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# **Techno-Cultural Opportunities: Anti-Immigration Movement in the Finnish Media Environment**

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**Abstract:** The article analyses how transformations in the media environment shaped the political success of the anti-immigration movement in Finland in the years 2003 through 2013. The qualitative textual analysis of blogs and the mainstream media debates that connect to racism and the national populist True Finns party demonstrate how the changes in the mediascape in general and in the new media technology in particular offered opportunities for the emerging anti-immigration movement. The changes in mediascape facilitated the early development of the movement but fragmentation in online spaces later hindered internal movement coherence and integration to the populist party politics. In order to gain coherence the True Finns party performed public scapegoat performances wherein it distanced itself from racism. Moreover, the study shows that rather than being separate and marginal, the anti-immigration movement and the ‘uncivil’ public spheres intertwine with traditional politics and the mainstream media.

**Keywords:** immigration debate, nationalist populism, new media technology, journalism, racism, scapegoat mechanism

## Introduction

Media environment in Europe is experiencing a major transformation. This began in the 1990s when the Internet, mobile technologies and increased competition challenged the hegemonic positions of mainstream media. This shift from the centripetal phase of mass communication to a multi-platform and centrifugal phase transforms the whole communicative system. The ways in which information and imagery are being produced, shared, consumed and interpreted are no longer as attached to mediated centres as before. Ideas and voices that surface into the public consciousness are also from groups that have been previously marginalised in the nationally bordered media environments.

This ‘media manifold’<sup>1</sup> constructs a space of appearance, a new visibility where awareness of issues in the world unfolds. Roger Silverstone’s<sup>2</sup> concept of mediapolis covers well the complexity of the contemporary media environment. Silverstone addresses mediascape as a singular unit, but he also recognises ‘the manifest fragmentation of the platforms and cultures of the global media’. This normative and descriptive notion of mediapolis includes an idea of connections and networks; that is, the various separate platforms and cultures are connected in multiple ways.

It is my understanding that the various social research on prejudice need to consider these transformations and the re-scaling of mediapolis, which crucially shape society and social relationships. Transformation towards a networked public sphere also includes strengthening positions for those who spread ‘uncivil’ ideologies of racist prejudice. Moreover, previous literature on media’s role in the anti-immigration parties has focused on the gate-keeping role of the mainstream media but largely excluded the aspect of new media technologies<sup>3</sup>. One of the rare examples is Clare Bratten’s analysis of the French Front National’s use of website and online chats as

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Couldry, *Media, Society, World* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2011), 220.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2007), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Antonis Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010); Julianne Stewart, Gianpietro Mazzoleni & Bruce Horsfield, ‘Conclusions: Power to the media managers’, in Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart & Bruce Horsfield (eds.) *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis* (London: Praeger 2003), 217–37.

means to circumvent mainstream media's often negative representation of the party<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in order to fully understand the construction of prejudice in the contemporary society, we need to examine the new affordances of particular media practices and platforms. This study aims to fill the gaps in existing literature on the connections between new media and anti-immigration politics within nationalist populist parties.

Despite connecting people and society, new media technology also fragments, individualises and polarises communication<sup>5</sup>. The social networks of people in online spaces are often closed and limited to like-minded groups. Many right-wing groups, such as the English Defence League, are known to use social media for their networking and organisation<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, white supremacist and Islamophobic groups disseminate their ideologies online<sup>7</sup>. In his analysis of the Belgian right-wing websites, Bart Cammaerts concludes that the exposure to the mainstream media of racist speech and those who produce it along with legal complaints are important and fairly effective tools for countering racism<sup>8</sup>.

Taking Cammaerts' argument as a starting point, this article examines the mediated connections between mainstream media, online communities and political movements in the context of the heated immigration debate in Finland. The mainstream public became aware of an anti-immigration movement in 2008 when a blogger Jussi Halla-aho gained electoral success as an independent candidate on the True Finns<sup>9</sup> (PS) list in the local elections in Helsinki. The nationalist populist True Finns party advanced in the same elections throughout the country and the success continued in the general

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<sup>4</sup> Clare Bratten, 'Online zealotry: la France du peuple virtuel', *New Media & Society*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2005, 517–532.

<sup>5</sup> Zizi Papacharissi, 'The Virtual Sphere: Internet as public sphere', *New Media & Society* vol. 4, no. 2, 2002, 9-27.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Allen, 'Opposing Islamification or promoting Islamophobia? Understanding the English Defence League', *Patterns of Prejudice* vol. 45, no. 4, 2011, 279 – 294.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Gavan Titley, 'They called a war and someone came: The communicative politics of Breivik's ideoscape', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* vol. 3, no. 4, 2013, 216–224; Liz Fekete, 'The Muslim conspiracy theory and the Oslo massacre', *Race & Class* vol. 53, no. 3, 2012, 30–47; Jessie Daniels, *Cyber Racism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers 2009), 117 – 134.

<sup>8</sup> Bart Cammaerts, 'Radical pluralism and free speech in online public spaces: The case of North Belgian extreme right discourses', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* vol. 12, no. 6, 2009, 555 – 575 (571).

<sup>9</sup> In this article I use the older English version of the Perussuomalaiset (PS) party, True Finns as it is closer to the Finnish meaning of the name (Basic Finns). The party now calls itself the Finns in English.

elections in 2011 when it became the third largest party in Finland. The political success of the True Finns connects with the relatively recent rise of nationalist populism in the Nordic countries, although its rhetoric is not as extremely xenophobic as the Danish People's Party's or Sweden Democrats'. The party can be defined as a populist radical right party that mixes traditional conservatism and anti-establishment. However, its core element, ethno-nationalism of Finnishness, connects it to other right wing parties.<sup>10</sup>

The study asks how transforming mediascape has shaped the development and rise of the anti-immigration movement in Finland in the context of nationalist populist party politics. By examining blogs, discussion sites and mainstream media coverage qualitatively, the article demonstrates how the transformations in the mediapolis created opportunities for the emerging anti-immigration movement in Finland in the early 2000s. However, subsequently when the movement integrated into the True Finns party, social networking sites and online discussions proved also problematic for creating coherent programmatic message. The True Finns party and the anti-immigration section within it have balanced racism and 'recalibration' on their journey to more mainstream politics in ways that have required intra-party political sacrifices. The mainstream exposure of online racist speech has brought prejudice among some True Finns party politicians on the public agenda, but it has not countered the anti-immigration movement in ways that many on the anti-racist side hoped for. By sacrificing provincial individuals, the movement has grown more coherent and stronger. However, the role of new media technology in the rise of the anti-immigration movement should not be taken as a sign of technological determinism; rather, the analysis suggests a broader angle to the understanding the complex connections of different social processes, including political participation, everyday racism, structural racism, changing technology, journalistic practice and new forms of spreading and interpreting mediated contents.

## **Racism and New Media**

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<sup>10</sup>David Arter, 'The breakthrough of another West European populist radical right party? The case of the True Finns', *Government and Opposition* vol. 45, no. 4, 2010, 484–504 (485, 501–502).

