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Discursive Constructions of White Nordic Masculinities in Right-wing Populist Media

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Abstract

Using superordinate intersectionality as a theoretical framework, this article explores notions of men and masculinities within right wing populism. It is attentive to how the right-wing populist media in Finland and Sweden construct white Nordic masculinities through discursive interactions across several axes of difference: gender (masculinities); sexuality (heterosexuality); social class (elites); and race (whitenesses). Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as methodological approach, we show how the discursive constructions of

white Nordic masculinities are context contingent, rendering them subject to constant reinterpretation and repositioning, at times privileging some axes of social structuring over others. By drawing out the subtle similarities and discrete differences embedded in the discursive constructions of right-wing populist media, our approach gives a more fine-grained understanding of the nuance to men and masculinities in the study of right wing populism. By focusing on the European Nordic semi-periphery, our comparative analysis makes an original contribution, not only to the masculinities literature in general, but also to the growing scholarship concerned with the ‘crisis of masculinity’ in the wider context of neoliberal globalizing tendencies.

Introduction

For many, Donald Trump represents the posterchild of right-wing populism in the west. His victory in the 2016 US presidential elections came with the promise to “make America great again.” According to Trump, the return to greatness would be achieved by defending ordinary white Americans against greedy corporations, distant and unresponsive state governments, gridlocked national legislatures, and the demographic challenges they face (Kimmel 2017). In his June 2015 speech whilst seeking the nomination for the Republican presidential candidate, Trump played to the anger of the white American men, juxtaposing them with the allegedly criminal, predatory, and racially different others:

When Mexico sends its people [...] They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. [...] It’s coming from more than Mexico. It’s coming from all over South and Latin America, and it’s coming probably [...]

from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no confidence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast (C-span (Producer) 2015, 11:04–11:57).

Whilst a fragmented and porous national party organization allowed the Republicans to be captured by various strands of populist conservatism, thus providing a conduit for Trump, in Europe where political parties tend to be more stable, new right-wing populist parties emerged in their own right (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017; Mudde 2007; Wodak 2015). Consistent with the US, and elsewhere in Europe, men's anger is politically mobilized across Northern Europe by parties who have made significant inroads in mainstream politics with claims to defend "the people." For example, in Finland, *Perussuomalaiset/ Sannfinländarna* (Finns Party) became the second largest party in the 2015 parliamentary elections with 17.6 % of the votes, and until recently was a part of the center-right governing coalition. Similarly, the 2014 parliamentary elections in Sweden, saw *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats) become the third largest party with 12.9 % of the votes, posing a serious challenge to the center-left minority government. For both of these parties, men outnumber women among both members and voters (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017; Pettersson 2017; Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2017); some scholars make the point to label right-wing populist parties as *Männerparteien* (men's parties) (Mudde 2007, 90–118; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015, 22).

Unlike the US, however, both Finland and Sweden have been commonly heralded as examples of Nordic "women-friendly welfare states." Such claims are underpinned by an assumption that gendered hierarchies and social class inequalities have been dismantled by the direct involvement and commitment of men and women in virtually homogeneous

societies (Christensen and Larsen 2008; Johansson and Klinth 2008). Gender equality and solidarity still enjoy strong support in both Finland and Sweden (Norocel 2017; Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2017), although neoliberalism has seriously diluted the principle of universal access to welfare provision – hitherto regarded as a central tenet of the Nordic welfare model. In this context, while rallying support against the mismanagement of the welfare state and the threat of uncontrolled migration, both the Finns Party and Sweden Democrats have been pressured to live up to the gender equality principle closely connected to the Nordic welfare model (Keskinen 2013; Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Norocel 2013; Saresma 2018).

Notwithstanding this, research unveiling the co-constitutive gendered hierarchies and interrelated axes of social structuring at work in right-wing populist discourses is still at a very early stage. Hitherto, few studies have analyzed the complex discursive interdependence between concepts of gender and sexuality; social class, culture, and language; race and migration, and those that do mainly focus on the discursive construction of femininities (Keskinen 2013; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Pettersson 2017; Saresma 2017a). The task of explicitly concentrating on the construction of masculinities has seldom been undertaken (Keskinen 2013; Norocel 2009, 2010). We suggest that this gap in the extant scholarship can be filled by adopting an “intersectionality of superordination” (Leek and Kimmel 2015) approach to right-wing populist discourses in Finland and Sweden, thus responding to the call for comparative perspectives on the study of men and masculinities (Hearn 2014, 457–458).

We will show how the right-wing populist media portrays idealized white Nordic masculinities through the discursive interactions across and between several axes of difference and inequality such as gender, social class, sexuality, and race. In considering this,

we analyzed the contents of official right-wing populist newspapers: *Perussuomalainen* for the Finns Party, and *SD-Kuriren* for the Sweden Democrats, and show which similarities and differences arise when comparing Finland and Sweden across these axes. The article is organized in five sections. First, we map out the conceptual background. Secondly, we discuss our methodological approach, and provide details of the data collection and analysis. Thirdly, we present the results of analyzing the Finnish data. Fourthly, we relay the results of analyzing the Swedish data. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and empirical implications of our findings, and indicate avenues for further research.

