have been fought and the key actors that brought them to victory. In other cases, they appear to have a more *materialistic* interest in military history, as illustrated in the first example with the 1940's German uniforms. I will argue here that in the Norwegian context, the interest in Nazi Germany is mostly restricted to that of a materialistic fascination, while it is is bit more prominent in the Swedish context. This could maybe be explained

170 Video E: @Werner, "example of typical 'cool' TikTok edit," see appendix.

by the differing conditions for a newfound Nazism in Norway and Sweden. Norway has, as mentioned before, a history of occupation under the Nazi regime, whereas Sweden does not. For this reason, one might think that Nazi sentiments would be more prominent in Swedish right-wing extremism, than in the Norwegian. Still, it is clear that also this part of history is an important element in both Swedish and Norwegian right-wing extremist activity online.

6 Aspect 2: Masculinity

The second defining aspect of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism that I would like to emphasize in this study is *masculinity.* In this section, I will first give a brief overview of the theoretical discussion that is central to this topic, before examining theory on how masculinity is treated in right-wing extremism from a more general perspective. Following this section, I will present some examples of constructed masculinity and its use in Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism.

6.1 Theory of Masculinity

Let us first examine some theory on the topic of masculinity. Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell has written some influential works on the topic. In her article "Masculinities: The Field of Knowledge" (2015) from the work *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice* edited by Stefan Horlacher, Connell briefly outlines the study of masculinity. Connell defines the term as "the pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order, and socially distinguished from practices linked to the position of women."[171] This is not to say that masculinity is necessarily determined by male biology, but that it constantly refers to masculine bodies. Both women and men can be regarded as masculine, just as

171 Raewyn Connell, "Masculinities: The Field of Knowledge," in *Configuring Masculinities in Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. Stefan Horlacher (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 40.

they can be regarded as feminine, however, feminine bodies are often considered weak by right-wing extremists.

According to Connell, among the most important findings in the study of masculinity is that constructions of masculinity vary across the world and throughout time. These constructions differ between cultures on both a *collective* and *individual* level: between countries, cities and peripheries, ethnicities, classes, generations, and individuals. One culture might have entirely different ideas of what is to be regarded as *true* masculinity from another culture. A product of this is what Connell refers to as *hegemonic* masculinities, in which one construction of masculinity is regarded as culturally dominant in comparison to others.[172] The hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the largest and does not always have total dominance over other masculinities. Other constructions can still exist alongside the hegemon.

Additionally, Connell writes that besides masculinities existing on an individual and collective level, it also exists *impersonally* in culture. For instance, the author explains how video games are greatly linked with masculinity. Not only do they have an expression of masculinity through the violent nature of the game, but the players are also expected to symbolically enact this masculinity in order to play the game at all. We can see this because it is generally, and stereotypically, a surprise to see a girl play videogames, and girls who do are often subjected to ridicule over in-game Discords.

In cultures where *sex roles*, more commonly referred to as gender roles, play an important part in the construction of masculinity, there might be clear ideas on what is regarded as feminine or masculine. Thus, what makes a "real man" is dependent on the culture's construction of masculinity. "Real men don't cry" is an example of this in modern Western societies.

However, modern Western societies appear to be breaking from the hegemonic masculinity that has existed in most industrialized countries at the national level. Public figures are often at the forefront

172 Ibid., 43.

of pushing and changing the imagined boundaries of sex and gender roles and, this is something that we can see through the media coverage when, for instance, superstar Harry Styles shows up on the red carpet in a dress instead of a suit. This change in norms has been a long time coming, as questions about masculinity are a result of the long debate on feminism and gender roles that took place during the 1970s.[173] Something has indeed changed, seeing as the idea of true masculinity has gone from "men don't cry" to "men cry too."

6.2 Masculinity in Right-Wing Extremism

There are quite a few theoretical works about masculinity in the context of right-wing extremism and, as I will soon present, some historians and social scientists find it to be a central aspect of these movements. Within this topic, I can identify two key points: masculinity as a construction of *real men*, and from a *love for violence*.

The expression "real men" continuously appears in right-wing extremist activism, and theoretical reflections on the topic suggests that many aspects determine what qualifies as "a real man" in the eyes of right-wing extremists. Theory on the subject shows that appearance, behavior, opinions, and sexuality have a lot to do with it.

First of all, right-wing extremists tend to establish strong macho-cultures between themselves. These cultures express a brutish form of masculinity, with manliness at its core. Norwegian professor in sociology, Katrine Fangen, has spent several years studying Norwegian right-wing extremist underground culture. Among her findings is a clear brute masculinity which attracts young boys into the right-wing "underground," as described in her article "A Death Mask of Masculinity: The Brotherhood of Norwegian Right-Wing Skinheads" (2003). Fangen suggests several ways in which right-wing extremists establish true masculinity; firstly, *appearance* plays an important role

173 Ibid., 49–51.

in establishing brute masculinity. Right-wing extremists take on an intimidating presence. The "classic" look consists of shaven heads, heavy Doc Martens boots, military camo jeans, and tattoos often picturing Viking symbols. However, their goal of intimidation involves not only their physical appearance but also how they appear together. Fangen writes that when right-wing extremists appear together in public, they exhibit a threatening presence through their *external conformity*. By looking alike and behaving similarly, the members can hide their individuality and moral standards behind the face of the group. Their threatening appearance is also enhanced by the way they mimic the formation of military parades. Walking in synchrony, side by side and carrying their banners, while wearing an expression void of any emotion, are some of the similarities we can find between right-wing extremist demonstrations and military parades.

Secondly, *behavior* and *opinions* are considered key determinants of who are considered real men. Real men, especially according to right-wing interpretations, are those who dare to stand up for their opinions and against the Other. Taking the "fight" to the street while intimidating on-lookers is seen as an honorable act, while never speaking up is seen as an act of cowardice and evidence of a lack of manliness.[174] Opinions also play an important role. Right-wing extremists have a very black-and-white view of the world. Fangen considers this as well, saying that "Others are either friends or enemies, there are no categories in between."[175] This could perhaps partly explain why Ukrainian refugees have come to be seen as "real" refugees in the eyes of right-wing extremists, despite the fact that they also contribute to multiculturalism. You are either an enemy or a friend, and possessing this brutal way of viewing the world makes you more masculine.

Another way in which real masculinity can be established is through *sexuality*—specifically through acts of *straightness*. One con-

174 Katrine Fangen, "A Death Mask of Masculinity: The Brotherhood of Norwegian Right-Wing Skinheads," in *Among Men: Moulding Masculinities*, vol. 1, eds. Søren Ervø & Thomas Johansson (London: Routledge, 2003), 190.

175 Ibid., 192.

cept that could be useful here is the term *sexual aesthetics*, which Tristan Bridges examines in his article "A Very 'Gay' Straight? Hybrid Masculinities, Sexual Aesthetics, and the Changing Relationship between Masculinity and Homophobia" (2014). According to Bridges, sexual aesthetics refer to cultural and stylistic distinctions "utilized to delineate symbolic boundaries between gay and straight cultures and individuals."[176] The author writes that the term involves a variety of things: interests, material objects, styles of bodily comportment, language, opinions, clothing, and behaviors.[177] In right-wing extremism, these aspects play important roles in determining one's straightness, which in turn determine one's masculinity. If we take The Nordic Resistance Movement as an example, we can see that their homogeneous appearance and conduct serve as a display of straightness through a sexual aesthetic.

Besides manliness being an essential component in establishing true masculinity, *violence* also plays an important role. As mentioned in the first chapter, Bernt Hagtvet listed violence as a key aspect of right-wing extremism, stating that "Right-wing groups see violence as a creative, even a cleansing, act."[178] Indeed, violence is regarded as a positive and necessary part of right-wing extremist activism by its members. In their article "'We Are the White Aryan Warriors': Violence, Homosociality, and the Construction of Masculinity in the Nationalist Socialist Movement in Sweden" (2021), Christer Mattsson and Thomas Johansson explore the role of violence in Swedish right-wing extremist movements. In the introduction, the authors write that violence can be a pleasurable, social, and identity-generating aspect of these movements.[179] Mattsson and Johansson further

176 Tristan Bridges, "A Very 'Gay' Straight? Hybrid Masculinities, Sexual Aesthetics, and the Changing Relationship between Masculinity and Homophobia," *Gender & Society* 28, no. 1 (New York: Sage, January, 2013): 62.

177 Ibid.

178 Hagtvet, "Right-Wing Extremism in Europe," 242.

179 Christer Mattsson & Thomas Johansson, "'We Are the White Aryan Warriors': Violence, Homosociality, and the Construction of Masculinity in the Nationalist Socialist Movement in Sweden" *Men and Masculinities* 24, no. 3 (2021): 394.

explain that status is gained through members' capacity for violence, and that an idea of the "Aryan warrior" is the most celebrated hegemonic masculinity—thus linking masculinity with one's willingness to act out violent behavior.[180] Simultaneously, the authors consider that there have been changes in the relationship between violence and masculinity in these movements. Because racism and hate speech have become more mainstream and are increasingly present in society at large, the authors find that the aggressive style of skinheads has largely been replaced by more sophisticated elements that conceal violence while putting forward new, attractive images of masculinity and nationalism.[181] For instance—as seen in the Nordic Resistance Movement—white shirts and green ties. With this theory in mind, I will now outline some of the trends I find in Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism in regard to masculinity.

6.3 Manly Men and their Manliness

The first trend I have identified is a clear emphasis on *manliness*. Much like the theory I have already explored, Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists concern themselves with the various factors they consider to characterize a "real man." According to my observations, this is commonly done by idolizing particular groups of men, historically imagined as well. Especially idolized as the "ethos of real men" is the Viking, or their *image* of the Viking. In Norwegian and Swedish far-right discourse, the Viking is seen as a hero figure, a warrior who crushed his enemies together with his brotherhood of fellow berserkers. Images of the Viking run through several parts of their movement—through bodily aspects such as physiques, facial hair, and tattoos, but also symbolically through music lyrics, band-, baby-, and club names.