The circulation of racism in websites and social media brings a darker view to the generally widely acclaimed assumptions that new media technology increases democracy and freedom of speech. However, claiming that some speech is injurious is not a simple matter ethically as Judith Butler insightfully argues in her work on excitable speech<sup>11</sup>. She reminds that the core problem of injurious speech is the thin line between the words and representations that wound and those that do not. Moreover, legal measures against hate speech also provide attention to prejudiced agents spreading their ideology beyond the like-minded social networks. The mainstream public attention they draw can provide credibility to the marginalised phenomena. This paradox of publicity has been relevant even before the new media era. For example, Antonis Ellinas<sup>12</sup> explains how the mainstream coverage of Front National and Le Pen in France in the 1980s pushed the party to the mainstream. Despite media exposure being critical to the party, publicity brought wider awareness and legitimacy to Front National and made immigration a political issue.

Bart Cammaerts provides a different angle to this paradox in his analysis of Belgian racist websites. He argues that in globalised mediascape, the regulation of online content is difficult ethically, legally and technically. For him, an effective way to counter racism online is for mainstream media and civic actors to expose those who make racist comments. By publicly shaming politicians and other public figures, extreme speech might cease to be appealing and it may turn out to be an effective way to counter racist speech. This can be particularly true when exposing words that are intended for a closed network or for ideologies behind ‘cloaked websites’<sup>13</sup> that pretend to be neutral. However, the focus on ‘extremist sites’ and extremist groups can reproduce the idea that racism is located only in these ‘exceptional’ spaces of the society. As Gavan Titley argues, research on these sites must be integrated into a more fluid understanding of mediated communication as the ideas and discourses are circulated and translated across trans-media environment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*. (London: Routledge 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe*, 217 – 218.

<sup>13</sup> Daniels, *Cyber Racism*, 117 – 134.

<sup>14</sup> Gavan Titley, ‘No apologies for cross-posting: European trans-media space and the digital circuitries of racism’, *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, 41 – 55 (51).

Nevertheless, the key issue in the new online cultures of those seeking to disseminate exclusionist ideas is the opportunity to spread content in an economical and fast way and to bring like-minded people together to an online community. Dissemination of different kinds of cultural products, such as music, is important for the mobilisation and construction of emotional connection to the movement<sup>15</sup>. Social media, such as Facebook, blogs, YouTube and Twitter enable these movements to create social networks locally and globally. The changing media environment not only gives new opportunities for racist movements but also shapes the cultures of these movements. Therefore, cyber racism is not about transmitting ‘old’ racism to new platforms; rather, the term refers to the cultural changes that racist ideology takes in the new environment. Such changes include the increased speed and reach of racist communication that have enabled the creation of global racist networks and ‘racist vernacular’<sup>16</sup>.

### **Background 1: Restructuring of the Finnish Media**

This article connects two simultaneous transformations in the Finnish public life since the 1990s: the re-structuring of journalism and platforms of public debate and the rise of anti-immigration movement that is connected to the nationalist populist True Finns party. In the following sections, the backgrounds of both social transformations will be discussed.

Digitalisation and globalisation have significantly transformed the media market, along with its production and consumption. For instance, in Finland in 2009, the readership of the traditionally strong newspaper market dropped 10 per cent compared to the previous year<sup>17</sup>. In their search for audiences, newspapers increased the number of their opinionated materials. The online comments sections of the mainstream media providers were largely anonymous until about 2010 when most media began to regulate commenting through pre-moderation, registration and identification of

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<sup>15</sup> Graham Macklin, ‘“Onward Blackshirts!’ Music and the British Union of Fascists’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 47, no. 4 – 5, 2013, 430 – 457; Ryan Shaffer, ‘The soundtrack of neo-fascism: youth and music in the National Front’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 47, no. 4 – 5, 2013, 458 – 482.

<sup>16</sup> Les Back, ‘Aryans reading Adorno: Cyber-culture and twenty-first-century racism’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2002, 628-651.

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Finland website. <http://www.stat.fi> (viewed November 12, 2013).

commentators.<sup>18</sup> Debates among professional editors and journalists escalated, resulting to the self-governing body Council for Mass Media in Finland creating an annex to the journalists' guidelines for monitoring the content generated by users in 2011. Journalists maintain that, on one hand, opinionated commentary sections provide direct access to audiences, creating a sense of community among readers and providing journalists important information and viewpoints. On the other hand, though, many journalists feel that commentary forums are 'sewage' and 'vomit' and interaction with aggressive speech tires them<sup>19</sup>.

The tightening of anonymity and moderation in the Finnish mainstream media in 2010 and after resulted to the number of comments in the threaded discussion spaces being dropped<sup>20</sup>. Based on my observation of the Finnish mediascape discussions on news stories moved to three directions: towards more intimate and identified spaces, such as Facebook, to more anonymous spaces where comments are moderated after publication (e.g., Suomi24.fi, murha.info) and to anonymous chat spaces provided by technology (e.g., Tor). News stories were copy pasted or linked to these discussion spaces where unregulated debate then flourished. This development characterises the typical trans-platform circulation of content in online spaces. Copy-pasting content, modifying, adding and translating it from one context to another is fundamental to the networked public sphere. Moreover, the architectures of discussion sites and social networking sites invite action and participation. The diffusion of news stories and the discussions connected to them to multiple platforms reflects what Yochai Benkler terms as a folk-cultural production model: a more-reflexive and participatory cultural production compared to that of the mass cultural production. A folk-culture model, rather than professionally polished model is created through active participation of

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<sup>18</sup> Kaarina Nikunen, *Enemmän vähemmällä* (Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto 2011) 71-73, 77.

<sup>19</sup> This appeared in the interviews I did with two Uusi Suomi editors on 14 June 2011. See also, Reeta Pöyhtäri, Paula Haara and Pentti Raittila, *Vihapuhe sananvapautta kaventamassa* (Tampere: TUP 2013), 164 – 167; Risto Uimonen, 'Sananvapauden väärinkäyttöä', 7 September 2011, available on the *YLE Ykkösaamun kolumni* website at [http://yle.fi/radio1/asia/ykkosaamun\\_kolumni/risto\\_uimonen\\_sananvapauden\\_vaarinkayttajat\\_31724.html](http://yle.fi/radio1/asia/ykkosaamun_kolumni/risto_uimonen_sananvapauden_vaarinkayttajat_31724.html) (viewed accessed November 14, 2013); Nikunen, *Enemmän vähemmällä*, 71-73.

<sup>20</sup> Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila, *Vihapuhe sananvapautta kaventamassa*, 176.



people.<sup>21</sup> Benkler stresses that the plasticity of digital objects improves the degree to which individuals can begin to produce a new folk culture. “This plasticity, and the practices of writing your own culture, then feed back into the transparency, both because the practice of making one’s own music, movie, or essay makes one a more self-conscious user of the cultural artefacts of others, and because in retelling anew known stories, we again come to see what the originals were about and how they do, or do not, fit our own sense of how things are and how they ought to be”<sup>22</sup>.

While Benkler and others writing about the transformations of cultural production rarely refer to uncivil or nationalist populist groups in this context, my intention is to do so. Racist and anti-immigration groups communicate and produce their ‘culture’ within this same mediapolis, gaining strength in the opportunity structures it offers.

In general, the mainstream media in Finland has tended to cover immigration and ethnic minorities in problem-oriented frameworks where authority sources dominate<sup>23</sup>, giving little space for immigrants themselves to define their agenda and frames. Media monitoring studies performed between 1999 and 2005 showed that the Finnish media was politically correct and lame in covering the issues of migration. However, more qualitative analysis demonstrated that mainstream publicity was divided between celebratory and accepting discourses in case of some suitable individuals and ethnicities and threatening discourses in the case of others, particularly asylum seekers<sup>24</sup>. The Finnish mainstream media has avoided explicit racism. Extremist groups, as well as individuals, were not presented in mainstream media in 1999 to 2005 although they had an online presence in various websites and blogs<sup>25</sup> during those times.