Theoretical Framework: Superordinate Intersectionality

We employ the concept of *superordinate intersectionality* (Leek and Kimmel 2015), to bridge several different research traditions: men and masculinities studies; scholarship on right-wing populism; and critical studies of race. Superordinate intersectionality, somewhat similar to what some European researchers call “intersectionality from above” (Mayer, Ajanovic, and Sauer 2014; Norocel 2017), entails an intersectional analysis along such superordinate axes of social structuring as: *masculinities* (for gendered hierarchies), *heterosexuality* (for sexual hierarchies), *elites* (for class systems), and *whitenesses* (for racialized and ethnic structuring). Intersectionality allows us to explore the co-constitutive systems of difference and inequality – unpicking several paradoxical situations, and subsequently reveal conceptual intricacies – at work in right-wing populist discourses. To begin with, using the concept in plural, we acknowledge that *masculinities* are multiple in form. They are contingent to the socio-historical and political context in which they are embedded, displaying internal complexity, and even innate contradictions, as they are being shaped by the interactions among men themselves, and between men and women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849–850; Beasley 2008, 86–88; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Kimmel

2017, 279–285). Of interest here are *hybrid masculinities*, which entail “the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities—and at times—femininities into privileged men’s [...] identities,” that were initially used to examine “young, White, heterosexual-identified men” (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 246). Contingency and hybridity notwithstanding, we find the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2005), useful for our purposes here. It involves a “discursive ideal mobilizing legitimation,” as “a political mechanism involving the bonding together of different masculinities in a hierarchical order, and to differentiate this meaning from a usage dealing with the authority of socially dominant men” (Beasley 2008, 99–100). To this we add the concept of *hegemonic whiteness* (Hughey 2010), which notes the cultural processes of white identity formation based on the reproduction of racist ideologies. The intersectional conceptualization presented above binds together the hybridization of hegemonic masculinities with processes of racialization. This helps us tackle a paradoxical outcome of right-wing populist ideology; namely, that while the narratives of white masculinity articulated in right-wing populist discourse is presented as highly desirable, and thus heralded as hegemonic, most men voting for such parties, those perceived to embody this masculine ideal, simultaneously present themselves as economically vulnerable and having been pushed to the margins of society. This commonly finds a voice in claims of an “aggrieved entitlement;” a vociferous claim that their birthright has been usurped by undeserving others (Kimmel 2017, 16–17).

It is worth noting at this point that right-wing populist ideology operates a gendered Manichean distinction between the seemingly homogeneous and monolithic “pure people” – personified by the “man in the street” – and the “corrupt elite” that defend those unworthy “others” – embodied as feminists; lesbian, gay, and transgender rights activists; and racial

minorities and/or migrant communities (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017; Keskinen 2013; Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; Norocel 2017; Saresma 2017b; Wodak 2015). Herein lies another paradox: while right-wing populist parties proclaim their anti-elitism and ability to represent the average man's political interests, they are an established presence in the national parliaments in both countries, and until recently a part of the governing coalition in Finland. Thus, they are members of the very political elite they criticize; consequently, the need arises to recognize the complexity of elites and the nuance of their discursive presence in right-wing populist ideology.

In addition, authoritarianism, nativism, and welfare chauvinism give further ideological consistency to right-wing populism. Authoritarianism manifests itself in the marked proclivity to support a rigid and disciplinary interpretation of conventional ethics that reify gendered social hierarchies (Kimmel 2003, 604). It entails a policing of both women and men for reproductive purposes, whereby the "heteronormative nuclear family is set up as a means of protection against loss of values, decadence, pornography, polygamy, homosexuality" (Claus and Virchow 2017, 315), and as a measure to ensure people's pure racial lineage. In the Northern European semi-periphery (Hearn, Blagojević, and Harrison 2013), the tension between maintaining gendered social hierarchies and concomitantly subscribing to gender equality is resolved in right-wing populist discourse by means of "pseudo-emancipatory *gender policies*" (*italics in original*) (Wodak 2015, 22). Also known as "gender populism" (Saresma 2018), this is a system that formally acknowledges equality between men and women, while at the same time ascribing masculinities and femininities with essentialist biological traits, that aim to consolidate the legitimacy of the heteronormative nuclear family. Nativism, in turn, encompasses almost completely the boundaries of the native racial

majority, ensuring that “people” become coterminous with “nation.” Such a move, as it was aptly pointed out, “provides ground for the creation of self-images as modern, progressive and advanced nations through a juxtaposition to migrant ‘others’ projected to the past and stagnation,” and endorses “visions of equal, emancipated and tolerant Nordic citizens through a contrast to ‘bad patriarchies’ located in distant places and migrant bodies” (Keskinen 2013, 226; see also Saresma 2017a). In other words, nativism entails a “relational process, where whiteness often acts as the unspoken norm against which ‘others’ are measured and defined, creating hierarchies not only among groups of people but also ways of life, embodied characteristics, [and] residential areas” (Keskinen and Andreassen 2017, 66).

Notwithstanding this, we acknowledge the presence of different *whitenesses* as formations of identity and practice within the global racial order, and are thus aware that whiteness in singular, is but a reductive “attempt to homogenize diverse white ethnics into a single category (much like it attempts with people of color) for purposes of racial domination” (Leonardo 2002, 32).