Another way in which Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists enhance the role of manliness within their movements is

180 Ibid., 408.
181 Ibid., 397.

through a relatively new phenomenon referred to as "active clubs." These clubs, which originally come from the US, often present themselves as innocent social clubs where people can meet and perform activities, such as hiking or training. However, these clubs have a multifunctional purpose. First of all, as they are disguised as generic clubs, active clubs allow members of the far-right to meet in secret, undisturbed. These clubs are usually unaddressed as to remain hidden, allowing people who are not openly right-wing extremists to socialize with fellow members in private. Secondly, the clubs usually have a strong focus on the physical aspect of their activism—training for the "fight." Weightlifting, wrestling, boxing, and other types of combat fighting are standard activities here. In the Norwegian 2023 NRK documentary, "Sons of the North," the topic of active clubs is investigated. Here, Swedish expert on right-wing extremism, Lars Stjernelöf, says that active clubs revolve around self-improvement, training, and right-wing ideology. Stjernelöf goes on to explain that the members themselves partake in these clubs as a way of preparing for the fight—against multiculturalism, LGBTQ+, feminism and democracy.[182] The new phenomenon has recently gained some attention in the media, and the Norwegian Police's Security Service (PSS) looks upon the trend with concern. In the documentary, criminologist, and senior counsellor of the PSS, Siv Sørensen, says that they are closely watching these groups, something which is further elaborated in the news article "Hidden Neo-Nazi-Network Worries the PSS." Since the summer of 2023, active clubs have appeared in Norway, and the PSS is worried that they might contribute to spreading extreme ideology. What they find especially concerning is that there are several elements in the concept of active clubs that were used by ISIS as a means of recruitment about a decade ago.[183]

182 "Kampklar," Episode 1, NRK, published March 15, 2024, accessed January 25, 2025, https://tv.nrk.no/serie/soenner-av-norden/sesong/1/episode/1/avspiller.

183 NRK, "Skult nynasist-nettverk bekymrer PST," accessed January 25, 2025, https://www.nrk.no/ostfold/pst_-nytt-hoyreekstremt-nettverk-har-etablert-seg-i-norge-1.16801282.

Active clubs have an apparent relationship to the concept of manliness. Firstly, active clubs allow members to grow physical strength, something which has been highly praised among right-wing extremists today, but also back during the era of Nazi Germany. Being able to fight and win a fight is seen as an honorable act. An individual capacity for violence is regarded as an essential element of true masculinity. Secondly, "real men" are those who act on their words. Putting words into action and actively doing something to help the cause distinguishes "real men" from others.

6.4 Violent Masculinities: A Particular Love for Violence

Many of these aspects are highly intertwined—such as manliness and violence. As I have just illustrated with the phenomenon of active clubs, violence as an expression of manliness plays an important role in the right-wing construction of masculinity. Let us, therefore, further examine the role of violence.

It seems apparent that a love *for violence* is central to the construction of masculinity. However, I do not mean violence in its most basic form, such as physically fighting someone in the street. *Violence* is a core element that runs through several aspects of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism. One example is their *military obsession*, which is not unique to the Norwegian and Swedish cases but is highly present in them non-the same. As mentioned in the theoretical section of this chapter, masculinity can exist impersonally in culture, and military obsessions might be an excellent example of this. In Western hegemonic cultures, the military is largely associated with masculinity. This can also have a historical explanation (as men have made up the main recruiting body of the military).

We have already slightly seen this obsession with the military in chapter 3, where I outlined different historical references. It was made apparent that Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists often create stylish online videos that focus on their respective country's

military history, concentrating particularly on military victories. In addition to their historical interests, right-wing extremists in Norway and Sweden appear to also focus on the material side of the military—the uniforms, artillery, weapons, and practices—as was made evident in the example of the German Nazi uniform. Take the Norwegian organization SIAN (Stop the Islamization of Norway) as an example. When demonstrating, their leader, Lars Thorsen, consistently dresses in a military look-alike uniform: beige cargo trousers and jacket, and a military green army style cap on his head as seen in Fig. 2. Additionally, Thorsen drives a camo Norwegian military Mercedes-Benz offroad Jeep, making him appear even more soldierlike.

Fig. 2: Lars Thorsen burning a Quran in Tøyen. Photo: Lars Nyland/TV2. (2022), https://www.tv2.no/direkte/jpybz/siste-nytt/64c8f68d628612cefc26733b/Sky%20News.

Fig. 3: NRM's uniforms pictured at a rally in Falun. Photo: Ulf Palm. (2017), https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/6761365.

This obsession with the military can also be observed in the way that right-wing extremists behave and organize themselves on the streets in Sweden and Norway. When demonstrating, some organizations attempt to imitate military parades—the Nordic Resistance Movement is a good example of a group who does this. They dress in white shirts

and green ties, carrying big flags adorned with the infamous Tyr rune, while walking in complete synchrony; the NRM certainly exhibits a threatening appearance.

Violent elements are not only a part of the act of right-wing extremist groups when confronted with the Other; even within the movements themselves, violence is a recurring topic. For instance, it appears to play an important role in right-wing extremist gatherings in the way that members act towards and with one another. Violence also features heavily in their chosen forms of entertainment, such as music. During right-wing festivals, members stand closely together while they do the Nazi-salute. Then, some may remove their shirts, exposing their tattooed bodies. As the crowd gets more and more excited, they often form an open circle in the crowd before running into each other, pushing whoever they come in contact with. Though the ritual of the so-called "moshpit" is not unique to right-wing communities, it can be surprisingly violent in these contexts—some lose their balance, fall, get stomped at and even break bones—but that does not matter because the violent nature is the thrill of it all.

The music is also violent, both instrumentally and lyrically. White nationalist music is often of the Metal genre, with different sub-genres such as black metal, death metal, Viking metal, and folk metal. Many might regard the instrumental points as violent, considering the use of fast-paced drums, guitar distortion, and vocal techniques such as growling and screaming. The lyrics are also violent. On NRM's website for news articles, Frihetskamp.net (fight for freedom), the editors post a weekly "song of the week." These posts feature music ranging from national romantic to white supremacist music. For instance, the Swedish band "Triskelon" was featured 8 December 2018 with their track "You can never defeat us." The lyrics are as follows:

"We have been defeated at any price,
but our faith has been kept alive.
The year of death 1945,
from the grave, we rose again.

Everything I feel is hate,
against this corrupted state.
We will never back down,
you can never defeat us."[184]

In addition to being a historical reference to the downfall of Nazi Germany, the violent lyrics fit into the masculine themes of the far-right movement: the fight against the system, the enemy, the Other, the hate, the power, and the resilience. I briefly also wish to mention that they seem to praise music that alludes to their cause, but that is not actually directed at it. For instance, the English band Muse's song "Uprising" and a variety of songs by the Swedish power-metal band Sabaton are good examples of this: "Uprising" because of its lyrics, which speak of taking up the fight against a corrupt system that takes away our right of freedom through force and control. A similar example is found in most songs by Sabaton due to their military themed lyrics and band image (e. g. The Last Stand, Stormtrooper, The Lost Battalion, and Man of War). This could potentially become problematic for the bands if they become associated with neo-Nazi movements.

6.5 Anti-Wokeness: Sexism and Homophobia

In chapter 2 of this study, I briefly discussed the role of right-wing extremism in the anti-liberal movement, which has appeared over the last few years as a response to the impactful "woke" movement. In the case of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism, it was shown that extremists can act as influential advocates for the anti-woke community. These anti-democratic sentiments seem to fall naturally into right-wing extremist discourse, and as these opinions grow more

184 "Ukens låt: Triskelon—Dere kan aldri beseire oss," Artikler, Frihetskamp, published December 8, 2018, accessed January 25, 2025, https://www.frihetskamp.net/ukens-lat-triskelon-dere-kan-aldri-beseire-oss/.

popular in societies at large, far-right communities might garner an even more significant following. This is a research topic which will not be covered sufficiently by this work, but a larger study on this would certainly be interesting and useful.

Heterosexuality and aesthetic expressions of straightness are an integral feature of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism. Despite the liberal gender politics and relatively open-minded and tolerant public opinion in both countries on the matter of gender and sexuality, the activity of these groups exhibits blatant homophobic and transphobic sentiments. Right-wing extremist memes often also express these types of opinions, as a way of cementing their own masculinity. Let us look at some examples.

This first example is an article posted to the website "Frihetskamp.net" (fight for freedom), which is the Nordic Resistance Movement's website for news articles. The article, which was posted on 18 January 2024, praises the comments made against an LGBTQ+-friendly journalist by the somewhat controversial American MMA fighter, Sean Strickland. The article exists within a category the editors call the "homolobby," which is a term they apply to individuals and organizations that support the queer community.[185] Within this category, we can find, as of 28 March 2024, 385 articles concerning this topic.

Strickland, who had been confronted with his views on homosexuality and gender politics, had replied the following when the journalist stated he was an "ally" of the LGBTQ+ community: "You are an infection, you are the definition of weakness—everything wrong that happens to this world is because of you."[186] What is interesting here is how the author of *Frihetskamp* words their comments prior to

185 "What is the homolobby and why is it to be defeated?," Frihetskamp, published June 20, 2022, accessed, January 25, 2025, https://www.frihetskamp.net/hva-er-homolobbyen-og-hvorfor-skal-den-bekjempes/.

186 Alexandr Ormanji. ""Creature, enemy of the world, infection." Strickland slams journalist who defends transgender people," RingSide24, published January 18, 2024, accessed, January 25, https://ringside24.com/en/107894-creature-enemy-of-the-world-infection-strickland-slams-journalist-who-defends-transgender-people.amp.

this, stating that "Strickland then puts the journalist in his place with a few powerful words."[187]

This article is a good example of how masculinity exists impersonally in culture, and of how some people are idolized as the ethos of real men. Not only does Strickland have a history within white supremacist milieus, but he also represents an attractive type of masculinity which is continuously praised by right-wing extremists. The man who acts more than he speaks, is steadfast in his opinions, and fights his opponents while being able to "take a beating," is the face of *true* masculinity. In 2022, Strickland replied to a comment on X asking him if he would "rather have a gay son or a thot daughter." Strickland replied: "If I had a gay son I would think I failed as a man to create such weakness … If I had a whore for a daughter I'd think she just wanted to be like her dad lol!!"[188]

Fig. 4: Sean Strickland's post on X.

187 "MMA-star to gay-friendly journalist: 'You are a weak fucking man'," Frihetskamp, published January 18, 2014, accessed, January 25, https://www.frihetskamp.net/mma-stjerne-til-homovennlig-journalist-du-er-en-svak-jaevla-mann/.