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<sup>21</sup> Yochai Benkler, *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. (New Haven: Yale University Press 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Benkler, *The wealth of networks* (299).

<sup>23</sup> Camilla Haavisto, *Conditionally one of ‘us’*. (Helsinki: SSKH 2011); Pentti Raittila and Susanna Vehmas, ‘Etnisyys ja rasismi sanomalehdissä 1999-2004 – seurantatutkimusten yhteenvetoa ja arviointia’, in Pentti Raittila (ed.) *Etnisyyttä, rasismia ja dialogia sanomalehdissä ja Internetissä* (Tampere: TUP 2004), 11 – 32.

<sup>24</sup> Karina Horsti, *Vierauden rajat* (Tampere: TUP); Karina Horsti, ‘De-ethnicized victims: Mediatized advocacy for asylum seekers’, *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 1, 78 – 95.

<sup>25</sup> Anne-Maria Pekkinen, *Rasismia Internetissä - vierasvihaisen nettiaineiston kartoitus*, (Tampere: Journalismin tutkimusyksikkö 2002).

## Background 2: Anti-Immigration Movement and the True Finns Party

In the Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, nationalist populist right-wing politics have gained electoral success in recent years. Despite the differences between the parties and their origins, they all oppose immigration and minority rights, particularly those of the Muslims<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, the Nordic right-wing parties articulate these positions in the context of gender, sexuality and welfare state<sup>27</sup> in ways that resonate with the dominating self-understanding of these countries as equal welfare societies. The parties depict the immigrants' cultures and values as 'violent', 'patriarchal,' and 'backward' and claim that they threaten the liberal Nordic values of equality. This culturalisation of immigration debate focuses particularly on Muslims and it connects with the broader discursive shifts in Europe and beyond. Ferruh Yilmaz<sup>28</sup> argues that the right-wing parties' hegemony over immigration debate is not just about discourse, but 'that of the redrawing of the political/social horizon in terms of culturally based political/social identities'. In so doing, the right-wing parties have been able to push the categorisation of the incompatible 'Other' to the more mainstream politics, making certain type of immigration 'a social problem'. There is a danger that this hegemonic horizon, where 'our values' are threatened if 'they' enter and receive cultural rights, corrode the fundamental principles of diversity and democracy. Nevertheless, the discourse of 'protecting women and gay' from Muslims, which appears also among some Finnish anti-immigration discourses, although not among all, does not prevent the overtly misogynist and homophobic positions<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Arter, 'The breakthrough of another West European radical right wing party?',

<sup>27</sup> Hans-Georg Betz and Susi Meret, 'Revisiting Lepanto: the political mobilization against Islam in contemporary Western Europe', *Patterns of Prejudice* vol. 43, nr. 3 – 4, 2009, 313-334; Tjitske Akkerman and Anniken Hagelund, '“Women and children first!” Anti-immigration parties and gender in Norway and the Netherlands', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 41, nr. 2, 2008, 197-217.

<sup>28</sup> Ferruh Yilmaz, 'Right-wing hegemony and immigration: How the populist far-right achieved hegemony through the immigration debate in Europe', *Current Sociology*, vol. 60, nr. 3, 2012, 368 – 381 (369).

<sup>29</sup> Tuija Saresma, 'Miesten tasa-arvo ja kaunapuhe blogikeskustelussa.' In Hannele Harjunen and Tuija Saresma (eds.) *Sukupuoli nyt! Purkamisia ja neuvotteluja*, (Jyväskylä: Kampus Kustannus 2012), 13 – 34.

The True Finns party is not on the traditional neo-liberal right as its core message is welfare chauvinism. However, the party combines this with nationalism, anti-immigration and Eurosceptic agendas, all of which are important for European right-wing parties. Through its ethno-nationalist position that understands 'Finnishness' as a racial-cultural container, the True Finns connect with the broader Nordic and European right-wing nationalist politics. In 2011, the party won 39 seats in Finland's 200-seat Parliamentary and became the third-largest party in the country after the Conservatives and Social Democrats. It remained in the opposition after the general elections. The party has a wide electoral support in municipalities across the country, although a lot of its popularity rests on the verbally talented chairman Timo Soini. Based on the analysis of party institutionalisation David Arter and Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen evaluate that while the True Finns is a typical entrepreneurial party tied around a long-time charismatic leader, it rests on a firm foundation. It has a core constituency in male voters (70 per cent of supporters are male) and is significantly cohesive in the legislative arena.<sup>30</sup>

Nine elected True Finns party members in the Parliament are explicitly against immigration. Six of them signed the anti-immigration election programme before the 2011 elections<sup>31</sup>. The key figure of this anti-immigration group is Jussi Halla-aho, a PhD in linguistics and a Helsinki City Council member who gained unprecedented electoral success in the municipal elections in 2008 and 2012, in the Parliamentary elections in 2011 and in the European elections in 2014. In the first elections in 2008 he ran as an independent candidate on the True Finns list, but he signed as a full member of the party in 2010. Halla-aho is the second most well-known member of the True Finns party after Timo Soini, being the most Googled Finnish politician in 2009. Halla-aho emerged to politics through the unconventional paths of blogging, being a prime example of the new politics in the transforming mediascape. His blog created a

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<sup>30</sup> David Arter & Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen, 'Measuring the extent of party institutionalisation: The case of a populist entrepreneur party, *West European Politics*, vol. 37, no. 5, 932-956.

<sup>31</sup> 'Nuiva vaalimanivesti', no date, available at [www.vaalimanifesti.fi](http://www.vaalimanifesti.fi) (viewed 7 November 2013). In addition, three members of the parliament campaigned using anti-immigration views (Tom Packalén, Reijo Tossavainen and Teuvo Hakkarainen).

wide online following that culminated in the anti-immigration discussion space *Hommaforum*.

Halla-aho and all the other signers of the Nuiva vaalimanifesti were fresh members in politics advocating ‘a new’ or ‘silenced’ social issue, immigration. In this recursive circle the anti-immigration movement and the True Finns have been successful in framing immigration in cultural terms and in taking ownership of the topic. This has made these political agents more central and relevant in the Finnish politics. In so doing, this group was able to present itself as ‘independent’ from traditional politics in ways that resonate with the mobilisation of right-wing populism elsewhere in Europe in times when people have de-aligned with parties and prefer new political movements instead of party politics<sup>32</sup>. The True Finns were able to create a sense of ‘offering an alternative’ to the Finnish political landscape also since the larger parties have reached a general audience and become more alike in a culture of ‘Finnish-style consensus politics’<sup>33</sup>. The three largest parties have taken turns in the government without politics changing that much.

### **Research Questions, Materials and Method**

The aim of this article is to examine how transforming mediascape has shaped the development and rise of the anti-immigration movement in Finland in the context of nationalist populist party politics. In so doing, the study adds methodological, empirical and theoretical depth to the research on the interplay between media and nationalist populism in general. The analysis is divided into two inter-connected sections. First, I analyse the connections between mainstream media, online anti-immigration communities and the True Finns party more generally. I ask how the transformations in media created technological and structural opportunities for the anti-immigration movement to organize itself and later to integrate into the national populist politics in Finland. While the networked public sphere clearly turned out to be an asset for the movement, it also proved to create problems for internal cohesion and programmatic coherence. Second, in this context, I examine in more detail the

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<sup>32</sup> Yilmaz, ‘Right-wing hegemony and immigration’, 371. Carlo Ruzza, ‘Populism and Euroscepticism: Towards Uncivil Society?’ *Policy and Society*, vol. 28, nr. 1, 87 – 98.