The third ideological element, welfare chauvinism, is intimately tied to nativism and needs to be understood within the wider context of neoliberal globalizing tendencies, and the cyclical crises they produce. The aggressive neoliberal policies of the present, and the post-Fordist processes of production pursued in the past decades in the US as well as in Northern Europe, have led to a dramatic restructuring of welfare provision, which has been described as producing “growing social exclusion, new flexibility demands and regimes in working life, increased competition in the labor market and the precarization of new groups” (Keskinen, Norocel, and Bak Jörgensen 2016, 323–324). Additionally, these forces have “paralleled a new ‘crisis of masculinity’ amongst male members of the working class and underclass across the Western contexts” (Roose 2017: 63). Welfare chauvinism then, fuses gendered

economic and cultural arguments that enable claims of proprietary right over welfare provision for, and on behalf of, native men, as “the welfare state built by our forefathers,” or on grounds of cultural distinctiveness as “our cherished national values,” which obscures outright racism by masquerading as a spurious concern to preserve cultural differences (Kimmel 2003, 605; Norocel 2017, 103; Roose 2017, 58). We show that this conceptual complexity and nuanced meaning that pervades right-wing populist discourses, is best disentangled by means of a critical discourse analysis approach.

Data and Method

The discursive construction of white Nordic masculinities in Finland and Sweden, is analyzed through an emphasis on newspapers that are directly and openly connected to the Finns Party and the Sweden Democrats respectively – *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren*. Previous research evinced how the established media (both print and televisual) impacts upon how right-wing populist discourses reach the wider public. Party newspapers, for example, play a crucial role in disseminating the officially sanctioned interpretations of right-wing populist ideology, and play a similar role to that undertaken by so-called “alt-right” media in Trump’s presidential campaign (cf. Barkun 2017, 441; Norocel 2013, 22–23). These party newspapers become even more important during elections, when they serve a double role: on the one hand they ensure internal solidarity around the official discourse, and on the other, they reach out to, and recruit, potential voters.

As the Finns Party and the Sweden Democrats gained significant parliamentary representation (since 2011 in Finland, and 2010 in Sweden), the two newspapers have developed journalistically. *Perussuomalainen* was established in late 1996, a year after the Finns Party was founded, and it currently publishes around twelve to sixteen issues per year.

Similarly, *SD-Kuriren*, which publishes ten to eleven issues per year, became the Sweden Democrats' sole official newspaper after its relaunch in 2003 – it had since 1991. Both newspapers have become much more sophisticated media products than they were initially. The amount of copy, and its diversity in each issue, has gradually increased. They can also boast a quality layout and formatting, and a number of regular contributors, giving them both an increasingly polished and professional image. As the official channels of these parties, the newspapers include transcripts of speeches by their respective leaders and other established members, parliamentary interpellations, and written initiatives of local councilors, as well as newsbreaks, columns, reports and interviews, and letters to the editor. Importantly, both *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren* are available both in print and online, ensuring increased visibility and accessibility of right-wing populist discourses.

Data gathering and analysis were implemented in three stages. First, we collected all issues published during national elections (2007 and 2011 in Finland, and 2010 and 2014 in Sweden respectively), and for the European Parliament elections (2009 and 2014). Secondly, since previous research had identified elections as moments of ideological crystallization for fringe political forces, when they structure their political agenda more clearly to distinguish themselves from the mainstream and attract more votes (Norocel 2013, 89), we narrowed down our selection to three issues before and one issue after the respective elections. This gave us a total of sixteen issues for both *Perussuomalainen*, and *SD-Kuriren*. The two newspapers had covered these elections extensively, with key party members and candidates making contributions, and discussing the ideological tenets and political priorities of their respective party. Thirdly, the selected issues were pre-analyzed, paying attention to those discursive constructions engaged in articulating the superordinate intersections in terms of

gender, social class, sexuality, and race. Based on these criteria, we identified a total of 130 texts and accompanying images, see Table 1.

Year \ Newspaper	2007	2009	2010	2011	2014	Total
<i>Perussuomalainen</i>	18	14		9	9	50
<i>SD-Kuriren</i>		18	23		39	80

Table 1: The data (n=130): the number of texts per newspaper and per year.

We interpreted the data by means of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which we would argue enables “the systematic and *retroductable* investigation [since no hypotheses are formulated and tested, it must be transparent, its interpretations justified, and value positions made explicit] of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)” (*italics* in original) (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 3). This serves to unveil and demystify the ideological reification of power hierarchies, and the establishment of modes of dominance and oppression through discourse (Fairclough 1992, 8–9, 2001, 36–63). Ideology, in this context, is understood to entail the set of representations and claims about social reality, which are mediated and reified through discourse, whereby discourse is both constitutive and conditioned socially (Fairclough 1992, 87). The communicative practices embedded in discourse “have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 260). Among the various CDA perspectives, we have opted specifically for an amended dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough 1992, 2001, 2009). This approach postulates that the meaning of analyzed linguistic elements and representations are not merely situational, rather they are

engaged in the ongoing production and reproduction of macro-level social practices, such as the traditional gendered social hierarchy. By the same measure, then, these macro-level structures constitute the very background against which the micro-level expressions are made possible, thus emphasizing the performative role of *semiosis* (of which language and visual elements are of interest for our analysis) in the production, establishment, and enforcement of social practices (Fairclough 2009, 163). CDA enables us to tease out the gendered social hierarchy and the power mechanisms employed in the discursive production of Nordic masculinities in interaction with the other superordinate categories of social identity in the pages of *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren*.

In the operationalization of CDA, we worked through several reading rounds, with each one becoming more specific, allowing for the refinement and deepening our analysis. In the initial step, one researcher identified specific topics pertaining to gender, social class, sexuality, and race in the data. In the following stage, which involved the entire research team, we took a closer look at the discursive strategies (such as membership categorization, evaluative attribution, and thematic organization) at work in the articulation of identities. In the light of this, we used our complementary language proficiency in Finnish and Swedish to evidence the linguistic means at work in the data (lexical constructions related to such categories as: masculinity; femininity; social class; nation; sexuality; race; and religion and culture as discrete cues for racial distinctions). The research team compared their findings regularly, returned to the data for closer reading, and discussed the validity of their interpretations in the respective textual, discursive, and social contexts. This was done by utilizing each researcher's complementary fields of expertise (sociology of gender, political communication, and cultural studies).

