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## Introduction

Donald Trump represents for many researchers and laypeople alike the posterchild of right-wing populism in the West, having won the 2016 US presidential elections with the promise to “make America great again,” to defend the common white Americans against the greedy corporations, against the distant and irresponsible state government and gridlocked national legislatures, and to take issue with the demographic challenges they are facing (Kimmel 2017). Already in his speech seeking the Republican party’s presidential nomination in June 2015, Trump appealed to the anger of white American men, taking aim at those allegedly criminal and predatory 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) 2016, 11:04–11:57)

If in the US context the Republican Party, the main right-wing conservative force, has caved in to populism, in Europe this political phenomenon is embodied by right-wing populist parties (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017; Mudde 2007; Wodak 2015). Like in the US and elsewhere in Europe, men’s anger is mobilized politically also across Northern Europe by such parties, which claim to defend “the people,” and make significant inroads in mainstream politics. 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

partook in the center-right governing coalition; in Sweden, *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats) became third largest party in the 2014 parliamentary elections, with 12.9 % of the votes, posing serious challenges to the center-left minority government. Men outnumber women among both voters and members of these parties (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017; Pettersson 2017; Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2017), with some researchers even labelling right-wing populist parties as *Männerpartei* (men's parties) (Mudde 2007, 90–118; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015, 22). But unlike the US, both Finland and Sweden are oftentimes heralded as examples of the Nordic “women-friendly welfare state,” which is underpinned by the assumption that gendered hierarchies and social class inequalities have been dismantled with the direct involvement and commitment of both men and women in virtually homogeneous societies (Christensen and Larsen 2008; Johansson and Klinth 2008). Gender equality and solidarity still enjoy a strong support in both Finland and Sweden (Norocel 2017; Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2017), although neoliberalism has seriously undermined the principle of universal access to welfare provision, which was another important tenet of the Nordic welfare model. In this context, while rallying support against the alleged mismanagement of the welfare state, as well as the imminent threat that the supposedly uncontrolled migration represents for the ordinary Finns, or the common Swedes, both the Finns Party and Sweden Democrats are pressured to live up to the gender equality principle so closely connected to the Nordic welfare model (Keskinen 2013; Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Norocel 2013; Saresma 2017a, 2018).

This notwithstanding, research unveiling the mutually co-constitutive gendered hierarchies and interrelated axes of social structuring at work in right-wing populist discourses is still in an incipient phase. To date, there are some studies analyzing the complex discursive interdependence between concepts of gender and sexuality; social class, culture, and

language; race and migration, but more often than not these mainly focus on the discursive construction of femininities (Keskinen 2013; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Pettersson 2017; Saresma 2018), while only few explicitly concentrate on the construction of masculinities (Keskinen 2013; Norocel 2009, 2010). We intend to fill this gap in scholarship suggesting an “intersectionality of superordination” (Leek and Kimmel 2015) approach to the study of right-wing populist discourses in Finland and Sweden, thus answering to calls for comparative perspectives on the study of men and masculinities (Hearn 2014, 457–458). We aim to study *how the right-wing populist media depicts idealized white Nordic masculinities through the discursive interactions between several such axes of difference and inequality as gender, social class, sexuality, and race? What kind of similarities and differences pertain to these identity constructions when comparing Finland and Sweden?* In answering these questions, we analyze the contents of official right-wing populist newspapers:

*Perussuomalainen* for the Finns Party, and *SD-Kuriren* for the Sweden Democrats. The article is organized in five sections. First, we map out the conceptual background. Second, we discuss our methodological approach, and detail the data collection and analysis. Third, we present the results of analyzing the Finnish data. Fourth, we relay the results of analyzing the Swedish data. Fifth, 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 to bridge several different research traditions, namely men and masculinities studies, scholarship on right-wing populism, and critical studies of race. More clearly, *superordinate intersectionality* (Leek and Kimmel 2015), 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 explain the co-constitutive systems of difference and inequality—unpicking several paradoxical situations, and unveiling 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. Masculinities are contingent to the socio-historical and political context they are embedded in, displaying internal complexity, and even innate contradictions, being shaped as they are 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), thus rather similar to our own research interest. Contingency and hybridity notwithstanding, we deem useful the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2005), which 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 refers to cultural process of white identity formation based on the reproduction of racist ideologies. The intersectional conceptualization presented above ties together the hybridization of hegemonic masculinities with processes of racialization, which helps us tackle one paradox in right-wing populist ideology: while the white masculinity articulated in right-wing populist discourse is presented as highly desirable, thus heralded as hegemonic,

most men voting for right-wing populist parties, those embodying in other words this masculine ideal, perceive themselves pushed to the margins of society into a vulnerable socio-economic position, and often times voice an “aggrieved entitlement,” a vociferous claim for their birthright allegedly usurped by undeserving “others” (Kimmel 2017, 16–17).