188 Sean Strickland (@SStricklandMMA), "If I had a gay son I would think I failed as a man to create such weakness … If I had a whore for a daughter I'd think she just wanted to be like her dad lol!!", X, December 21, 2021, accessed, January 25,. https://twitter.com/SStricklandMMA/status/1475580221596209153?ref_src=twsrc%25255Etfw%25257Ctwcamp%25255Etweetembed%25257Ctwterm%25255E1475580221596209153%25257Ctwgr%25255E2c5dcaff22e0ffc1017a53e0d41bb18157d854e8%25257Ctwcon%25255Es1_&ref_url=https://www.out.com/sports/2022/1/05/ufc-mma-fighter-sean-strickland-gay-son-homophobic-tweets. See Fig. 4.

The double standard in this statement clearly demonstrates a sexist attitude. Such sentiments are a problem for organizations such as NRM, however, which encourages women to join their cause. Despite the organization claiming that there is equal room for women in the NRM, the article ends on an interesting note. According to Strickland, the [national] decline began when women were given the right to vote: "We men have to vote for someone who wants to bring women back into the kitchen, put the men to work, raise our salaries and build a fucking wall." The editors end the article here—with no comments for or against the statement.

Lastly, another way in which Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists construct masculinity is through promoting "anti-wokeness" on social media. In the introduction of the research part of this study, I briefly outlined the different aspects of semiotics. One central point was how tailored language can be used to target a specific audience. "Speaking their language" entails recognizing the way a certain group communicates, and then adjusting the spoken or written sign to better reach its intended audience. Jargon is an example of this and is quite prevalent in social media platforms that are heavily influenced by trend-setting jargon.

In the chapter on the historical development of the far-right movement in Norway and Sweden, I briefly outlined the emergence of the anti-woke movement, which developed in response to the emergence of the "woke" community in the first half of the 2010s. By stating "anti-wokeness," I refer to people who take anti-liberal standpoints. These people might have negative attitudes towards several liberal causes, such as gender equality, gender issues, sexuality, and environmental issues. Though this is prevalent in society as a whole, it is especially apparent that anti-wokeness plays an important role in the construction of masculinity in right-wing extremist communities.

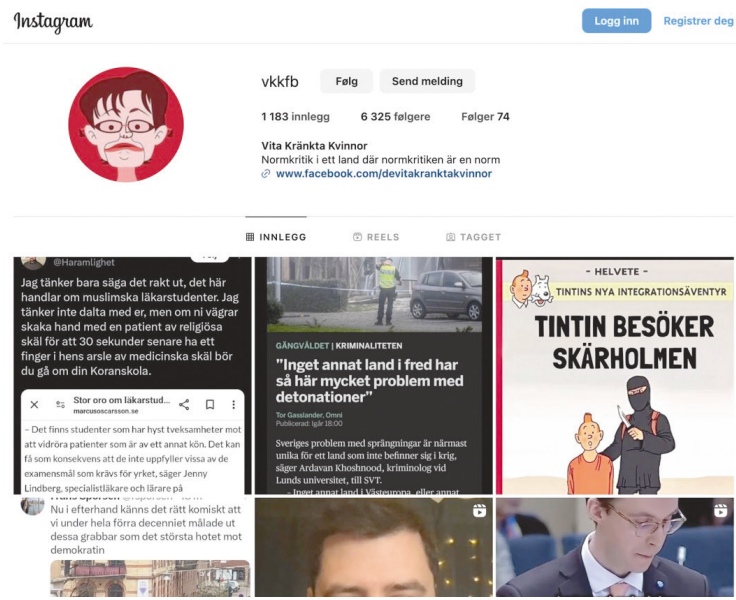

Fig. 5: @vkkfb, "white offended women," Instagram.

One reoccurring example is that of Greta Thunberg, who has been the subject of far-right ridicule ever since she took up the fight against climate change in 2018. Thunberg has faced backlash from all corners of society; however, it seems as if she has become an easy target for the right-wing community as it is easy to make cruel jokes about someone that they perceive as the complete opposite of them. She is regularly featured by accounts that post anti-woke content, often in the format of memes. One example of this is the Instagram user @vkkfb with the username "Vita Kränkta Kvinnor" (White offended women) which you can see in Fig. 5. This account, which in its bio claims to be a "norm critique in a country where norm critique is the norm," posts various right-wing extremist content, including memes of Thunberg. In these posts, Thunberg is often pictured in moments of emotion, in an attempt to portray her as overdramatic and overemotional—

characteristics often associated with women, children and feminine bodies. Additionally, the memes attempt to discredit and disprove Thunberg's activism, making her engagement appear annoying and clingy rather than useful and wanted—both qualities that are highly valued within far-right communities.

The same appears to be the case with attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. Having a sexual preference other than the opposite sex is considered to make a man less masculine. Gay men are often ridiculed through the format of memes. Straightness, both as heterosexuality and as a sexual aesthetic, is used as a way of measuring one's masculinity. For example, the Norwegian TikTok user @samle_norge_igjen (reunite Norway again) posts various forms of nationalist content, mostly the same sort of history edits as seen in chapter 5 of this work. Among those are regular posts which bring up the topic of LGBTQ+. In one post by the account, the user has posted a slideshow of seven images. In the first photo, we see a picture seemingly taken at a recent Pride parade in Norway, captioned "Norwegians today." In the second photo, we see a photograph of what looks like a group of soldiers, likely during WW2, captioned "Norwegians in the 1940s." The last five photos of the slideshow are images of various battle-centered scenes, supposedly depicting Norwegians throughout different eras all the way back to the 10th century.[189] The way in which the photograph of people at the Pride parade is compared with soldiers at different stages, gives a clear indication of a "lost" masculinity. This illustrates how these extremists' picture real men and what they consider to constitute peak masculinity—going into war and fighting the Other.

One of the reasons why I believe this aspect to be very important is because there is a potential risk that right-wing extremists might exploit the shift in attitudes regarding liberal activism. Young people who spend significant portions of time on social media platforms can easily be exposed to right-wing propaganda, which includes anti-

189 Video F: @Norgesvelde, "Norwegians before versus today," see appendix.

woke discourse—this might allude to some easily influenced audiences, and it is not unreasonable to think that this could become the start of a longer radicalization process. For this reason, a larger study of right-wing extremist interactivity with the overall anti-liberal movement over time would be interesting.

7 Aspect 3: Whiteness

The third aspect one can find in Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism is an element of "*whiteness.*" One could also choose to apply the terms "ethnicity" or "race," however, because the type of right-wing extremism we find in Norway and Sweden today holds a particular focus on the *glorification* and *preservation* of the *white* man; I argue, therefore, that this term is more nuanced and therefore more suitable. This is not to say that there is an absence of a racial focus beyond the white man. Many right-wing extremists may claim their racist discourse actually does not revolve around race but instead around religious concerns and concerns with multiculturalism; it is evident, though, that such discourse is indeed racist in nature. Before I present a few examples that illustrate this aspect, I will examine some of the theoretical discussion on whiteness.

7.1 Theory of "Whiteness"

The topic of "whiteness" is not just a simple matter of race. In this context, whiteness can be regarded as a *social construct* in which race plays a key role in shaping ideas and systems of thought, self- and group identity, as well as social behavior. In understanding the disposition of "whiteness" in Swedish and Norwegian right-wing extremism, I will introduce the term *implicit whiteness*. The term was first used by the American psychology professor Kevin MacDonald, who applied it to a social phenomenon where white people in multiethnic democracies are gradually and subtly indulging in ethnocentric activities without

asserting explicit white identities. In these societies, mainstream white people seek out temporary pure white gatherings, at times without conscious intent. These gatherings, from a historically cultural standpoint, are known to attract white people. MacDonald mentions stock car racing (NASCAR), country music festivals, evangelical Christianity, and Republican Party functions as examples of these types of gatherings.[190] The key point to the term is that it arises when multiethnic democracies are subject to social norms that *stigmatize* preference for white racial fellowship. "Acting out" white culture thus becomes socially unacceptable and must therefore occur *implicitly* or out of plain sight.

The term implicit whiteness has been understood and used excessively by white nationalists and right-wing extremists across the globe, both positively and negatively. In his article "Implicitly White Right-Wing Nihilism and the Politicizing of Ethnocentrism in Multiracial Sweden," American ethnographer Benjamin Teitelbaum examines the term and its use. On the one hand, for MacDonald, the expansion of implicit whiteness gives cause for pessimism regarding the prospects of the white nationalist cause. If it really is the case that white people feel the need to hide their sense of racial pride, then implicit whiteness can only be a symptom of defeat. On the other hand, Teitelbaum finds that in the case of Swedish nationalists, the term is often highlighted by its positive potential. In the Swedish case, the survival of white ethnocentrism represents a reserve of sympathy and support that can be exploited during a future movement of rebirth.[191] Considering the similarities between white nationalism in Sweden and Norway in addition to the racial politics and mainstream racial solidarity in the two countries', there is reason to assume that this understanding of implicit whiteness might be similar in the neighboring country. That is to say that white ethnocentrism is likely to occur covertly in the Norwegian context as well.

190 Benjamin Teitelbaum, "Implicitly White: Right-Wing Nihilism and the Politicizing of Ethnocentrism in Multiracial Sweden," *Scandinavian Studies* 89, no. 2 (2017): 162.

191 Ibid., 167.

Another aspect of whiteness becomes rather apparent in welfare states such as Norway and Sweden. Nation-states have a key function in determining who belongs within and outside the state's borders. This is particularly the case with welfare states, due to the distribution of resources and the role the state plays in the people's day-to-day lives. In their article "Welfare State Chauvinists? Gender, Citizenship, and Anti-democratic Politics in the Welfare State Paradise" (2019), Maria Finnsdottir and Helga Hallgrimsdottir show that a certain *welfare chauvinism* occurs when outsiders are understood as a threat to the well-being of the people of a welfare state by taking too much of the state resources. The authors claim that in contexts where ethnic criteria are used to determine national belonging, anti-immigrant sentiments arise.[192]

The Issue With Multiculturalism: Who Are The "Real" Refugees?