Upon analyzing the data, we were able to distinguish a couple of discrete, albeit overlapping, discursive constructions of Nordic masculinities. In the Finnish case, we observed an initial emphasis on an ideal of white Finnish masculinity articulated around the axes of gender and sexuality, and social class; in time, this also accommodated a presence along the axis of race as a category for social structuring in right-wing populist discourse. In the Swedish case, the ideal of white Swedish masculinity was from the outset articulated along the axes of gender and sexuality, and race, while social class served mainly as a secondary axis, that strengthened the role of race as the key category for social structuring in right-wing populist discourse. Although we discuss the findings of our analysis in separate sections for each discursive construction of masculinities, we acknowledge that the interplay between these axes is not always easily distinguishable, because there are instances when several axes overlap, and even fuse together. We structured the presentation of our findings in this manner because we want to evidence the discrete similarities and subtle differences between the two contexts, thus giving more nuance to our analysis.

The Discursive Construction of Masculinities in *Perussuomalainen*

In *Perussuomalainen*, the default position was the assumption that the party rank and file was male. Following the populist tenet to defend the “people” against elites (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; Saresma 2017b), praise is given to the “common (Finnish) man.” He is generally described as “your average guy” from the countryside or the suburbs and, echoing the descriptions of those Republican male supporters in the American Rust Belt (Kimmel 2017), does “honest work,” but still has difficulties making ends meet. Such emphasis on the average character of these men is clearly present also in the accompanying visual elements in the pages of *Perussuomalainen*, particularly in the early issues examined. Emphasis is strongly placed upon the working-class background of these men, which is reflected as both a

virtue and a grievance. On the one hand, their working-class status represents a guarantee for them truly representing the “real” members of the Finnish nation, the “true people” as opposed to the much-vilified elite. This is also alluded to by the party’s name in Finnish, *Perussuomalaiset* (in literal translation meaning Basic, or Ordinary Finns). On the other hand, however, this is also described as a vulnerability. The semiosis in *Perussuomalainen* discusses widespread unemployment, small salaries, and insufficient pensions as grounds for welfare chauvinist policies. Interestingly, some of the party representatives embody this working-class ideal, which manifests as a programmatic disregard for the middle-class masculine ideal of the “proper looking gentleman,” thus presenting an archetype of anti-establishment hegemonic masculinity. A case in point is long-serving chairman Timo Soini (1995–2017). Soini was often portrayed in the pages of *Perussuomalainen* looking slightly overweight, wearing ill-fitting suits, with rather greasy hair, and sporting not quite fitting spectacles. Interestingly, Soini is a practicing Catholic in a country where over 70% of the population belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, one of the country’s state churches. Decidedly against abortion and promoting a conservative role for women as caretakers, Soini managed to level out his religious particularity, and to incorporate these as foundational elements for the way he presents himself as no different to his voters – a man of the people. Soini cultivated the image of an authoritative patriarch, a man with the messianic task of embracing a quasi-religious language, and to become a bold and hardened leader (Parkkinen 2017). In doing so, he sought to underscore his “ordinary” background at every opportunity. He confessed that, “leading a party is not an easy job. Nor do I seek to live a comfortable life. I know from experience what it takes to lead a party successfully. It requires strength and the ability to withstand mental discomfort. The leader must dare to lead” (*Perussuomalainen* #7/2009, 8). Despite his long leadership, Soini was always keen on describing himself as “a simple guy,” even when discussing his education. Tellingly, his

autobiographies are titled *Maisterisjätkä* (2008) (The Guy with a Masters Degree) and *Peruspomo* (2014) (Basic Boss, alluding to the much used *perus-* lexical particle in the party discourse), which we argue represents Soini's attempt to strengthen his credentials as "a common man," and to disassociate himself further from the elite (he is a "boss," but a "basic" one, and so on). This claim is made despite his multiple mandates in both the Finnish and European parliament, and more recently for holding the Foreign Affairs portfolio in the conservative-right government (Palonen 2017).

This ideal of unsophisticated, hard-working, and down to earth working-class masculinity is articulated further by various party candidates in *Perussuomalainen*. Take Jani Kolehmainen, "a 37-year old pipe-fitter and family father, whose long career started already at age 13, and has not been on hold ever since." The text contours a white Finnish masculinity underpinned by traditional attributes – physical effort is what characterizes both his work, as well as his (masculine) hobbies and interests – which fuse with his genetic heritage (that which confirms unspoiled racial purity) in making him a "true" Finnish man. In Jani's own words:

I am a common working man, a construction guy, who is familiar with the Finnish everyday life and its challenges. I believe in hard work based on one's own free will, which is passed onto us Finns through our mother's milk. [...] I live a happy married life, and my family is the most important resource and background support for me (*Perussuomalainen* elections #/2014, 17).

Although such a discursive move is not uncommon throughout the world of party politics, we argue that this type of articulation, in this particular context, seeks to legitimize white Finnish masculinity by embedding it into the social framework offered by the heteronormative nuclear family.