<sup>33</sup> Arter, The breakthrough of another West European populist radical right party?, 487.

specific problems that the new media environment created for the recently developed political movement. A series of mediatized debates around True Finns racism online emerged right after the 2009 electoral victory of Jussi Halla-aho. I take Bart Cammaert's argument that public exposure to this kind of racist speech in online 'echo chambers' would shame the True Finns party members and harm the aspirations of respectability. I examine three cases of mediatized debate around racist speech online wherein mainstream attention pushed the True Finns' party leadership to respond to the accusations of intra-party racism.

I have observed the Finnish media landscape and collected different types of media materials during years 2003 to 2013. The research materials used in this article include the anti-immigration discussion site *Hommaforum*, mainstream media news from *Helsingin Sanomat* and the public service broadcaster YLE, blogs of True Finns politicians involved in the racist speech scandals and the blog of the chairman Timo Soini, True Finns political newspaper *Perussuomalainen* and interviews of the True Finns politicians that were published in mainstream media and the *Perussuomalainen*. From these sources I collected articles and blog entries that connected with the racist speech scandals. I explain the context of the materials used, method of collection and analysis as the argumentation and analysis proceeds. Each mediated text has its own specific context and genre, which are closely considered in the analysis.

Methodologically, this study falls into the cultural studies tradition and aims to explain and interpret a cultural phenomenon, which is the rising anti-immigration sentiment in Finland. Subsequently, the texts are analysed in their cultural, social and political context. Methods are founded on virtual ethnography<sup>34</sup> and close reading of texts. I analyse architecture of the blogs and *Hommaforum*, paying attention to the structure, organization, connections and opportunities for participation. Virtual observation is focused on the analysis of both inter- and intra-communication within the platform and between platforms. In this observation the construction of identities is of particular interest. In order to analyse the development of anti-immigration movement in the new mediascape, I pay attention to the positioning of actors and the construction of identities. How do the architecture of platform and the language used

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<sup>34</sup> Christine Hine, 'Virtual ethnography: Modes, varieties, affordances' in Nigel Fielding, Raymond M. Lee & Grant Blank, *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (London: Sage 2008), 257-271.

in the communication create certain identities and online communities? I follow the research ethics developed for online research among the Association of Internet Researchers<sup>35</sup>.

### **Transformations in the Media Environment and Anti-Immigration Sentiment**

Without a specific political aim, Jussi Halla-aho began writing his blog *Scripta – Kirjoituksia uppoavasta lännestä/ Writings from the drowning West*<sup>36</sup> in 2003. The blog, which (17 December 2014) has 382 entries, attracted a wide following and an active community of commentators who, later in 2008, created a separate anti-immigration discussion forum named *Hommaforum*. Some 8700 registered members have written about 1.5 million entries on the forum<sup>37</sup>. In the early phase Jussi Halla-aho's blog invited discussions and comments, and thus, it functioned according to the culture of the blogosphere where the liveliness of debate and participation equals success. Halla-aho participated in these discussions with his readers. However, as the number of participants grew and the followers began to develop their own discussions, they all decided to open a separate discussion platform, *Hommaforum*. This technology offered more opportunities for structured discussion among a growing number of participants. Halla-aho's interaction with the community became less regular. He participates in the discussions of *Hommaforum* only occasionally. Discussions around his blogs continued in the *Hommaforum* where his blog texts were copy-pasted. Thus, after 2008, Halla-aho's role in the anti-immigration community shifted towards a more traditional undisputed authority.

Due to the great number of entries in the *Hommaforum*, it is impossible to read all comments. For this study, where I am interested in the development of the movement, I have closely read the sections that discussed the role and meaning of the forum:

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<sup>35</sup> Association of Internet Researchers. Annette Markham and Elizabeth Buchanan, *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research*, (AoIR 2012), available at <http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Jussi Halla-aho, 'Scripta', <http://www.halla-aho.com/scripta/> (viewed 6 March 2014).

<sup>37</sup> 'Hommaforum', <http://cms.Hommaforum.org/> (viewed 6 March 2014).

*Homman nimi, Hommary* and *HommaWiki*. I focused only on the material available for public viewing and excluded the members-only section of *Hommaforum*<sup>38</sup>.

The materials in *Hommaforum* are produced more or less spontaneously under discussion threads on different topics. The mode of discussion falls between public and private communication. Some address a broader public audience but others engage in more private discussions, which are nevertheless visible to anyone. Most *Hommaforum* commentators use pseudonyms. Many argue that they would get negative stigma in their working life if they revealed their participation in the *Hommaforum*<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, they are registered users and moderators can censor and ban unwanted content.

*Hommaforum* has constructed a networked public among like-minded individuals, an imagined collective that emerged in the intersection of shared interests, technology and practices of sharing and discussing blogs and news<sup>40</sup>. The discussion forum and the anti-immigration movement, broadly speaking, are examples of movements that have adopted strategies from new social movements, such as human rights and environmental activists. *Hommaforum* has the characteristics of a social movement<sup>41</sup>. Its discussants are connected through this online network and, through their communications, the members draw boundaries that identify them from other social agents. Subsequently, they construct a collective identity. This online community shares the assumption that immigration is a crucial issue in the society and a unified perspective to this issue. The anti-immigration movement is male-dominated just like the True Finns party. However, where as the True Finns party is particularly popular among blue-collar working-class<sup>42</sup>, the anti-immigration debaters in *Hommaforum* tend to be more middle-class. According to a linguistic study on *Hommaforum*, the

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<sup>38</sup> These methodological decisions rest on ethical recommendations of the Association of Internet Researchers. Markham & Buchanan, *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research*.

<sup>39</sup> 'Yleinen esittäytymisketju', <http://Hommaforum.org/index.php/topic,903.0.html>, (viewed 6 March 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Danah Boyd, 'Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics and implications.' In Zizi Papacharissi (ed.), *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, (London: Routledge 2011), 39 – 58.

<sup>41</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006), 20 – 21.

<sup>42</sup> Arter & Kestilä-Kekkonen, 'Measuring the extent of party institutionalisation'.

participants are able to write Finnish quite correctly, which means that they are rather well educated<sup>43</sup>. While the members collaborate mostly anonymously and online, they have created a sense of belonging and identity that some members, such as Jussi Halla-aho, have transformed into a more traditional political capital.

Language and language use are important in the construction of collective identities<sup>44</sup> and the formation of a distinct discourse has played a crucial role in the anti-immigration movement. Language is particularly interesting in this case since the network originally grew from written online communication. The peculiar language and the invented naming for ‘us’ and ‘them’ highlight a sense of community and indicate group boundaries. The forum participants have developed a distinct humour and manner of writing. They made up words to describe themselves (*netsit, nuivat*) and those they oppose. In the linguistic game, the nationwide newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* is called *Pravda*, referring to a belief that the paper will be dominated by ‘elitist’ multicultural ideology. Similarly, other mainstream media is considered to be against the *nuivat*. Immigrants are called *rikastuttajat/enrichers*, ridiculing the kind of discourse that argues for migration as ‘enriching’ Finnish society. Moreover, *Hommaforum* participants use the term ‘enrichment’ as a coded language (meaning rape) connected to a recurring trope of ‘Muslim rape’ that circulates in global counter-Jihadist and Islamophobic networks<sup>45</sup>. Authorities who are involved in immigration issues and those labelled ‘multiculturalists’ are the main targets of *Hommaforum*’s ridiculing speech. The words *kukkahattutäti/flowerhat women*, *mokuttajat/multicults* are examples of new words that the members use to describe those in favour of multiculturalism. Like the word ‘flowerhat women’ indicates, much of the anti-immigration discourse in this male dominated networked public sphere also intertwines with anti-female and anti-feminist discourse.