Right-wing extremists often voice their concerns about immigration: "They will take the people's jobs, enjoy the goods paid by our taxes, cause an increase in crime, affect our political landscape!" and other similar arguments are often expressed by 'concerned citizens.' This is often the trajectory of the type II nationalism I outlined in the first chapter. In their work "Migration and the Crisis of the Modern Nation-state?" (2018), German historian Frank Jacob and American political scientist Adam Luedtke further examine the relationship between fear and nationalism. The authors write that type II nationalism, in addition to being a more aggressive form than type I, is directed "towards external forces to counter crisis or the perception of one."[193] In addition, this type of nationalism might also be directed

192 Maria Finnsdottir and Helga Hallgrimsdottir, "Welfare State Chauvinists? Gender, Citizenship, and Anti-democratic Politics in the Welfare State Paradise," *Frontiers in Sociology*, ed. Jana Günther (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2019), 3.

193 Frank Jacob and Adam Luedtke, "Introduction," in *Migration and the Crisis of the Modern Nation State?*, eds. idem (New York: Vernon Press, 2018), vii.

internally, if "the nation is no longer capable of cradling a stable imagined community."[194] Thus, starting processes of deciding who belongs inside and outside of the nation—imagining its' limits. By this logic, all refugees are to be regarded as just as big a threat to the nation-state. However, different cases show that refugees are given different values, almost as if they can be hierarchically distinguished from one another. I argue this might also be the case in Swedish and Norwegian right-wing extremism as well, where Muslim immigrants and refugees often are treated differently to other immigrant groups, especially because they are easily perceived or identified as non-white or non-Western.

This claim has also been the subject of Amanda Palmgren, Mathilda Åkerlund and Lisen Viklund's article, "Refugees versus 'Refugees': The Role of Islamophobia in Swedish Alternative Media's Reporting on Ukrainian Asylum Seekers" (2023). This article examines Swedish alternative media's reporting on Ukrainian immigration after the Russian invasion in 2022, with a particular focus on how far-right medias reported on the matter. Interestingly, the authors found out that in reports about Ukrainian immigration, there were frequent mentions of Muslim immigrants. Often with an antagonistic perspective, the reports make clear distinctions between the Ukrainian refugees and the Islamic refugees. Whereas Swedish far-right medias tend to undermine the gravity of crisis in the Muslim world, the authors find that reports on the Ukrainian crisis are treated more compassionately, referring to Ukrainian refugees as *real* refugees and "in need of help."[195] Often, the legitimacy and need for refuge are questioned and compared between the "two" groups of refugees, which is determined by: geographical and cultural aspects, the degree of gratitude expressed, and whether they possess a threatening presence or not. Throughout the analysis, the authors find clear Islamophobic discourse in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. With the Russian

194 Ibid.

195 Amanda Palmgren, Mathilda Åkerlund and Lisen Viklund, "Refugees versus 'Refugees': The Role of Islamophobia in Swedish Alternative Media's Reporting on Ukrainian Asylum Seekers," *Media, Culture and Society* 45, no. 7 (2023): 1405.

invasion of Ukraine and the sudden immigration to other European countries, we might argue that right-wing extremists can no longer hide behind claims and concerns with immigration's many alleged consequences. The aspect of whiteness surfaces and becomes clear.

Glorification of the "Aryan" Race

Glorification of the white man has long been part of right-wing extremist ideology and discourse. This ethnic nationalism is based on ideas and claims that the white man is superior to other races, both athletically and intelligently. Adolf Hitler attempted to prove this during the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, claiming he could prove "Aryan supremacy." This, however, backfired when Jesse Owens, a black American sprinter, won four gold medals during the games.

Nonetheless, white people are continuously celebrated and praised for their "biological superiority" in right-wing extremist discourse in both Sweden and Norway. This glorification of the white man provides a particular focus on an alleged "Aryan" race. This term was adopted and redefined during the early ages of the Nazi party in the 1920s. *Aryan* was previously a linguistic term applied to an ancient group of people who spoke related languages, but when Hitler applied the term to a racial category, the meaning of the word changed. The terms Aryan and non-Aryan proved themselves difficult to define in racial terms, but it first and foremost referred to people that were neither Jewish, 'gypsies' or black people.[196] Even though the term eventually lost its official significance due to the end of the reign of Nazi Germany in Europe, the term Aryan continues to appear in right-wing extremist discourse as a category for self-identification or ethnic abstractionism alike.

196 "Aryan," Holocaust Encyclopedia, last modified September 29, 2020, accessed April 21, 2024, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/aryan-1

Whiteness as a Social Construct

In this chapter's introduction, I briefly mentioned that whiteness is not solemnly an expression of race but that there are also many social aspects of whiteness that affect other parts of social life. The complexity of race can be seen in various cases. For instance, this could be illustrated by how the topic of race has and is being treated in relation to the indigenous Sámi people. Historically, the Sámi people, who live in an area referred to as Sápmi, which encompasses parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, have been subject to colonization and racialization from the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s. In her article "I Felt So White: Sámi Racialization, Indigeneity, and Shades of Whiteness" (2019), Astri Dankertsen claims that even today, the topic of race and racism is an "ambiguous and complex issue" in the Sápmi region. While the Sámi people today often are classified by themselves and others as *white Europeans*, there is a disruption in their whiteness due to their status as an indigenous people. Dankertsen explains this, writing that the issue with whiteness is complicated as "being Indigenous is so closely, but at the same time ambiguously, connected to being non-white."[197] The author further elaborates how we can understand whiteness as a social construction: "Whiteness in this perspective is more than a skin color. It is a political and cultural term that signifies status, power, and character, a place from which people look at themselves, at other and at society, and a cultural practice, and a social and historical identity and an epistemically and salient and ontologically real entity that have survived it constantly changing boundaries."[198]

The previously discussed term, implicit whiteness, considers that when one cannot explicitly or outwardly "act out" one's whiteness, it instead happens implicitly or in the hidden. The term also takes into

197 Astri Dankertsen, "I Felt So White: Sámi Racialization, Indigeneity, and Shades of Whiteness," *NAIS Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* 6, no. 2 (2019): 116.

198 Ibid., 111.

consideration that acts of whiteness do not have to be conscious acts, similar to how acting "girly" when you are a girl does not always take place at a conscious level. Likewise, whiteness as a social construct is not always something one is aware of, as it is embedded into several parts of life, yet it does affect how one thinks. This is illustrated, for instance, by Peter Jackson in his article "Constructions of 'Whiteness' in the Geographical Imagination" (1998). Jackson, who had compared two different parts of London, had found that constructions of whiteness were articulated through discourses of "Englishness." The author discovered that in the area of Green Wood, people (especially the older generations) would constantly compare their neighborhood's flaws with "how it used to be." As opposed to understanding this from a perspective of pure nostalgia, Jackson shows that there are other "racialized" discourses involved. The author could point out a localized construction of "whiteness," as the residents would express concerns with a national decline and the social change at the neighborhood level.[199] We find these constructions of whiteness in right-wing extremist discourse as well, which I will illustrate later on.

7.2 Glorification of White People and a Golden Past

White people's superiority is one of the most common subjects within the Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremist discourses. One example of this is found on the Nordic Resistance Movement's website, where the main activist and chief director of the Swedish branch's website www.nordfront.se, Martin Saxlind, has written the article "Racism." The post discusses racism, racial differences, and migration, and Saxlind starts the text by writing, "I consider myself a racist."[200] The glorification of white people, however, is extensively

199 Peter Jackson, "Constructions of 'Whiteness' in the Geographical Imagination," *Area* 30, no. 2 (1998): 103.

200 Martin Saxlind, "Rasisme," *The Nordic Resistance Movement*, August 23, 2023, accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.motstandsbevegelsen.info/rasisme/.

illustrated upon looking at the picture chosen to be placed in the middle of the article.

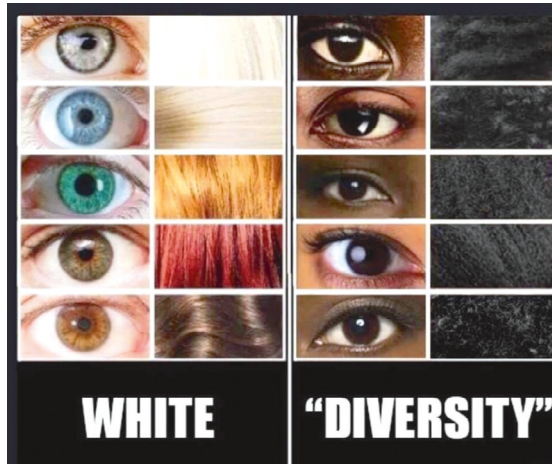

Fig. 6: Chart representing "white" versus "diversity" posted to the Nordic Resistance Movement's official website. Martin Saxlind. (2023), https://www.dnmb.no/rasisme/.

The picture consists of a comparison of eyes and hair color. On the left side, labeled "white," there are pictures of grey, blue, green, hazel and light brown irises, along with white, blonde, orange, red and brown hair. On the right, which is labelled "diversity", are five images of dark brown to black eyes, along with five images of black, afro-textured hair.[201] I have seen this picture on several right-wing extremist accounts across different platforms. For example, a variation of this was posted on Instagram by the Swedish user @politikfakta, where it was translated to Swedish with the caption stating "'Vita' vs. 'Färgade' …" ("white" versus "colored …").[202] This version which you can

201 Figure 6: see text.
202 Figure 7: see text.

see in Fig. 7 also consists of more images to illustrate the point. While this version has nine images to "prove" the diversity of white people, the right side of the picture still only consists of dark brown eyes and black hair. In addition, whereas Nordfront's English version says "diversity" in the section which consists of images of eyes and hair belonging to that of Middle Eastern and African people, the Swedish version labels this as "colored" people. The common purpose of this type of post appears to be to glorify white people's diversity while denigrating the supposed unvariedness of people of color.

Fig. 7: Chart representing "white" versus "colored," Instagram.

Ironically, right-wing extremists appear to be offended by the "diversity" label, despite being part of the reason why colored people have been assigned the label "diverse" to begin with. From a historical perspective, when white people felt they were superior and thereby felt

the need to exclude themselves from contact with other races, colored people were put in a racial "leftover" box—hence why it is "diverse." Reclaiming the title of diversity is ironic and goes to show that when non-white people explicitly act out racial pride, these right-wing extremists are there to oppress said people. This illustrates the great sense of racial superiority that exists within these groups—"Only white people should feel racial pride." In comparison, we find a similar case following the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which started in July 2013, after a series of instances of police brutality against African Americans in the US. Right-wing extremist's response to this movement, which quickly also moved outside the borders of the USA, was to create a "white" version of the Black Lives movement—#White LivesMatter.