Utilizing the family as a key social institution serves as a discrete proxy for references to (hetero)sexuality, which is rarely addressed explicitly in *Perussuomalainen*; rather, it is woven discursively together with references to traditional gender roles. Men and women, while equal, are described as essentially complementary (Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Pettersson 2017; Saresma 2017b; Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2017). Reproduction is the goal of the complementarity heralded by “gender populism” (Saresma 2018). Opposing the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples, member of the Finnish Parliament Pentti Oinonen argued that procreation was

[...] decreed with great wisdom by the Creator at the beginning of time. We need a man and a woman to make a child. Even though we live in a new millennium and liberal times, this fact cannot be changed by the Finnish Parliament. [...] If same-sex couples want to play in their bedrooms, so be it, but why mix innocent children into this, as we ought to be afraid of the consequences of this for children’s development. (*Perussuomalainen* #4/2009, 24)

The gendered hierarchy is justified by inflexible gender roles divinely ascribed “at the beginning of time,” and thus beyond such temporal powers as the Finnish parliament. The different organization of intimacy is ridiculed, and even presented as a potential threat to “children’s development,” whereby children are incarnations of the (nation’s) future and need to be protected. In other words, white Finnish masculinity is discursively constructed as resolutely heterosexual, whose sexuality is manifested (mainly for procreative purposes) within a (legally sanctioned) monogamous union with a woman. While party members do not incorporate religious references consistently in their argumentation, there is an underlying assumption about their shared Christian values. In fact, until recently *Perussuomalainen* had a special section *Leivän ja sanan jakaja* (That who shares bread and words) where readers could submit their thought concerning “spiritual topics.”

It is important to note here that the experience of war casts a long shadow in Finland. In particular the memory of the “Winter War Spirit,” which ensured the country’s survival as a democracy during the conflict with the Soviet Union in World War II. This cultural and historical reference is a key dimension to the construction of masculinity in *Perussuomalainen*, which is presented as integral to Finnish history, and thus intimately connected to that of men as defenders of their families. The war is employed to mobilize internal solidarity against an external threat, though hardly any space is allocated to describing the warmongering other (see, *Perussuomalainen* #4/2007, 3, #6/2009, 20, #7/2009, 16, #7/2014, 21). Instead, most effort is put into contouring the gendered hierarchy within Finnish society (*Perussuomalainen* #4/2007, 3, #7/2014, 18). The soldiers that defended the country in the World War II are highly revered in Finnish society, and the few veterans still alive today are warmly welcomed at the Presidential palace for the Finnish independence celebrations every year. In *Perussuomalainen* however, the fact that these veterans had actively participated in the conflict is juxtaposed with the alleged carelessness of the Helsinki elite; to further emphasize the antagonism between the “true Finns” and disconnected elite. Illustratively, when these festive moments are discussed, the masculine peasant-cum-warrior ideal is presented as more important for the society that Finland is today than the elite, often characterized as “ladies in gowns” invited to the Presidential palace. It calls into question the contribution to Finnish welfare made by this feminized elite: “Perhaps this is true in some respects, but I personally appreciate a *perusjätkä* [basic/honest Finnish guy] and his Finnhorse, who were once a tough couple both at war and in peace.” (*Perussuomalainen* #4/2014, 25) These representatives of the rich and obviously vain elite are regarded as less entitled to partake in celebrating Finnish independence than the fraternity

of hardworking and steadfast men and their devoted horses; in their view, these masculine war heroes are the “true” Finnish elite.

The representation of such “basic” and heterosexual inward-looking white Finnish masculinity, deeply anchored in the countryside and small cities remote from the capital, has nonetheless gradually lost its hegemonic position in *Perussuomalainen*. In this respect, we refer to the growing salience during the 2010s of a right-wing anti-immigration and nationalist faction within the party, which originated in the party’s youth organization under the ideological guidance of Jussi Halla-aho. He mobilized anti-immigration and right-wing nationalist supporters first through his personal blog, before joining the Finns Party in 2010. He was elected first to the Finnish Parliament (2011), and then to the European Parliament (2014). He has built his entire political career on courting controversy (claiming to speak what previously was “unspeakable”), and making rabid attacks against Islam, often depicted as the poisoned gift brought to Finland by the “unintegratable” (sic!) Muslim migrants (Keskinen 2013).

Modern-looking and more urban in character, the Finns Party Youth rejected the previous ideological emphasis on addressing poverty and consolidating economic solidarity. Instead, they moved closer to the party’s ideological core xenophobia and culturally justified racism, particularly with regard to the growing (albeit slowly) presence of Islam in Finland (Saresma 2017a). This change of direction, has paved the way for more hybrid forms of masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). In the examined semiosis, we denote a breaking point at the time of the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections. During the campaign the Finns Party Youth chairman revealed a more combative and decidedly xenophobic attitude. When the largest

Finnish daily claimed the party was recruiting supporters among “young angry men” he contently remarked that,

I was immediately delighted by the idea, even though I would add ‘and women’... We are even tired of the National Coalition Party [main governing party at the time] accepting the new, completely unsuccessful foreigners’ and nationality laws. That the Swedish People’s Party wants a residence permit granted in one Nordic country to be valid in the other ones as well. [...] And [we are tired] of the fact that all [mainstream parties] are pushing for that pernicious multiculturalism the whole Europe has embraced. (*Perussuomalainen* elections #/2011, 11)

In our view, the reference to “pernicious multiculturalism” generates a twofold distinction. First, it draws attention to the previously unspoken whiteness of the native population (Keskinen and Andreassen 2017), a feature which has hitherto tacitly underpinned right-wing populist claims of Finnish cultural and national homogeneity. It must be noted however, that the whiteness Finns Party are in no way interested in defending is the white “Europe” that embraces multiculturalism. Secondly, under the guise of cultural difference, it ascribes racial distinctions to the migrant others. Pernicious multiculturalism is merely a shorthand for the danger posited by Islam.