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<sup>43</sup> Leena Vänni, ‘Yhteisöllisyyden ilmeneminen verkkokeskustelussa: Tarkastelussa yhteiskuntakriittisen keskustelufoorumien sanasto’, Master’s thesis, University of Vaasa, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 106, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Liz Fekete, ‘The Muslim conspiracy theory and the Oslo massacre’, *Race & Class* vol. 53, nr. 3, 2012, 30 – 47.



However, the most successful discursive manoeuvre has been the launch of the term *maahanmuuttokriittisyys*/immigration criticism. Jussi Halla-aho and *Hommaforum* commentators define themselves as ‘immigration critics’, claiming that their position is not racist but ‘critical’. This has opened up space for people who do not feel comfortable in identifying with extreme groups of white supremacists or neo-Nazis. The adjective *maahanmuuttokriittinen*/critical towards immigration and the noun *maahanmuuttokriitikko*/immigration critic entered the public vocabulary in the nationwide newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in 2008 at first through opinionated journalistic genres of editorials, letters to the editor and columns<sup>46</sup>. However, the term soon emerged in regular journalistic language and began to appear in other genres, such as news and current affairs sections without quotation marks.

The successful discursive manoeuvre and invention of peculiar terms effectively illustrate how the online community began forming itself in the commentary sections of Halla-aho’s blog and later in the *Hommaforum* discussion site. Eventually, active participants in *Hommaforum* spread the awareness of this new discussion space to other discussion sites, including those maintained by the mainstream media. By increasing inbound hyperlinks, the members created important website visibility for *Hommaforum* and in so doing they circumvented mainstream media ignorance for this new movement.

*Hommaforum* is designed to serve multiple functions. The publicly visible debates are divided into sections, such as news, current affairs, party politics and more conceptual and intellectual discussions to guide members to sections they are interested in. The site has spaces for general public discussions and for discussions among registered members only. This structure invites lurkers, general publics and journalists to peek in without further commitment or identification of being ‘a member’. Registering, on the contrary, makes one feel like a member of a community, albeit it is a rather ‘light’ attachment. One can collaborate without being identified or being committed as opposed to more traditional movement memberships. Nevertheless, the architecture and the functions in *Hommaforum* commit and reward participants. The most active

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<sup>46</sup> Since 1990, ‘immigration critical’ appears 55 times in different forms in the main nationwide daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. The first appearance is in 2005 in a letter to the editor. In 2008 the term appears in domestic section of the newspaper, 6 times; in 2009, 20 times; in 2010, 78 times; in 2011, 77 times; in 2012, 20 times.

and core members are marked visually, offering them prestige and a label of expertise.

The sense of community that emerged in synergy between online technology, architectures of the online spaces, language use, commitment of certain key people and the practices of moderating participation was crucial for the political success and the agenda-setting power that followed the anti-immigration movement's initial vernacular phase in 2003 to 2008. Halla-aho's *Scripta* blog formed the architecture of communication that invited and encouraged others to share their views. Jussi Halla-aho, who is also ironically called as 'the Master' among the *Hommaforum* members, provided an example, and his writings generated a direction for the discussion. He was also seen as a brave individual who dared to speak about immigration in ways that was generally considered politically incorrect.

Jussi Halla-aho recognised the sense of belonging and the energy that his blog following created. In an interview with the *Perussuomalainen*-magazine he explains how the sense of community served as the main force that pushed him into a political career: 'I happened to be in the right—or wrong—place at the right time. I ran for (the seat) in the 2007 Parliamentary elections because my blog readers encouraged me, and that's where I am (now)',<sup>47</sup>.

Mainstream media attention, although critical and negative, often facilitates the success of new political populists<sup>48</sup>. In the case of Jussi Halla-aho, mainstream journalism did not recognise the movement around him before 2008, which however did not prevent him from reaching a constituency. After the electoral success in 2008, traditional news values required the mainstream media to cover the political newcomer, which was typical for other similar cases of populist politics elsewhere<sup>49</sup>.

The landslide victory in the municipal elections of 2008 raised the anti-immigration movement into the mainstream news agenda and key figures of the *Hommaforum* were invited into talk shows and other mainstream media spaces as representatives of this new movement. Both the *Hommaforum* members and the mainstream media

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<sup>47</sup> Jussi Halla-aho in Heli-Maria Wiik, 'Kritiikki ei keikuta Halla-ahon laivaa,' *Perussuomalainen*, 14 April 2013. <http://uutiset.perussuomalaiset.fi/kritiikki-ei-keikuta-halla-ahon-laivaa/> (viewed 14 November 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Ellinas, *The media and the Far Right in Western Europe*.

<sup>49</sup> Pippa Norris, *Radical Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), 9.

framed the movement as a ‘citizen movement’, believed to be the voices of the silenced common man. The first appearance of *Hommaforum* in the public service television talk show raised the number of visitors to the forum into a peak that temporarily crashed the site. This was highlighted as a key event in *Hommaforum*’s own timeline. Halla-aho himself became the most Googled politician in Finland in 2009 and, although the publicity was often negative or critical towards his ideas, his electoral success continued in the national elections of 2011 when he ran as a full True Finns Party candidate and received the second highest number of votes in his constituency in Helsinki. His visibility in the media was largely based on his provocative blog writings from 2006 to 2008. His political opponent, the Green Women’s Association, was the first to file a report for an offence against Jussi Halla-aho over his blog entry, wherein he sarcastically hoped that ‘the right kinds of women will be trapped in the claws of the predators who randomly hunt their victims’. The ‘right kinds of women’, he explained, were ‘Green-Leftist world reformers and their voters’<sup>50</sup>. While investigating the report, the police decided to press charges because of evidence found in another blog. This resulted to mediatised court proceedings in 2009 and to a legal process that ended in 2012 when the Finnish Supreme Court sentenced Jussi Halla-aho to a fine for violating the free exercise of worship and for inciting racism against an ethnic group. At that time he was a True Finns Party MP and the chairman of the Parliament’s Administrative Committee. Eventually, he had to resign from the position of chairman.

In our analysis of the interplay between social media and mainstream media in the case of immigration debate in Finland, we concluded that the mainstream media accepted the polarised agenda that the anti-immigration movement offered, the one that constructed a division between the believed ‘multiculturalist’ authorities and the ‘immigration critics’<sup>51</sup>. Consequently, while the mainstream media coverage was technically balanced, it failed to cover the debate in ways that would reflect cosmopolitan sensibility. Juxtaposing the official authorities with anti-immigration movement, the media ignored minority actors and multiculturalist advocates.

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, ‘Jussi Halla-ahon raiskauskirjoituksesta tutkintapyyntö’, *Vihreä Lanka*, 19 November 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Karina Horsti & Kaarina Nikunen, ‘The ethics of hospitality in changing journalism: A response to the rise of the anti-immigrant movement in Finnish media publicity’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2013, vol. 16 no. 4, 489–504.