In addition to praising white people, another aspect of whiteness is linked to a particular focus on the *past*, often a specific time which is glorified and compared to their own time. As an introduction to this study, I quoted a few of the most liked comments under a particular TikTok video. In the video which these comments were posted on—uploaded by @FedUpGenX—the creator alludes to a golden age which has been lost due to immigration.[203] The video starts with the text "Stockholm, Sweden 1955 vs. 2023: wonder what changed, I can't put my finger on it" which is displayed over a video depicting life in the city of Stockholm during the 1950s. The video is accompanied by calm music, creating a rather harmonic scene. The video then abruptly cuts to an event from 2023, where we can see a crowd seemingly consisting of Muslim people in the street. The people are yelling and are visibly upset, and in the video, we can barely catch a glimpse of the Israeli flag being torn to pieces by some of the people. A similar video was posted by one of @basedswede's now deleted accounts, which shows a text saying, "Oh I hate Sweden," while showing different pictures from today's Sweden: a burning police car, streets covered in dirty snow, a group of Middle-Eastern-looking men, and an

203 See Video A in appendix.

urban-looking apartment complex. The video then cuts to a text that says, "But oh, Sweden," while a series of photos from the Swedish countryside are shown. This clip consists of photographs from the mid-1900s as well as more contemporary photos of different Swedish traditions: a family around a campfire, the Swedish flag in a field of wheat, a lake, a young couple seemingly taken in the 1960s, Stockholm during the mid-1900s, Midsommar, people dancing in Swedish traditional clothing and classic red and white-trimmed cottages.[204] The purpose and effect of these examples comes from the contrast established in the selection of photographs in the two clips.

Glorification of a nation's past is a common aspect of nationalist movements, right-wing extremism included. In order to convince "the people" that the new ways of the nation are not working, nationalists tend to glorify the past in the process of redefining the nation. The past is an important part of the nation itself. In Renan's definition of the nation, the nation is a soul or a spiritual principle that lies in the *past*, and the other which lies in the *present*. The past consists of a nation's rich legacy of memories, whereas the present is determined by the people's consent and desire to live together.[205] In examples such as these videos, where the present is compared to a specific point in the nation's time, this relation between the past and the present is evident.

Similarly to the findings in Jackson's article, we can identify a clear construction of whiteness within these sorts of videos. This is articulated through discourses of "Swedishness," according to which the country is losing its traditional Swedish traits to multiculturalism. This point is presented through there not being a single ethnic Swede in sight throughout the video, alluding to this narrative of immigrants "taking over" the country. One can also find similar videos on the platform that allude to the same goal of returning the country to its former glory. This is specifically the case with the type of videos I analyzed in the previous chapter, where nationalists make edits of

204 Video G, see appendix.
205 Renan, "What is a Nation," 10.

historical military events. These events are presented as the peak of the nation.

There is however an important difference to point out between this example and the case Jackson used to illustrate constructions of whiteness in the geographical imagination. Whereas the people of the Green Wood neighborhood do express a level of constructed whiteness, it appears to be happening at the subconscious level. The difference here is that right-wing extremists deliberately create and exploit these constructions of whiteness, both as a way of creating conformation between fellow far-right thinkers, and as a way of recruitment. It is hard to deny the appeal of the former scene—the combination of music and footage in the first part creates a serene image of what Sweden used to be, as opposed to the impression one gets from the screaming, chaos-like state of the second clip.

7.3 Ridicule in the Form of Animalization and of Intelligence

The aspect of whiteness does not only revolve around putting the white man on a pedestal. Equally apparent in right-wing extremist discourse and activity is the continuous ridicule and discrimination of non-whites, as we have partly already seen in the previous section. This seemingly appears to be the trend in all right-wing extremist activity; however, in the Norwegian and Swedish contexts, Muslims are most often the subject of discrimination. In general, these extremists base their activity and internal ideological beliefs on alluding to a supposed biological difference between races. We can observe this in the different forms of ridicule presented via memes, caricatures, and jokes, as well as in attempts at spreading "scientific evidence" such as statistics and "factual" texts. In addition to racial superiority, the construction of whiteness is articulated through discourses of religious superiority. Two ways in which these extremists do this is by: 1) comparing Muslims to animals as well as 2) claiming there are differences

in intelligence between races. I will now analyze two examples that illustrate this trend.

The first example is from the social media platform X, formerly Twitter. The app has over 500 million users, making it one of the largest social media platforms today. Famous for its 280-character (initially, it was only 140) limit, X/Twitter has become an important tool in political campaigning and debating. This is also the case for right-wing extremist activity, in which members of organizations and other right-wing extremists can make short and effective statements via "tweets."

Fig. 8: Comic style image of white woman kicking Muslim pig, from X.

In the post published by Swedish user @WalkingJepp, the user has published an unnamed digital drawing. The drawing, which one could describe as a hybrid between the styles of a comic and a caricature, depicts a white woman dressed in a white gown and a "Viking" helmet while holding a shield labelled "Europa" kicking a pig dressed in Muslim attire in the buttocks. The woman is pictured to be stand-

ing on what looks like the outline of southern Europe, while the pig flies through the air over the western region of Asia, which is colored red and marked with the symbol of Islam. Along with the pig soars the Quran. Depicting the Muslim as a pig can be understood as no coincidence. Pigs are, both in the Norwegian and English languages, used to represent something that is messy and unhygienic, squealing and annoying, and overall, a nuisance to the peace. Additionally, the choice of the pig can also be an insult to the Muslim, seeing as pigs are seen as unclean animals according to Islam and, therefore, are prohibited as food.

Portraying Muslims as animals and diseases is not rare in right-wing extremist discourse. We also see this in written texts. For instance, in the previous post about Stockholm in 1955 versus 2023, this point is illustrated upon looking through the comment section of the video. Username @Factos! writes "like every living organism, Sweden got cancer!" A different user named @user6872664036412 writes: "They are reproducing too fast we cant stop em." Another user, @Brenda69, writes, "Sweden. Where every single girl layed down with a blackie and tarnished their bloodlines forever. Mixing blonde with mud."[206] It is not rare for Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists to apply parasitic descriptions to Muslims, and the impression is unmistakable—like a parasite, they are unwelcome, uninvited, and leeches to their host and, if not removed, they may become life-threatening.

Insults about intelligence appear to go hand-in-hand with discourse on whiteness. When looking at Norwegian and Swedish right-wing online activity, posts that glorify white people celebrate white people's intelligence as much as they attempt to *deny* the intelligence of non-whites. Ignoring the effect of variables such as education and the welfare state's economic dispositions, these extremists attempt to blame undereducation on racial conditions. For instance, Saxlind wrote of this in the previous example:

206 See Video A in appendix.

> "I consider myself a racist. I don't believe that people who at least ten-thousands of years have lived geographically separated from one another in radically different environments and also have developed to look very different, still have identically configured brains. Just as two individuals are not completely identical, are neither the different human races. Therefore is the expression 'all people are of the same value' a pointless expression, both on an individual level and seen from a collective perspective. For something to have a 'value,' it has to be measurable, and everything that can be measured in humans—intelligence, strength, empathy and whatever else—will vary between different individuals, and measures show that many characteristics vary between different groups of people."[207]

While some extremists, such as Saxlind, "do not see any point in discriminating or humiliating other ethnic groups," other extremists do. In a TikTok post by user @arthurdinter, the user has posted a slideshow of pictures. In the first photo, we see a world map which illustrates the "average skin color" across the globe. The next photo is another world map, but this one shows the "average IQ" around the world. The top of the map is blue, parts of Asia are yellow, and large parts of Africa are red. In the next slide, we see a primitive-looking hut on top of red sand, built of sticks and straws. The photo is titled "2023 Africa." The final slide is a photograph of the Acropolis in Athens, titled "-447 Europa."[208] The user has written "Common W Europa" in the caption. Looking at the comment section, it is filled with comments saying, "Well well well." This is recent TikTok jargon, which is often commented when something is unsurprising.

The post, along with the account, has since been deleted. However, before it was deleted the post had 299,800 likes, 307 comments (which all sided with the user, suggesting that negative comments may have been deliberately removed), 31,900 saves, and 10,100 shares.

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207 Saxlind, "Rasisme," https://www.motstandsbevegelsen.info/rasisme/
208 Video H: @ArthurDinter, "IQ map comparison," see appendix.

To other users, the post might appear as evidence of the superior intelligence of white people. Again, several variables are not considered, such as education and state economy. Another variable is that IQ tests are not equivalent to intelligence, in addition to them being measured using Western standards.

7.4 Criminalization and Demonization of Muslims

In order to convince the people to join their cause of stopping immigration, Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists attempt to demonize and criminalize immigrants. Seemingly, this does not apply to "real" refugees such as Ukrainian refugees but rather to Muslim immigrants who, in their mind, cannot justify being there. This demonization involves highlighting instances where Muslim immigrants or "Muslim-looking" people have been involved in crimes while simultaneously ignoring those committed by ethnic Norwegians and Swedes. An example of this was found on X, where Norwegian user @Geir_AAnestad posted a photo from the Norwegian debating program "Debatten." The photo is from an episode which aired on 31 October 2023, where the panel debated ways to target the sharp increase in crime among young people between 15 and 18 years old. The user's post consists of two screenshots that display statistics on the ethnic background of this group.

As seen in Fig. 9 the upper photo shows an image of a masked man with the text saying, "particularly active law-breakers, 86 % immigrant background." The bottom photo presents the ethnic backgrounds of this group, saying "50 % Africa, 35 % Asia (including Turkey), 7 % EU/EØS, 5 % Europe outside of the EU, 3 % American." In the caption of the post, @Geir_AAnestad writes, "More immigration! Become like Sweden next." (Fig. 9) Like many posts by right-wing extremists, "evidence" is often taken out of context. For instance, after these statistics were shown on the screen during the debate, the host, Fredrik Solvang, asked the leader of preventative work in Oslo's

police department, Rune Solberg Swahn, what he makes of the representation of criminal background. Swahn replies that the statistics lack context, saying that "what was not said is that 70 % of them were born in Norway, and that 83 % of them have Norwegian citizenship." Additionally, he explains that there are many different and complex reasons as to why people with immigrant backgrounds are more likely to commit crimes, naming, for instance, poverty, bad family relations, psychological difficulties, and bad living standards.[209]

Fig. 9: Statistic representation of crime in Norway, from X.