This stance features prominently in the later issues of *Perussuomalainen*, where Muslim migrants are often portrayed as an unwanted economic burden on the welfare state and thus strengthening welfare chauvinist arguments, and as undercover bearers of Islamist religious extremism, thus stoking fears of cultural and religious diversity. However, the request to help for example Syrian refugees in the countries neighboring Syria were accompanied by demands to significantly cut Finnish development aid, which could potentially benefit these

refugees (*Perussuomalainen* #7/2014, 14–15). This ideological shift then, from native inward-looking masculinity to a manifestly xenophobic nationalist masculinity ideal, was consolidated in mid-2017, when Soini’s chosen successor lost the chairmanship competition to Halla-aho.

The Discursive Construction of Masculinities in *SD-Kuriren*

Much like *Perussuomalainen*, analyzing *SD-Kuriren* reveals the same type of stance, positioning the party as one “in the service of the common man.” The construction of “your average Svensson” however, takes place at the intersection of gender and (hetero)sexuality, social class, and (white) race, with the heteronormative nuclear family as its background, and in clear opposition to both Swedish elites, and racialized (male) others. In our view, this reflects the party’s continuous reevaluation and negotiation of its racist roots by cautiously walking “the line between radicalism and extremism – to avoid accusations of the latter” (Hellström 2016, 92). Indeed, the examined data indicates that *SD-Kuriren* supports a conservative and essentialist view on gendered hierarchies in Swedish society (see, *SD-Kuriren* #80/2009, 2; 13, elections #81/2009, 2, #110/2014, 20, #112-113/2014, 14; 17). Concomitantly, it is vehemently against the Swedish establishment (*SD-Kuriren* #87/2010, 5). At the same time, *SD-Kuriren* carefully dresses up its racism by suffusing it into cultural distinctiveness (see, *SD-Kuriren* elections #81/2009, 6, #85/2010, 4, 7, 16, #86/2010, 3, #110/2014, 6, #112-113/2014, 18–27, #114/2014, 12–13). Racism is disguised into the imperative to preserve cultural specificity by employing the idea commonly shared in Swedish society that “Swedishness is whiteness” (Lundström 2017, 80), and by mobilizing “gender equality” as an intrinsic Swedish value to oppose the racialized (Muslim) migrant other (cf. Mulinari and Neergaard 2014, 46–49; Norocel 2010, 173–176, 2017, 100–101).

If “basic” is the key attribute in *Perussuomalainen* to denote the white Finnish masculinity ideal, in *SD-Kuriren* the leitmotif of white Swedish masculinity is “democracy-loving,” which is used to characterize the party (as for example in *-demokraterna* lexical particle in the party name). Love for “democracy,” narrowly defined as respect for the Swedish welfare state (echoing the welfare chauvinist appeal to “defend the welfare built by our forefathers”) and social conformism (as in the “common sense” of “people in the street”), constitute discreet markers of the “average Svensson.” These elements distinguish him from both the Swedish cultural and political establishment, and racialized (male) others. Although during the analyzed timeframe the party won seats in the Swedish parliament, and even consolidated further its presence in politics – thus becoming part of the establishment – the elites of which are described as the unholy union of “multiculturalists, Sweden-haters, [and] EU-federalists” (*SD-Kuriren* #87/2010, 5). This was no doubt amplified by the fact that the Swedish media elite had, particularly after the 2010 parliamentary elections, ignored the Sweden Democrats. Furthermore, by giving their unanimous support to the mainstream parties, they reinforced the perception that the “entire” Swedish establishment had united against the party (Hellström 2016, 166; Norocel 2010, 177). The Swedish elites are often disparagingly labeled by the party as “Sweden-haters,” and described in terms similar to how the right-wing populist Tea Party regards the US government: both hypomasculine (a “nanny” caving in to multiculturalism and centralist demands), and hypermasculine (oppressive of white American masculinities) (Kimmel 2017, 58). In this regard, the Sweden Democrats profile themselves as the true representatives of common people’s interests. They give particular support to idealized working-class men (Norocel 2013, 151), they pursue a self-denoted “a Sweden-friendly politics,” and stress the importance “of our party appearing as the party we actually are – popular. A party for ordinary people” (*SD-Kuriren* #111/2014, 21).

This ordinary masculinity ideal is arguably personified best by the party's chairman Jimmie Åkesson. Very much like Soini, Åkesson enjoys an uncontested leadership position, after being elected in 2005 on a mandate designed to shake off the Sweden Democrats' reputation of a racist party. Since Åkesson successfully took the party into the Swedish parliament in 2010, he has managed to widen the party's appeal outside of its xenophobic core of supporters (Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Norocel 2010, 2013, 2017). In both the visual and textual data, Åkesson is represented as embodying a polished, well-balanced, and youthful masculinity. This applies equally to occasions when he adorns the traditional folk costume at the opening ceremony of Swedish parliament, wearing well-fitting suits, and when anchoring the political and ideological priorities of Sweden Democrats in the column he writes regularly for *SD-Kuriren* (see, *SD-Kuriren* elections #81/2009, 1,11, elections #87/2010, 1, 3, elections #114/2014, 1, 24). His autobiography *Satis Polito* (sic!) (2013) (That/Who Is Sufficiently Polished/Educated, in approximate Latin) also emphasizes Åkesson's well-choreographed ordinariness: a man of modest extraction who managed to accede to the most exclusivist sphere of politics in Sweden motivated by his strong right-wing populist political ideals (Hellström 2016, 177–178). Åkesson's discursive construction of masculinity is somewhat different from Soini's unkept, folksy, and assertive interpretation of masculinity ideal. Instead, he embodies a right-wing populist version of the "gender-equal Swedish masculinity" (Johansson and Klinth 2008): tastefully pedantic, yet down to earth; soft-spoken and considerate, though steadfast and committed to his political cause; and last but not least, seemingly gender-equal, albeit decidedly patriarchal (cf. Johansson and Nyström 2013; Norocel 2013).