## **Public Debate on Racist Speech Acts**

The first part of the analysis has demonstrated how the transforming mediascape and new media technology created opportunities that facilitated the development of the anti-immigration movement and its integration into representative politics. However, the networked public sphere and the decentralized discussions circulating online have not been unproblematic for the consolidation of the movement and for its programmatic coherence. The True Finns politicians who hold views against immigration have regularly been ‘caught’ by the mainstream media and political rivalries of racist speech circulated in online spaces. While these spaces can be characterized as ‘echo chambers’ of like-minded individuals, they are not concealed spaces but porous and vulnerable.

The second part of the analysis focuses on three cases of public controversy concerning racist speech and analyses how the public exposure of the True Finns politicians’ racism influences the internal dynamics within the party and the anti-immigration movement. Social media played a crucial role as racist gestures and utterances were originally shared and intended for members of these networked communities. However, political rivals and the mainstream media picked up on racist utterances or gestures and pressured the party leadership for response. I identified the cases by searching the nationwide newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*’s archive with the keywords *perussuomalai\** (True Finns party) and *raisi\** (racism). After identifying the three cases, I additionally searched for news stories connected to the cases in the website of the national public service broadcasting news website *yle.fi*. In addition to these mainstream media sources, I collected related entries from the party leader Timo Soini’s blog and the blogs of the three individual True Finns politicians that were involved in these scandals.

**Table 1. Three Cases of Racist Speech Acts**

Politician	Online Presence	Background	Racism Controversy	Political outcome of Controversy
Jussi Halla-aho (PS): City council, 2009; True Finns (PS) member since 2010; MP 2011; MEP 2014.	Blog 'Scripta' since 2003; <i>Hommaforum</i> member; Active in open Facebook profile in 2011.	PhD in linguistics, teaching and research but no permanent position at the University of Helsinki.	2006 and 2008 blog posts resulted in legal proceeding in 2009–2012. 2012, Supreme Court conviction: breach of religious sanctity and incitement to ethnic or racial hatred.	2012, forced to resign as chairman of the Administration Committee in the Parliament.
Teuvo Hakkarainen (PS): MP, 2011.	Blog 'Teuvo Hakkarainen' in <i>Uusi Suomi</i> news site since 2012; Open Facebook profile.	Basic education, saw mill entrepreneur.	2011, racist remarks of Muslims and black-Finns quoted by the mainstream press and in his blog 2013.	No legal cases, but reproached by PS chairman Timo Soini.
James Hirvisaari (Muutos 2011): Municipal council, 2009; PS MP, 2011 – 2013; Muutos 2011 MP, 2013.	Blog 'Finland is the country of Finns' in <i>Uusi Suomi</i> news site since 2008; Twitter and open Facebook profiles.	Train engine driver, gospel musician.	2010 blog text resulted conviction of incitement to ethnic or racial hatred in 2011; 2012, supported his assistant who made fascist comments in her blog; 2013, rebuked by the Speaker of the Parliament for inappropriate	2012, reproached by the Chairwoman of the PS Parliamentary group; 2013, True Finns party expelled Hirvisaari.

			behaviour in the parliament.	
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The True Finns leader Timo Soini has kept a public distance to the anti-immigration section of the party and has not participated in the *Hommaforum* discussions. In his own blog, that is in the discursive space he controls himself, Soini writes very little about immigration and avoids making any arguments about it. His blog does not invite or allow comments or discussion from the readers – a decision that distances him from the realm of the blogosphere as such. Thus, instead of being a real blog, Timo Soini’s ‘Ploki’ (Blog in Finnish) is actually a website with an architecture that confirms his position as an unquestionable leader, a celebrity. Therefore, Soini’s online presence is based on a tradition authority and has little to do with participation or decentralisation of authority.

However, Soini’s attitudes towards immigration appears indirectly, in the ways in which he manages racist comments made by others in the party and in the ways in which he accepts and tolerates members who are explicitly anti-immigration as the analysis of the three cases of racism scandals will demonstrate. Thus, Soini has outsourced the public debate on immigration and the political program on this issue to the anti-immigration section led by Jussi Halla-aho.

In 2009, in connection to the mainstream attention to Halla-aho’s blog, Timo Soini said in a mediated interview that if a party member was convicted of racist speech in court (practically convicted for inciting ethnic or racial hatred) the person would be expelled from the party. This, however, did not happen although two members of the Parliament—Jussi Halla-aho and James Hirvisaari—were later sentenced to fines because of racist speech. While Timo Soini is a charismatic and undisputed leader of the True Finns, in these scandals on racist speech, he avoided public leadership. Instead, he downplayed the crisis and made the decisions on punishment or non-punishment look like the party’s collective decision. Instead of Timo Soini, the Parliamentary chairs of the True Finns delegation responded to the media pressure in public when controversies around the MPs’ actions and speech surfaced.

Racism controversies coincided with the growing electoral success of Jussi Halla-aho in 2009 - 2012, and instead of distancing himself from Halla-aho, Soini allowed Halla-

aho to gain politically important positions such as the Chairman position in Administrative Committee in Parliament. After Halla-aho's resignation from the Committee in 2012, he became more careful in his public appearance and had not been a source of public controversy since that incident.

The public controversy surrounding Halla-aho's blog kept him in the public eye in the years 2009 through 2012. His conviction in 2012 and, more importantly, his dismissive words about the Supreme Court that had decided to convict his writings, led to political pressures targeted towards the True Finns party, prompting Halla-aho to resign from the chair position in the Administrative Committee. Previously in 2011, Halla-aho was temporarily suspended from the Parliamentary group because he had written on his open Facebook wall that 'right now Greece would need a junta that would not have to mind about its own success and that could control the strikers and the rioters with tanks'. Party leader Timo Soini did not explicitly criticise or support Halla-aho in his blog or in the interviews or in his blog during the scandal. He stepped aside and acted as if he or his party were not directly involved in the controversy. In a similar way, Soini distanced himself and his position as the leader in 2008 when he wrote in his blog: 'They (the Green Women) challenged Halla-aho. Now, the challengers and the challenged one deal with the matter among themselves. I am not interfering more than I have already said.'<sup>52</sup> However, he actually did criticise the Green Women for 'taking politics to court' and for going after writings that were published 'years ago', in 2006. In a very similar circumstance, Soini avoided saying anything particular about Halla-aho's sentence in 2012: 'There is no reason for explanations in politics—your opponents will not believe you, your supporters will not need your explanations. I have said everything I have to say about Halla-aho's fine conviction. ... Today, I am going to focus on soccer both live and in visuals.'<sup>53</sup> In this quote he downplays Halla-aho's conviction by reminding that the punishment was only a 'fine' and by quickly moving to his favourite leisure activity, soccer. Although Soini claimed in this quote, that 'he had said everything', he had said nothing about the conviction for the main news providers in Finland. In the news materials (26 news items of 2012), Soini was only quoted as responding to journalists

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<sup>52</sup> Timo Soini, 'Ajatuksia adventtina', 30 November 2008, blog on Timo Soini Ploki, <http://timosoini.fi/2008/11/ajatuksia-adventtina/> (viewed 8 April 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Timo Soini, 'Kuningas jalkapallo', 9 June 2012, blog on Timo Soini Ploki, <http://timosoini.fi/2012/06/kuningas-jalkapallo-2/> (viewed 8 April 2014).

that: ‘This punishment is enough. Publicity is tough, ruthless, sometimes justified. I am not going to take this further.’<sup>54</sup> In this quote, he again used the strategy of down playing the conviction and stepping aside of the case by presenting the dispute as between the media and Halla-aho. While Soini did not explicitly argue for or against Halla-aho’s conviction, he dismissed it in his blog by hiding the comment on the matter under a longer piece about soccer (titled King Soccer) and calling the court order a ‘fine’ conviction.