One reoccurring topic when linked with criminalization is that of rape and sexual assaults. Sometimes explicitly, such as posts published by the Swedish Instagram user @det_nya_sverige. The account, which

209 "Polititopp: Folk ville blitt skremt om de visste," Debatten, aired October 31, 2023, accessed January 25, 2025, https://tv.nrk.no/serie/debatten/202310/NNFA51103123.

labels itself as "anti-globalist" and concerned with "anti-Swedish politics," primarily publishes collections of news headlines and short excerpts of crimes committed across all of Sweden as seen in Fig. 10. Among these are regular posts about sexual assaults and rapes. While these news articles do not specifically mention the ethnicity of the perpetrator, the user uses them as evidence to reinforce their racist claims. We see this when reading the captions and hashtags of these posts, which consist of tags such as: "detnyasverige" (the new Sweden), "nationalist," "importeradbrottslighet" (imported criminality), and "sverigeärsvenskarnasland" (Sweden is the Swedish people's land). Other times it is suggested more covertly. For instance, as Jimmy Thunlind, leader of the Swedish section of the Nordic Resistance Movement, suggestively said in episode 2 of "Surrounded by Enemies" when asked about which aspect of immigration he is the most scared of: "I guess it is that something will happen to those who remain closest to me, above all my daughter."[210] This could be understood as just an expression of concern for his child, but in this context it seems to insinuate a more suggestive meaning.

In addition to attempting to make Muslims look as if they are criminals and dangerous by nature, Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists also tend to demonize Muslims at a more general level. This involves applying an array of negative qualities to them, for instance by making them appear greedy, ungrateful, and animalistic. Overall, these negative qualities are presented in stark contrast to those of white people, who are portrayed as empathic, intelligent, loyal, and well-balanced. The demonization of Muslims is often explicitly expressed; however, right-wing organizations appear to do this in a more subtle way. This is likely because their controversial opinions are not likely to sit well with the opinion of the general public, so if they wish to gain sympathy for their cause and be taken seriously, they have to be convincing. One way in which this is done is by trying to convince the public that their general well-being is under threat by

210 Viaplay, "Radikaliseringen," Surrounded by Enemies.

Fig. 10: Crimes linked to immigrants, Instagram.

the implications caused by immigration—creating an attitude of welfare chauvinism among the people. An example that illustrates this is The Sweden Democrats' deleted and censored election campaign video from 2010. The video was supposed to be part of the party's election campaign during the 2010 prime minister election. However, it was met with strong reactions and distaste due to its content and was consequently deleted and banned from the campaign.

The video, which lasts just 30 seconds, shows a rapidly decreasing number which represents the Swedish state budget. On the left side

sits a woman dispersing money to a section labelled "pensions," while a man sits to the right dispersing money to a section labelled "immigration." As the number falls to 100,000,000, an alarm goes off, and two emergency handbrakes with the same labels fall from the ceiling. From the darkness, an elderly lady approaches the handbrakes from the other side of the room. Soon, she is followed out of the shadows by a group of women dressed in niqabs, who move quickly across the room with their baby strollers, surpassing the elderly woman. In the final clip, we see their hands reaching for the emergency brakes, as a voice says, "you can choose the immigration brake before the pension brake."[211]

The Sweden Democrats use various semiotic tools here to get their message across. One method is through the use of light and shadow. The women in the niqabs appear out of the darkness, and the combination of the black room and the black fabric of the niqab gives them an appearance of invisibility—suggesting that immigrants have appeared out of nowhere and are feeding on the nation-state, invisibly like parasites. Another way that this demonization is presented is through the subtle use of body language. While the elderly woman does not speak, she appears scared and paranoid, looking over her shoulder at the darkness behind her. The women in the niqabs appear quite suddenly behind the woman, giving the impression that they are chasing her and creating an element of danger while fueling the animalistic characteristics of the Muslims. As the single, elderly woman reaches for the "immigration" brake, we see several hands reaching for the "pension" brake—a symbol of many things: On the elderly woman's side, of abandonment, hopelessness, and of being outnumbered. The several hands of the Muslim women could represent the "wave" of immigration, of taking over the country, and the ultimate victory of immigrants. When these semiotic tools are combined, it might lead to welfare chauvinistic attitudes, especially when we consider that The Sweden Democrats have chosen to portray the immigrants specifically as Muslims.

211 SDReklam2010, "Sverigedemokraternas valfilm 2010," YouTube, published August 27, 2010, accessed Janury 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkRRdth8AHc.

8 Aspect 4: The Race War

8.1 Lone Wolves and Terrorist Manifestos

As claimed in the introduction of this study, right-wing extremism and especially right-wing terrorism is regarded as a big threat to Norwegian national security. This is largely due to the fact that much of far-right extremist activity has moved to digital arenas, platforms where extremist ideology can spread easily without the constraints of public opinion and beyond the reach of law enforcement. However, another factor that further complicates authorities' attempts at constructing a representable image of the nation's right-wing extremism is that there has for the past few decades been a change in the organizational pattern of the far right. This pattern is characterized by a shift from structured organizational frameworks to that of aspiring militant "lone wolves." Eitan Azani assesses this change in his work "Evolution in the Modus Operandi of Far-Right Activists" (2020), writing: "The movement has rejected the traditional hierarchical organizational paradigm in favor of borderless, online networks of inspiration and radicalization, creating a transnational extremist community that exists largely beyond the reach of law enforcement and counterterrorist agencies."[212] These "lone wolves" have proved themselves especially dangerous, not just due to the results of their actions, but also because identifying and uncovering their plans before the attacks are carried out is challenging. This is for instance the case with the Utøya attacks in Norway

212 Eitan Azani, Liram Kobenz-Stenzler, Lorena Atiyas-Lvovsky, Arie Ben-Am and Delilah Meshulam, "Evolution in the Modus Operandi of Far-Right Activists," *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism* (2020): 56–57.

and the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand. When comparing Islamist terrorism, which is defined by a more traditional structure, to right-wing terrorism, studies find that despite the frequency of Islamist attacks being higher than right-wing terrorism, the latter stands for a higher lethality rate.[213] An explanation to this might be that right-wing terrorists manage to be a lot more discreet than Jihadist terrorists, mainly due to this "lone wolf" paradigm.[214]

Arguably, this change came with the 2011 Oslo and Utøya attacks, when right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik alone shot and killed 77 people. Studies on right-wing extremist terrorism years after argue that successors have found inspiration in this style and form of terrorism.[215] For instance, Brenton Harrison Tarrant who shot and killed 51 people while injuring 89 others during a Friday prayer at a Mosque in New Zealand 2019, stated that Breivik was his biggest source of inspiration. This trend of lone wolves finding inspiration in their predecessors is a cause for concern amongst terrorism researchers. Azani describes the trend as a *domino effect* where terrorist actors are inspired by the actions of "their glorified predecessors," and which ultimately can explain the observed increase in right-wing terrorism since 2011.[216]

In addition to the change from structured organizational frameworks to borderless online networks of "lone wolves," right-wing terrorist perpetrators have adopted the use of *manifestos*. These texts, usually published on underground digital platforms such as *8chan* just before or after an attack, describe the why's and how's of the attack. Manifestos have also become a source of inspiration and admiration among fellow right-wing extremists. Jacob Ware examines the use of manifestos in his article "Testament to Murder: The Violent

213 Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2019): 9.

214 Eitan Azani et. al. "Evolution," 57.

215 See Eitan Azani et al., "Evolution;," Bjørgo and Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence," and Ware, "Testament to Murder."

216 Eitan Azani et al., "Evolution," 61.

Far-Right's Increasing Use of Terrorist Manifestos" (2020). Here he outlines the many common themes of right-wing terrorist manifestos: race, immigration, religion, Europe, the political climate, and the portrayal of an act of terrorism as self-defense and as a last resort.[217]

It is especially the last point which is interesting for this final part of the study. Seeing terrorism as self-defense and as a last resort reflects the far-right's idea that the white race is under an immediate threat of being wiped out. This aspect is also a central part of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden in the 2020s, in which right-wing extremists of the two nations claim that we are either living through, or are about to enter a "race war" soon.

8.2 White Genocide Theory

The idea that white people are going extinct is not a new belief. Right-wing extremists have long theorized that white people are in fact victims of a slow process of replacement. This theory is referred to as the "white genocide theory" in right-wing extremist literature and is often conflated with the "great replacement" theory which share many of the same beliefs.[218]

Kyler Ong in the article "Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right" (2020) examines the ideological aspects of the modern far-right, emphasizing the movement's predisposition to conspiracy theories and its sense of victimhood,[219] which also explains the why such narratives are often adopted by members of the right wing scene. According to the white genocide theory, white people are being replaced

217 Ware, "Testament to Murder," 4.

218 For more reading on "the great replacement theory" see: Le Grand Remplacement (2011) by Renaud Camus, The Politics of Replacement: Demographic Fears, Conspiracy Theories, and Race Wars (2024), edited by Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, and "The great replacement narrative: fear, anxiety and loathing across the West" (2024) by Mark Sedgwick.

219 Kyler Ong, "Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 12, no. 5 (2020): 1.

by non-whites, a supposed ploy by Jews.[220] The theory blames the alleged "replacement" on several factors: rising feminism, declining birth rates, increase in mixed-race marriages, in addition to the growing number of non-white peoples in the West.[221] Furthermore, Ong emphasizes the influence Donald Trump's 2016 victory has had not only on US politics, but also the overall political climate of Europe. The author argues that Trump's time in office has contributed "to the mainstreaming of the extreme right's xenophobic, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and neo-Nazi sentiments."[222]

The white genocide theory advances a *catastrophist* narrative, portraying demographic and cultural changes as existential threats to the white population and therefore somehow mimics narratives that had already been used by National Socialist propaganda in the 1930s. This aspect is examined in the article "The Catastrophist Vision of The Far Right" (2024), in which author Michael Feola shows that right-wing extremists promote a narrative in which immigrants are supposedly *erasing* white people both ethnically and culturally. The far right tends to describe immigrants "as a form of 'invasive species' that will spread boundlessly and deplete the cultural ecosystem of the host nation."[223] The catastrophist narrative is not entirely pessimistic, however. While catastrophes can easily be understood as a "disease" of a disastrous nation, catastrophe can also provide the "cure." It is only when society has fallen into this state that new possibilities arise, actions can be taken, and the nation might be saved.[224] This is the state of a nation which was described in the first category of the *life cycle model* presented earlier in this study. In the *ground-laying phase*, political and social discontent induce a political climate which engenders neo-populist discourse. Ong argues that white nationalists benefit from polit-

220 Ibid.

221 Ibid.

222 Ibid., 2.

223 Michael Feola, *The Rage of Replacement: Far Right Politics and Demographic Fear* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 34.