Gender equality is narrowly understood in *SD-Kuriren* as the default characteristic of Swedish society, which need not be "tinkered with" by further feminist endeavors. Feminism

is deemed harmful to the Swedish society in general, and to the harmony between men and women within the heteronormative nuclear family, in particular. Indeed, feminist and other such emancipatory political goals, such as same sex marriage and adoption rights are disparagingly described as harmful and elitist “identity politics.” These types of political endeavor characterize what *SD-Kuriren* sees as the utopian and anarchistic political agenda of *F!* (Feminist Initiative), and other mainstream parties that jumped on the feminist bandwagon (*SD-Kuriren* #112-113/2014, 17, 18–26, 35). In this context, Swedish men occupy a dual position. On the one hand, they are portrayed as defensive, like white American men in the US, their masculinity is under attack from “an engine of gender inversion, feminizing men, while feminism masculinizes women” (Kimmel 2003, 608). On the other, they are confirmed as the hybrid ideal of masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014), most appreciated in right-wing populist discourse. In contrast, those elite men supporting a progressive agenda are described as emasculated and without vigor, simple followers of the latest political trends, removed from the real needs of people across the country. This notwithstanding, “gender equality” appears more frequently in the analyzed data than in *Perussuomalainen* (both textual, such as, *SD-Kuriren* #80/2009, 2, 8, #87/2010, 5, #111/2014, 23; and visual, for example, *SD-Kuriren* #81/2009, 6, electoral issue #87/2010, 5, #110/2014, 16). Despite this, echoing *Perussuomalainen*, men and women are depicted in essentialist terms, complementing one another within the safe confines of heteronormative family, proclaimed “motherland of the heart” (*SD-Kuriren* #80/2009, 8), and thereby confirming socially conservative values in a right-wing populist key (Norocel 2017; Saesma 2018; Wodak 2015). The masculinity ideal is described in this context as the (biological) father figure, firmly embedded in traditional family values, and who provides the most suitable environment for the development of white Swedish offspring and their future lives as socially well-adjusted adults (*SD-Kuriren* #80/2009, 8). This reference to biological fatherhood, we argue, serves two purposes. First, it

opposes blankly the extension of adoption rights to include same-sex couples. Secondly, it points to the risks of racial miscegenation, though only in the case of Swedish women building families with racialized men. This unveils the patriarchal logic whereby transferring white racial privilege from one generation to another is the monopoly of Swedish men. Such a stance indicates the deeply ambiguous position occupied by racialized others in right-wing populist discourse, which we address at length below.

Race as a distinctive marker in the construction of Swedish masculinities becomes clear in the analysis of visual semiosis in the *SD-Kuriren*. In it, “Swedishness is whiteness” (Lundström 2017) is reinforced through pictures of blond and blue-eyed preteen boys holding hands with an equally blonde and blue-eyed girl, and set against a bucolic landscape (see, *SD-Kuriren* #81/2009, 16, #87/2010, 5); happy family pictures presumably of the father, mother, and their offspring (*SD-Kuriren* #80/2009, 8, 10); or the portraits of (almost) exclusively white men, Sweden Democrats rank and file and party supporters (see, *SD-Kuriren* #82/2009, 13, #112-113/2014, 18–26). In contrast, the racialized men are pictured as aggressive in manner, and primitive in their customs (like the picture of a group of Somali men applying Sharia-inspired punishment, stoning to death adulterers, like in *SD-Kuriren* #86/2010, 4). Such depictions lend visual strength to the textual construction of “democracy” and “gender equality,” or the lack thereof, as discursive separators between white Swedish masculinities and racialized others, be them men and women (see, *SD-Kuriren* #82/2009, 13, #85/2010, 8, #87/2010, 4, #112-113/2014, 21, #112-113/2014, 23, #114/2014, 15–17).

It must be noted however, that in the analyzed textual data we did not identify explicit references to race. Rather, religious affiliation – particularly Islam – served as a racial marker indicating a non-native status. Similar to how Donald Trump described the presence in the

US of racialized foreign men, the pages of *SD-Kuriren* depict Muslim masculinity twofold. First, as hypermasculine where violence and homophobia, honor killings, genital mutilation, religiously sanctioned violence against women, and gang rapes are the recurring descriptions (one which is echoed in the Finnish context in the Kempele rape case, see e.g. Saesma 2017b). Secondly, Muslim masculinity is concomitantly portrayed as hypomasculine, located in a subaltern position in relation to the Swedish elites experimenting with multiculturalism (see, *SD-Kuriren* #80/2009, 13, #82/2009, 9, #85/2010, 19, #87/2010, 10, #111/2014, 3, #112-113/2014, 18–27). In other words, the traditional heterosexual white Swedish masculinity ideal promoted by the Sweden Democrats is presented as the only viable option for Sweden to survive as a nation which cherishes its democratic and welfare institutions, and nominally embraces gender equality.