Jussi Halla-aho has balanced his public appearance between a provocative figure and a respectable top True Finns politician. As the key person of the anti-immigration movement, he also balanced himself between the movement and the True Finns party politics. In a discussion thread in *Hommaforum*, he commented on the expulsion of MP James Hirvisaari from the party after the racism scandal: ‘We should remember the political realities and priorities. If we (anti-immigration True Finns party members) had slammed the door and left every time the leadership (of the party) does not please us, we would not be where we are now. And we are much further compared to where we were some years ago’<sup>55</sup>. The balancing between these two groups has been tough for Halla-aho, but his extremely wide electoral support and high educational knowledge, as well as his ability to communicate his own views have been an exceptional political capital that had protected him throughout the scandals.

As Halla-aho became more careful in his writing in different online platforms and as his public identity transformed from a provocateur to a more respectable party member and politician, the mainstream search for blunt racist remarks shifted from Halla-aho to other targets after 2011. In particular, two Parliamentarians, James Hirvisaari and Teuvo Hakkarainen, became the centre of recurring scandals. Hirvisaari was originally one of Halla-aho’s protégé who ended up misbehaving in the Parliament and publishing racist ideas in his blog. Halla-aho paid part of Hirvisaari’s penalty after he was convicted of incitement against an ethnic group in 2011, although the Parliamentary group temporarily suspended Hirvisaari at that time.

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<sup>54</sup> Teija Sutinen, ‘Soini veti sanansa takaisin’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 8 June 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Jussi Halla-aho comments in *Hommaforum* Kotimaa/ V: 2012-04-17 Yle: Hirvisaari erotettiin eduskuntaryhmästä, 20 April 2012, <http://hommaforum.org/index.php/topic,69785.750.html> (viewed 4 April 2014).



Thus, the party demonstrated to other parties and the public that they do not approve such racist speech. Simultaneously however, the anti-immigration section also showed solidarity towards Hirvisaari by paying his fine. Nonetheless, Hirvisaari continued on the provocative road unlike Halla-aho. Finally in 2013, Hirvisaari was expelled from the True Finns party because he had invited a well-known Finnish neo-Nazi to the Parliament and allowed him to make the 'Hail Hitler' hand movement and photographed the act inside the Parliament. Subsequently, the neo-Nazi circulated the image in his social media networks and it finally leaked to wider media publicity.

Similarly, another MP Teuvo Hakkarainen was placed at the centre of continuous scandals because of his racist remarks both in social media and in his interviews with mainstream journalists. However, Hakkarainen's speech has not reached the court, nor has he been temporarily suspended from the Parliamentary group like Halla-aho and Hirvisaari. Both candidates, Hirvisaari and Hakkarainen, were new and inexperienced in politics. They did not have much political experience from the local level before entering the Parliament and they were not nationally known figures before their scandals. Moreover, they have not held important positions within the True Finns party or in the Parliament.

Following his strategy with Halla-aho's scandals Soini has not touched on the controversies concerning Teuvo Hakkarainen's and James Hirvisaari's anti-Muslim and racist comments in his blog. Soini mentioned Hirvisaari only after the party had decided to expel him: 'The Hirvisaari case was solved fast and in a right way. ... We lost a few members but got thousands of voters more'.<sup>56</sup> In this political calculation, Soini presented the expulsion as a political gain for the party. The case of Teuvo Hakkarainen appears in Soini's blog only as a symbol of the media's simplicity and the people's ill-mindedness. The media had already treated Hakkarainen as an inexperienced rural character who does not have good manners in the city. Soini continued to rely on this construction of a simple and rural figure whose words cannot be taken literally. Thus, for Soini, Hakkarainen's speech did not qualify as racism. One repeated strategy of dismissing racist speech in Soini's blog was to claim that the focus on Hakkarainen took public attention from 'more important things'. 'Mr

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<sup>56</sup> Timo Soini, 'Galluppi sojottaa ylöspäin', 23 October 2013, blog on Timo Soini Ploki, <http://timosoini.fi/2013/10/galluppi-sojottaa-ylospain/> (viewed 4 April 2014).

Hakkarainen is more important (for the media) than the secretly lost billions (of euros)<sup>57</sup>.

Thus, the repeated storylines in these public scandals were the following: first, racist, uncivil and provocative comments of these rather marginal figures circulated in social networking sites. Second, the mainstream media tapped on these debates and began to pressure the True Finns party for responsibility. Third, the party leadership dismissed the seriousness of the speech act and/or symbolically punished the 'black sheep'. Thus, at this stage, when the anti-immigration movement had entered the national Parliamentary politics and integrated with the True Finns party, social media and the blogosphere proved to be problematic as not all members of the party follow the rules of the leadership.

Particularly, the expulsion of James Hirvisaari from the True Finns party followed the logic of René Girard's scapegoat mechanism, which provided a psychological relief for a community in crisis<sup>58</sup>. The presentation of one individual as the cause for the crisis, as the one who transgressed prohibition, brought the rest of the community together. Even former enemies and rivalries converged. René Girard argues that this process of scapegoating a single victim is foundational in cultural life. It opens a civilised way out of violence and conflicts for communities to restore peace by expelling one individual or a group. In this case, the scapegoat mechanism offered a strategy for coherence and further integration between the anti-immigration section and the rest of the True Finns party.

Although the True Finns leadership is often besieged with racism scandals, their party essentially has gained advantages through the anti-immigration movement. Timo Soini and Jussi Halla-aho have complained that the mediated attention to racist speech is a 'political hunt' aimed at harming the party. Such imagined 'hunt' fits with the general aim of the party and the movement to represent themselves 'citizens' movements' and 'citizens' voices' as opposed to 'elitists'. Position as an underdog creates sympathy for the party and the anti-immigration movement. Moreover, in the

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<sup>57</sup> Timo Soini, 'Politiikan ja talouden pullasorsamedia', 2 March 2012, blog on Timo Soini Ploki, <http://timosoini.fi/2012/03/politiikan-ja-talouden-pullasorsamedia/> (viewed 4 April 2014).

<sup>58</sup> René Girard, *The Girard Reader* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company 2000), 69 – 93.

case of Hirvisaari scandal, the more elite politicians within the anti-immigration movement, such as Juho Eerola and Jussi Halla-aho, emerged in this crisis as rational and responsible politicians. In an interview, Juho Eerola, who was a member of the board of the True Finns party that expelled Hirvisaari, said that the decision was a warning signal to the ‘provincial arm wavers’<sup>59</sup> that the party would not digest such behaviour and neo-Nazism<sup>60</sup>. In his statement, Eerola made a distinction between the ‘provincial arm wavers’ and the respectable party members, positioning himself with the latter group. Similarly, Jussi Halla-aho positioned himself against the more radical individuals by saying that ‘I believe I have had a pretty significant role in bringing the immigration criticism into a serious political movement, and neo-Nazis and village idiots are no longer representing it (immigration criticism) in publicity’<sup>61</sup>. In this quote Halla-aho takes credit for making ‘immigration criticism’ politically relevant and respectable by contrasting his activities to neo-Nazis and by claiming to be a moderating force in the debate on immigration. Moreover, Halla-aho is a supporter of Israeli politics along with other Islamophobic bloggers and groups that he provides links to in his blog, such as the Gates of Vienna. Therefore, he often makes a clear distinction with neo-Nazis. This discursive strategy of supporting Israel and Jews has worked powerfully as a counter-argument against accusations of racism and prejudice among European right wing parties.<sup>62</sup>

This scapegoating of ‘provincial arm wavers’ and marginal politicians who lack cultural and political capital, made other politicians in the same movement seem less racist. This was part of the broader strategy for both the anti-immigration movement and the True Finns Party in their attempt to increase legitimacy and respectability in national political arena. They were able to present themselves as moderating forces,

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<sup>59</sup> He refers to Heil Hitler salute that a well known neo-nazi made in the parliament while visiting Hirvisaari.