224 Ibid., 28.

ical and social discontent, here referred to as "fissures" in the system, which can be exploited to sow civil discord and in turn ignite the race war.[225] In Scandinavia, the act of provoking violence as a way to spur on the race war is often referred to as "acceleration theory." The idea is that it is more favorable for the race war to begin sooner than later, while white people have yet to be outnumbered.

8.3 Justification for Violence

Violence plays a crucial role within the far-right movement. Firstly, right-wing extremists' sense of victimhood is actively used as a justification for committing violent acts. In the article "You Will Not Replace Us: The Melancholic Nationalism of Whiteness" (2024) Michael Feola uses the term "white anxiety" when describing the far-right's concerns with immigration and labor flows: "The nation is not just slipping away from its racial core but is being *taken* from its rightful heirs and *given* to undeserving others."[226] In line with nationalist theory, nations belong to specific groups of people, thus making it a story of displacement enacted *against* white people for the benefit of non-whites.[227] This narrative of white people being victims of displacement is therefore accompanied by a "melancholic rage" which further justifies the far-right's use of violence. This is for example reflected in a 2018 interview with Haakon Forwald who at the time was leader of the Norwegian branch of the Nordic Resistance Movement, where he expressed his sympathies with terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, saying that he "understands why people can act in that way when seeing that their people slowly but surely is being replaced."[228]

225 Ong, "Ideological Convergence," 3.
226 Feola, *Rage of Replacement*, 5.
227 Ibid.
228 Lars Erik Berntzen and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Monster or Hero? Far-right Responses to Anders Behring Breivik and the July 22, 2011 Terrorist Attacks," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 3 (2021): 44.

Secondly, violence is by many right-wing extremists considered a necessary political tool as it effectively spurs on the race war. In the 1990s British terrorist manifesto "The White Wolves," the authors encourage right-wing extremist activists to commit violent acts against Muslim minorities, writing that random attacks "are expected to provoke minorities into indiscriminate violence, so as to force white 'native' communities 'off the fence.'"[229] In right-wing extremist literature, authors often claim that the majority community has "proven itself immune" towards far-right arguments.[230] As they fail to see the true enemy of the nation, only provoked violence can reveal the "Other's'" true colors. It is because of this assumption that right-wing extremists tend to have a somewhat positive reaction when minorities commit violent acts, as if saying "I told you so." Not only does violence bring the cause one step closer to a race war, it can also be used as justification for any counter-reactions.

However, modern Scandinavian right-wing extremist movements appear to have a more cautious approach to violence than what one might expect. While 1990s right-wing extremism is characterized by more frequent and random attacks, much like the "White Wolves" manifesto encouraged, modern Scandinavian right-wing extremism has seen a decline in these sorts of attacks. This is not to be confused with lethality—today's "lone wolf" right-wing terrorists have proven themselves more lethal than their predecessors. However, some organizations have taken a different approach when it comes to violence, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement. In the article "Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains Its Use of Violence" (2020), Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Ravndal examine the reasons why the NRM appears to constrain its members' use of violence as part of their activism. Bjørgo and Ravndal argue that it has little to do with having any moral restraint against political violence but can instead be explained as a *strategic* calculation. Random and frequent attacks are seen as

229 Paul Stott, "The White Wolves: The Terrorist Manifesto That Wasn't?," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 4 (2019): 58.

230 Ibid..

counter-productive as they tend to have an opposite effect of what is desired. Instead, they believe that a long-term goal of gaining support via public and legal channels is more productive.[231] Simultaneously, activists who have committed violent acts in situations where they allegedly had to "defend themselves," are excused, praised for their actions and deemed heroic.[232] This is even reflected in the NRM's comments on the 2019 New Zealand shooting, where the organization's leader Simon Lindberg wrote, that "some may think that it can never be justified to kill someone else. However, we whites have involuntarily been embroiled in a low-intensity extinction war across the West. In war, people die. Is it worse to kill someone physically than to lobby politically for, to enforce, and to play an active part in a policy that takes the life of a whole race? Furthermore, the assailant seems to have chosen his targets carefully to avoid hitting those that are completely innocent."[233] Ultimately, violent acts, even mass murders, are justified based on the belief that white people are in fact the *true* victims of a society where non-whites are treated as such. Working against an otherwise blind majority community, the modern Scandinavian far right continues to use and not use violence as a political tool in the alleged race war. This aspect is an important characteristic of Scandinavian right-wing extremism and is reflected in online activity as well as real life activism.

8.4 Preparing for the War

Both in Norway and Sweden, right-wing extremists claim that we are either about to enter a war of races or are already waging it. There are many covert references to this online, and it has proved itself difficult to get in touch with right-wing extremists in real life both in Norway

231 Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains Its Use of Violence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 6 (2020): 42.
232 Ibid., 38.
233 Ibid., 41.

and Sweden partly due to the opposing public opinion. However, some researchers have been able to get an inside-look at these movements' real-life activities and an idea of exactly how pivotal this aspect is in Norway and Sweden today.

This first example reflects an important focus within the Norwegian and Swedish far-right—namely *preparing* for the alleged race war. In the Norwegian documentary "Sons of the North" (2023) which was only briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, journalist Martha Antonette Solli contacts a Swedish man who publishes white nationalist propaganda online. The mid-20-year-old Swede, under the alias "Vidar Odensson," publishes content that clearly references the race war and encourages mobilization. Wanting to understand the idea of the race war better, Solli attempts to contact Odensson to set up a meeting. However, the man would only meet digitally with the guarantee of absolute anonymity. Over an online call, Solli questions the man about his concerns. When asked exactly what he is trying to achieve through his propaganda, Odensson answers: "From my perspective, my country is under occupation. There is an enormous amount of non-Swedes in the country, and they wish to make this country into something that isn't mine anymore. In our lifetime I believe we are only going to witness more and more violence. An ethnic, armed conflict."[234]

When Solli follows up with the question "Like a race war?," Odensson answers "Yes. We've already got it in Sweden. Swedes make up a smaller and smaller percentage of the country for each day that passes, and non-Swedes take over whole cities. They change the cultural and social composition."[235] When then asked whether he is ready to use violence in a conflict or not, Odensson replies: "Absolutely. I have no qualms about it. I would recommend everyone capable of it to arm themselves. I have no issue with arming myself when I go out.

234 "Rasekrig," Episode 4, NRK, published March 15, 2024, accessed January 25, 2025, https://tv.nrk.no/serie/soenner-av-norden/sesong/1/episode/MYNT07000422 (17:39).

235 Ibid. (18:13)

I do not believe that we are going to find peace through a democratic solution."[236]

The interview with Odensson reflects parts of the modern Scandinavian far-right's "white anxiety" around their conviction that white people are being replaced right before our eyes, and that violence has therefore become the only answer. It is no longer possible to achieve peace through democratic resolutions, and therefore violence is not only justified in the name of self-defense but also encouraged as a completely necessary political tool. This approach is quite different from other parts of the Scandinavian far-right movement, such as the one taken by the NRM, who discourages members from being overly violent in their activism. However, these two seemingly contradictory approaches might be explained by the arena in which these extremists are active—online versus real life. It is less problematic to share extreme propaganda and encourage violent behavior out of reach of law enforcement. Real-life activists recognize the danger and potential consequences of openly spreading white supremacist ideology. This is apparent in their fears regarding anonymity. In the beginning of the same episode, Solli manages to set up a rare interview with the Finnish white supremacist band Circle of Dawn, who previous to the interview had never been unmasked in public.

This interview reflects yet another important aspect, namely the catastrophist perspective. When discussing their views on Finland's future, one band member states that he believes that "things will get worse before they get better. Yeah, some kind of collapse." Scandinavian right-wing terrorists, similar to those who sympathize with their ideas or worldview, consequently share a catastrophist perspective in the sense that chaos is also seen as a positive thing. From the ruins of a broken nation, a better, white nation will rise in its stead.

236 Ibid. (19:39)

8.5 Save Europe!

Let us return now to the digital world. There are many references to the race war within this space, however, most of them are indirect or suggestive messages, conveyed through different formats such as picture-text combinations like memes, or simply as comments.

This first example here is from Instagram. Similarly to TikTok, there is a significant amount of right-wing extremist content posted on the platform that focuses on history, culture and tradition, often fronted through a specific style of edited videos with loud, bass-boosted music and bold caption statements. A video posted by the user @vitt.lejon, Swedish for "white lion", is similar to the one posted by @basedswede which was examined earlier in this study. The video consists of several short clips, all showing different sides of Swedish tradition (Midtsommar, sports) and history (18th century military combat, statues of military figures, paintings etc.). However, it is the caption which clearly references the race war. "In the end we win."[237] The caption is followed by several hashtags, for instance #vril, which is a nod to the fictional "Vril Society" which with the help of conspiracy theories has been connected to the rise of Nazism during the mid 20th century.