Concluding Discussion

This article analyzed right-wing populist media depictions of idealized white Nordic masculinities. It employed superordinate intersectionality (Leek and Kimmel 2015) as a theoretical perspective to connect diverse research traditions such as men and masculinity studies (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Beasley 2008; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Kimmel 2017), scholarship on right-wing populism (Mudde 2007; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Keskinen 2013), and critical studies of race (Hughey 2010; Keskinen and Andreassen 2017). By means of an amended dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 2001, 2009; Wodak and Meyer 2009), the study unveiled the topics, discursive strategies, and lexical constructions, which articulate meaning to white Nordic masculinities at the intersection of axes of social structuring such as gender (masculinities), social class (elites), sexuality (heterosexuality), and race (whitenesses).

Our analysis adds clarity to the study of men and masculinities in right-wing populism (Claus and Virchow 2017; Erzeel and Rashkova 2017; Gottzén 2014; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; Kimmel 2003, 2017; Roose 2017; Wodak 2015), and makes a strong contribution to the wider scholarly discussion concerning the “crisis of masculinity” and emerging hybrid masculinities in the context of neoliberal globalizing tendencies. We argue that in right-wing populist discourses, the traditional hegemonic masculinity ideal, based hitherto on hard work, ordinariness, and of rural or small-town extraction, is gradually giving way to hybridized ideals of masculinity. These hybrid representations of masculinity emphasize modernity, education, and style, which are no longer the characteristics attributed exclusively to elites. Notwithstanding this, the emphasis on (racially pure) whiteness and heterosexuality remain central to the construction of these hybrid masculinities – while traditional hegemonic masculinity has been reinterpreted, hegemonic whiteness (Hughey 2010) remains reinforced as a central tenet of right-wing populist masculinity ideals. Indeed, when examining the countries in the European Nordic semi-periphery, often regarded as schoolbook examples of “women-friendly welfare states,” we noted that the principle of gender equality has permeated the model of Nordic hegemonic masculinity. Gender equality, is however is operationalized in right-wing populist agendas as a demarcation from, and a subordination of, the racialized migrant other, who is portrayed as a threat to women’s rights and their bodily integrity (Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Norocel 2017; Saresma 2018). From this perspective, we provide a complement to “femonationalism” (Farris 2017), which mainly explores how nationalism, neoliberalism, and certain strands of feminism jointly exploit feminist themes to “liberate” migrant women.

Notwithstanding geographical closeness, and seemingly similar political fortunes in recent elections, there are some differences in how masculinities are constructed in right-wing

populist newspapers in Finland and Sweden. By teasing out the subtle similarities and discrete differences of these discursive constructions in the pages of *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren*, we have shown that the discursive constructions of white masculinities are context contingent and subject to reinterpretation and repositioning, which at times gives preference to different axes of social structuring. A common discursive pattern we identified, concerned the synergy between the axes of gender (masculinity) and sexuality (heteronormative nuclear family). For example, there was a strong tendency to emphasize socially conservative understandings of “gender equality,” projected as an essentialist complementarity between men and women, and to reinforce heterosexuality as desirable and necessary to reproduce the national bodies within the framework of traditional nuclear family (Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Saresma 2018). Nonetheless, we recognized a difference in degree between the two sources. In *SD-Kuriren*, for example, the interaction between these axes was more distinctively emphasized, thus adding a layer of nuance to previous studies on gender analyses of right-wing populism in Sweden (Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Norocel 2010; Pettersson 2017). A more substantial difference was identified when analyzing *Perussuomalainen*, and this confirmed earlier discussions about the specificity of the Finnish case (Keskinen 2013; Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Norocel 2009; Palonen 2017; Parkkinen 2017; Pettersson 2017; Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2017). We observed an initial emphasis on the interaction between the categories of gender (masculinity) and social class (working-class) in the discursive construction of Finnish masculinities, while race (Finnish ethnicity) played a rather complementary role, emphasizing ethnic homogeneity (defended through war).

Despite these differences, we noticed an increasing convergence in how masculinities are articulated discursively in Finland and Sweden. In this sense, the interaction between the axes

of gender (masculinity), and race (culturally coded as different religious affiliation) is privileged in the establishment and enforcement of gendered systems of difference and inequality, that separates white Nordic masculinities from those of racialized Muslim men. In our view, this indicates a global consolidation of the Manichean separation of the “people” from their “others” on grounds of racial belonging, and by the same measure, a revaluation of sexuality as relatively prior to social class as axes for such distinction. Arguably, this has been a political consequence of right-wing populist forces seeking mainstream acceptance on the one hand, and a response to acquiring positions of power on the other. Furthermore, there is no singular coherent masculinity being constructed. The ideals of masculinity they formulate are under constant (re)negotiation. In their attempt to gain societal and political relevance, right-wing populist forces in the Nordic semi-periphery reify hybridized ideals of masculinity. They adopt women friendly outlooks while simultaneously harnessing gender equality positions that enable racializing and xenophobic aims.

We conclude that transnational studies germane to men’s gendered and intersectional positioning, need to take account of right-wing populist discourses as well as those of progressive and emancipatory transversal movements (Hearn 2014, 459–460). The absence of such analyses, means that any conclusions are likely to be partial and dependent on insufficient scrutiny. We hope our article provides a meaningful signpost for further studies, focusing not only on other countries across Europe in a wider comparative perspective, but also on right-wing populism in the US (Kimmel 2017). For example, analyses of the discursive construction of masculinities in the so-called “alt-right” media, or for that matter, in Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, are much needed contributions, which may shed light on how right-wing populism discursively articulates the anger of white American men.

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