<sup>60</sup> Mika Moksus, ‘Eerola: Hirvisaaren erottaminen on viesti maakuntien kädenheiluttelijoille,’ *YLE News*, 3 October 2013. [http://yle.fi/uutiset/erola\\_hirvisaaren\\_erottaminen\\_on\\_viesti\\_maakuntien\\_kadenheiluttelijoille/6862792](http://yle.fi/uutiset/erola_hirvisaaren_erottaminen_on_viesti_maakuntien_kadenheiluttelijoille/6862792) (viewed 14 November 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Wiik, ‘Kritiikki ei keikuta Halla-ahon laivaa’.

<sup>62</sup> On BNP, see also Simon Goodman and Andrew J. Johnson, ‘Strategies Used by the Far Right to Counter Accusations of Racism’, *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines* vol.6, no. 2, 2013, 97 – 113 (101).

as agents that actually reduce racism in the society. This discursive strategy, which is also typical among other European right-wing populists, like the British National Party (BNP)<sup>63</sup>, was used to contrast one's own group from more extreme groups and individuals.

However, the implications of the scapegoat mechanism reached further than the True Finns party. In this discursive game against the extreme racists, the Finnish media and the society at large were also positioned as non-racist, civil, and responsible. Thus, the mainstream media could also be considered as actors in the scapegoating activity, wherein they seemed to have taken an anti-racist role, while the more structural issues of inequality and the more powerful forces of the anti-immigration movement remained untouched. In such mediatised public scandals, the mainstream media and the Finnish society at large purified themselves from the disturbing complexity of structural racism, in ways that provided a tolerant self-identity for all. Consequently, the mainstream media opened up a discursive space for the more serious anti-immigrant politicians, allowing them to represent themselves in respectable terms. The anti-immigration movement and the True Finns party played the game at the border of civility and uncivility. Some members of these groups voiced uncivil racist opinions, but this offered a way for others to perform their 'civility'. The expulsions of some members, Hirvisaari in particular, pacified the groups and generated a sense of programmatic coherence, togetherness and unity.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper, I analysed how the anti-immigration movement's political success and mainstreaming of prejudice against immigrants unfolded in Finland in 2003 through 2013. My main intention was to demonstrate how the changes in the mediascape in general and in the new media technology in particular afforded the emergence of the movement and its transformation into a political force. In the earlier phase, the decentralized anonymous online spaces facilitated the development of the anti-immigration movement. The movement was able to circumvent the initial ignorance of the mainstream media and later counter the negative representations by

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<sup>63</sup> Goodman and Johnson, 'Strategies Used by the Far Right to Counter Accusations of Racism', 101 – 102.

communicating directly among the movement 'believers'.<sup>64</sup> However later, in the phase when the movement integrated with the True Finns party, the online spaces and social media created problems for coherence. Undisciplined members circulated racist comments which offered fuel for political rivalries and mainstream media attention. However, the movement and the party have survived by strategically playing the role of the underdog or by sacrificing marginal figures.

The first transformation that was considered was the restructuring of Finnish journalism and the media environment. Economic crisis and uncertainties in competition resulted deregulation of opinions around journalism and blurring of the boundary between journalistic content of edited opinions and non-edited contents. As immigration was among the topics that generated most debate in these opinionated online spaces, its salience in the mainstream public sphere increased. The heated discussions raised the topic to mainstream agenda and the anti-immigration movement began to set the agenda for issues and terms of immigration.

However, this was only part of the story. Instead of dividing immigration debate spaces to civil mainstream media and aggressive online echo chambers, this paper suggests examining the media environment as a system of connectivities, or as mediapolis in Roger Silverstone's terms. This environment is a techno-cultural construct<sup>65</sup>, meaning that the connectivities and affordances emerge in the intersections of technology and human activity. The *Hommaforum* discussion space is an exemplary case in this respect. The architecture facilitated the construction of a community, creating a sense of belonging and commitment. This was particularly crucial for political mobilisation in the early phase of the movement before it gained electoral success and political power within the True Finns party. Moreover, the active human agency guided the discussions in ways that prohibited the site from becoming an unorganised hate site. Volunteer monitoring and the structuring of discussions into different chat rooms organised the otherwise anonymous and spontaneous discussions. In addition, Jussi Halla-aho, 'the Master', was the

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<sup>64</sup> See comparable development within Front National in France in Bratten, 'Online zealotry'.

<sup>65</sup> José van Dijck *The Culture of Connectivity. A Critical History of Social Media*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013).

intellectual mind of the movement and he provided an example and direction for the debates.

Social media's logic of popularity and connectivity<sup>66</sup> partly explains Halla-aho's growing fame in the anti-immigration movement and the True Finns party politics. He started as an unknown blogger, but his readers formed a networked public, an online community that shared a sense of cultural belonging and membership so strong that it encouraged Halla-aho to run for politics. In this case, popularity in online spaces translated into popularity in electoral politics and, finally, as a protective capital within party politics. This convergence of anti-immigration movement and the True Finns party has taken place gradually and has required public performances of scapegoating. The sacrifice of James Hirvisaari has particularly gained political power both for the anti-immigration movement and the True Finns party. The party has diminished its internal division between the more radical anti-immigration section and the more moderate members. At the same time, it purified its public image of being racist and prejudiced.

The rise of the anti-immigration movement is an example of a broader phenomenon in Europe where people are not as attached to political parties as before the 1980s. The role of associational activities, social networks and other alternative political movements has grown in preference. This civil society participation uses participatory media forms, such as social media, and they are often celebrated for their pro-democracy efforts. However, as Carlo Ruzza<sup>67</sup> argues in the context of new political movements, in addition to democratic developments, 'uncivil' developments have increased in European societies and politics. Right-wing movements have copied the discourses and strategies of the civil society movements in ways that make them appealing as an alternative type of political participation. However, as the interconnections between Halla-aho, *Hommaforum* and the True Finns party show, these new movements can also redeem their networked popularity in the more traditional party politics. In the Finnish case, this has required public scandals and

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<sup>66</sup> José van Dijck and Thomas Poell 'Understanding Social Media Logic', *Media and Communication* vol. 1, no.1, 2013, 2 – 14.

<sup>67</sup> Carlo Ruzza, 'Populism and Euroscepticism: Towards Uncivil Society?' *Policy and Society*, Vol. 28, nr. 1, 87 – 98.

scapegoat mechanism, which also involved the mainstream media. To conclude, the anti-immigration movement and the ‘uncivil’ public spheres are not distinct from traditional politics and the mainstream media. Rather, they are being utilised in different ways in the Finnish society, leaving the essential problems of ethnic and racial inequality in the margins.