Also the comments support this view. @mwxl__ writes "The REAL Sweden," and @deutsche_geschichte1871 says "Looks like 1930s Germany" to which @vitt.lejon replies "Germanic brothers <3." However, it is the comment by @15drrb that is especially relevant to tie the respective nationalist perspective to a larger transnationalist or even pan-nationalist context: "Save Europe <3."[238] This phrase is widely used by right-wing extremists all over the world and reflects the urgency of the situation. There are also more country-specific versions of this phrase, for instance "save Sweden" and "save Norway." The phrase is often used in the criminalization and animalization of

237 Video I: @vitt.lejon "In the end we win," see appendix.
238 Ibid., comment section.

immigrants, but most importantly when expressing frustration over the alleged ethnic replacement that the rest of society seems otherwise oblivious to. In a TikTok video which shows a heated conflict between what appears to be an ethnic Norwegian grocery store worker and two people of color, many of the 1,700 comments reveal similar sentiments. Swedish user @Jón Björnsson writes "Shameful to see what is happening to my Norse brothers. Where is your axe and shield? This enemy is easily defeated with right weapons. Do better." @Akhmed_Ramazanov writes "Time to arm yourself all real Norwegians." @Rafa writes "CLEAN EUROPE." @Simon writes "Yes to arming grocery store workers."[239]

This comment section represents a dangerous trend that is unfolding within online spaces in both Norway and Sweden. There appears to be an overwhelming number of viewers on various platforms who encourage violent behavior towards specific groups of people. This observation does not only account for the engagement observed under right-wing extremists' content, but also under content that is not related to these issues. There might be several explanations to this. On the one hand, it is possible that we may be seeing a shift in the general opinion. Far-right parties in both Norway and Sweden are evidently gaining support from larger parts of the people. The recent resistance towards the "Woke" movement could also be a symptom of this. On the other hand, it is important not to underestimate how various topics are handled in real life versus online, and most importantly by whom. A majority of the users who engage with this type of content, and who actively follow the trend-heavy framework of social media, are young people. It is clear, not only throughout this study, but also from observations of teenagers as a junior high teacher, that borderline racist, xenophobic, homophobic and sexist behavior is considered edgy by some peers. Online right-wing extremist activism, both the published content and the engagement does therefore not necessarily come from the same group that engage in real-life activ-

239 Video J: @bergencity "Live fra REMA 1000 LAX," see appendix for TikTok video.

ism. Still, it is important not to undermine the severity of this online activism. While the joking nature of memes and trendy language does a fine job at hiding the message, Norwegian and Swedish online right-wing extremism is characterized by many aspects that should not be taken lightly. This is clearly reflected in the annual national threat assessment from the Norwegian police.

9 Conclusion

In this study, I have attempted to outline key aspects of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism. With a particular, but not exclusionary, focus on how these aspects take form on social media platforms, I have attempted to get a better understanding of how right-wing extremists adapt to our digital world and use it as a way of spreading far-right ideology. The latter is usually presented in a semiotic construction by a combination of words and images, i. e. memes, which often refer to certain value sets or fears shared by members of right-wing organizations in the Scandinavian context. By looking at right-wing extremist activity, both by private actors and organized groups, online and offline, I have aimed to get a better picture of what right-wing extremism looks like in Norway and Sweden today. The first thing I have found out is that there is indeed a lot of right-wing extremist activity online, coming from Norway and Sweden, in addition to the Scandinavian region overall. While content is published on many different platforms, the most prominent ones appear to be TikTok, Instagram and X.

A majority of the examples I have used to illustrate the different trends identified have been found on TikTok. I do not find that it is a coincidence that a large part of right-wing extremist content is found here, especially when one considers the target age group of the presented content. Firstly, along with its popularity, TikTok's trend-setting nature is a perfect tool for spreading extreme ideology. By "hiding" right-wing discourse in trends, be it funny memes or slideshows, creators can reach audiences that might not be fully aware of what they are looking at—all the while avoiding moderators that

seek to remove content that breaks the platform's guidelines. Secondly, like other social media platforms, TikTok possesses well-developed algorithms that control the flow of every user's content. After having spent hours on the platform finding and studying the right-wing side of TikTok, the algorithm has picked up on my interest for anything with the #nationalism. I experienced that this algorithm is quite "sensitive," in that I only have to watch one video of a specific type of content for the algorithm to then show me more of it.

Though there are many aspects of right-wing extremism as a whole, in this context, I have chosen to elaborate on four key aspects that I was able to identify as central elements. The first aspect is *historical references*, which are a central part of nationalism overall. Both Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists tend to look back to the past in order to create an appealing image of their ideal nation. I could determine two trends here: 1) Vikings and pre-Christian time symbolism in addition to 2) military history. Both Norwegian and Swedish far-right members identify with their Viking heritage and express a strong sense of pride with it. We see this through many aspects of their practice—through symbolism in their organizations, how they talk about one another, and how they express themselves in terms of appearance. The Viking is seen as the ethos of real men, a symbol of true masculinity. This also leads to their interest in military history, which is an aspect of the overall obsession of these right-wing extremist groups with the military. From the violent rampages of the Vikings, to the affairs of the military today, warfare appears to be of great interest within these groups. A specific interest in WW2 can also be identified, especially the materialistic side of it, something that we can observe in their possession and admiration of military artefacts. Overall, references to history allude to a lost, golden past. These periods in time are glorified, while today's time and society are presented as a bleak version of what the nation used to be. This can, for example, be seen in videos that show images of the nations' traditions—17 May in Norway, as well as Midsommar and St. Lucie in Sweden. These traditions are allegedly being erased because of the Other.

This brings us to the second aspect which is a clear focus on *masculinity*. This aspect is evident in all corners of their practice: in their appearance, mannerisms, opinions, and interests. This is also the case in Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism, in which masculinity plays a key role in determining one's manliness. Taking on intimidating appearances is crucial when confronting the Other, as seen with organizations such as SIAN and the Nordic Resistance Movement. Training for "the fight" is central to their construction of masculinity, which is apparent in the rise of Active Clubs, in which extremists gather to physically and mentally prepare for confrontations with the Other. What I have also found is that these extremists exploit the anti-woke movement that is on the rise in society at large, partly through their masculinization of anti-liberal values. Among many ways, this is done through the ridicule and discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community, placing emphasis on straightness, and at times through a somewhat contradictory form of sexism. Promoting such values might mean that younger, easily influenced people could be drawn to their movements. This is enhanced further by the tendency of these movements to make fellow far-right thinkers feel welcome and a part of something larger than themselves. This could potentially pose a real danger to the "outcasts" of society who struggle to find meaning and companionship—who we already know to be more prone to radicalization.

The third aspect is a strong emphasis on *whiteness*. In order to rewrite the nation, right-wing extremists direct a lot of their activism towards trying to convince "the people" that they are under an immediate threat of the non-white Other. Multiculturalism supposedly poses a danger to the purity of the white man, a race that is seen as inherently superior. By demonizing certain ethnic groups—Muslims in the context of Norway and Sweden—these right-wing extremists manipulate people's fears in order to encourage support for their groups. This can be seen through various trends, alleged statistics, facts taken out of context, political parties' campaigns, and furthermore through ridicule of multiple formats. This is all part of the process of trying

to convince the people that the nation should only consist of white, ethnic Norwegian and Swedish citizens—thus imagining the community as limited and ethnically exclusive.

The fourth and final aspect are references to an alleged *race war*. Right-wing extremists in Norway and Sweden are convinced that the "white race" is under an immediate threat of being "wiped out" by mass immigration from the Middle East. This is evident through real-life examples like organizational activity in SIAN and The Nordic Resistance Movement, and also digital activity through different content and engagement online. Since the 2011 Utøya attacks carried out by Anders Behring Breivik, right-wing extremist terrorism has been characterized by a "lone wolf" paradigm, where singular people have planned and carried out deadly attacks under the belief that they are "saving" Europe. It is especially because of this aspect that the Norwegian authorities list right-wing extremist terrorism as a large threat to national security—online radicalization can be particularly difficult to identify, and the consequences can be major.

One of the most interesting observations is how right-wing extremists in Norway and Sweden seem to fit their discourse into already existing trends and formats on social media. By using various semiotic tools, such as jargon, these creators tailor their language to allude to a larger audience beyond far-right communities. I have used the term trends to refer to certain types of video formats and particular ways of communicating. Trends are unique in that they make the recipients feel as if they are in on something secret, something that not everyone can understand—almost like an inside-joke between two friends. A specific type of "trendy" language in far-right communities is, as illustrated, the jargon "well, well, well," "W," and "Based," which are often used in the context of anti-woke content. Sometimes, as could be proven, entire comment sections are filled with these remarks exclusively.

This observation is important because it might tell us something about how right-wing extremists adapt to the excessive use of social media. To me, it seems clear that Norwegian and Swedish right-wing

extremists are conscious of the power that social media holds and understand that these platforms can truly help their cause; even more so if they gain sympathy from the anti-woke community.

Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism are not one and the same, however I have demonstrated that they share more similarities than they have differences. The four main semiotic elements presented are just as prominent in both movements, and as their organizational sections cross borders, they consequently have very similar practices. This is likely also due to the fact that they base a majority of their ideology on the same points—the Muslim being the Other, white people being the superior, a longing for a return to tradition, and a common heritage that goes back to the Viking age. After studying the interaction between right-wing extremists from the two countries, I found that Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremists, including both Finland and Denmark, tend to recognize each other as two of the same kind—almost like brothers. While being exclusionary in terms of "Us" versus "Them," it is clear that right-wing extremists are transnationally connected and somehow drawn to one another—"the more, the merrier," and the more power to influence they get.

However, I also wish to emphasize that the *degree* of right-wing extremism might differ between the two countries. While the aspects of right-wing extremism in Norway and Sweden appear to be quite similar, according to my research, the Swedish variety is slightly more prominent than the Norwegian one. This is, for example, evidenced by the amount of content that is being published on different platforms, with Swedish right-wing extremism appearing more often than Norwegian. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this does not mean that there is only a limited amount of content coming from the Norwegian side. There could be several other explanations for this. Firstly, it could be something as simple as Sweden having double the number of citizens as Norway does. This could explain why more content appears to be published by Swedish right-wing extremists. Secondly, another explanation could be that Swedish right-wing extremism might have gained a more solid foothold over the past

two decades. In some ways, it could be argued that far-right ideology appears to have gained more sympathy in this country—which is evidenced in the success of the Swedish far-right party, the Sweden Democrats.

This work has aimed to outline key aspects of Norwegian and Swedish right-wing extremism. In the process of doing so, I have discovered that there is a significant amount of interaction between creators and seemingly non-extremist users on different social media platforms where we find far-right content. This is merely an observation, as I have, for the duration of writing this, spent many hours watching far-right content and scouring comment sections. An interesting focus for a future study could be to look further into the relations between the right-wing extremist and anti-woke community, perhaps also in the context of social media interaction.

Studying right-wing extremism on social media platforms has been a challenge throughout working on this, which could indicate issues for further research. Because the nature of the content makes it prone to censorship by other users or being taken down by platform moderators, getting a representative image of both the *amount* and *type* of content being published can be challenging. In spite of these difficulties, it remains important to study as much of this content as possible in order to better understand the nature and semiotics of Scandinavian right-wing movements.

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11 Appendix

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Video D
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Video E
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Video F
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Video G
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Video J
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