Worth noting here is 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,” defending those unworthy “others”—embodied by 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 Finland and Sweden, and until recently even part of the governing coalition in Finland, thereby members in the very political elite they criticize; consequently, the need to analyze the discursive presence of various *elites* in right-wing populist ideology.

In addition, authoritarianism, nativism, and welfare chauvinism give further ideological consistency to right-wing populism. Authoritarianism concerns the 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), a system that formally acknowledges equality between men and women, while at the same time ascribes masculinities and femininities with essentialist biological traits, aiming 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 conterminous 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). This notwithstanding, we acknowledge the presence of different types of *whitenesses* as formations of identity and practice within the global racial order, thus aware that whiteness in singular is but an “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 against the wider context of neoliberal globalizing tendencies, and the cyclical crises they produce. The aggressive neoliberal policies and the post-Fordist production

pursued in the past decades in the US as well as in Northern Europe have led to the dramatic restructuring of welfare provision, “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 Jørgensen 2016, 323–324), which 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 fuses gendered economic and cultural arguments enabling claims of proprietary right over welfare provision on behalf of the native men (“the welfare state build by our forefathers”) on grounds of cultural distinctiveness (“our cherished national values”), which masquerades outright racism into preserving cultural differences (Kimmel 2003, 605; Norocel 2017, 103; Roose 2017, 58). We disentangle this conceptual complexity at work in right-wing populist discourses by means of a critical discourse analysis approach, as explained in detail in the next section.

### **Data and Method**

To examine the discursive construction of white Nordic masculinities in Finland and Sweden, the analysis focuses on the newspapers that are directly and openly connected to the Finns Party respectively Sweden Democrats, namely *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren*. Previous research evidenced how established media (both print and televisual) impact on how, and if the right-wing populist discourses reach the wider public; thus, party newspapers play a crucial role in disseminating the officially sanctioned interpretations of right-wing populist ideology, serving a similar function to the one undertaken by so-called “alt-right” media in the context of 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: to cement internal solidarity within the party around the official discourse, and reach out to and recruit potential voters.



As the Finns Party and Sweden Democrats gained significant parliamentary representation (since 2011 in Finland, and 2010 in Sweden), the two newspapers have developed journalistically. *Perussuomalainen*, which publishes around 12 to 16 issues per year, was established in late 1996, approximately a year after the Finns Party was founded. In turn, *SD-Kuriren*, which publishes 10 to 11 issues per year, became the Sweden Democrats' sole official newspaper after its relaunch in 2003, although in existence since 1991. Presently, both newspapers are much more sophisticated media products than they were initially. The amount of texts and their diversity in each issue has increased gradually, the number of regular contributors is higher than previously, as well as the quality of layout and formatting, the two newspapers acquiring an increasingly professional outlook. Being 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 the elections for the national parliaments (2007 and 2011 in Finland, and 2010 and 2014 in Sweden), respectively for the European Union parliament (2009 and 2014). Second, since previous research 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 in the aftermath of elections, totaling 16 issues for *Perussuomalainen*, and 16 issues for *SD-Kuriren*. The two

newspapers have indeed covered extensively these elections; key party members and candidates contributed as well, discussing the ideological tenets and political priorities of their respective party. Third, the selected issues were subsequently 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.

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

Given the purpose of our project, we interpreted the collected material by means of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which 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) to unveil and demystify the ideological reification of power hierarchies, and 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 opt more specifically for an amended dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough 1992, 2001, 2009), which postulates that the meaning of analyzed linguistic elements and representations are not merely situational but in fact are engaged in the production and reproduction of the 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* (among 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 flesh 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, each specifying and deepening our analysis. In a first step, one researcher identified specific topics pertaining to gender, social class, sexuality, and race in the semiotic data (the aforementioned 130 texts and accompanying images, see Table 1). In the following step, 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. For the third step, 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).

Analyzing the semiotic data, we distinguished 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 accommodated a growing presence along the axis of race as a category for social structuring in the right-wing populist discourse. In the Swedish case, in turn, the ideal of white Swedish masculinity was from the beginning articulated along the axes of gender and sexuality, and race, with social class serving mainly as a secondary axis, and strengthening the role of race as key category for shaping social structuring in the 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, with instances when several axes overlap one another, 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, and thus add more nuance to our analysis.

### **The Discursive Construction of Masculinities in *Perussuomalainen***

In *Perussuomalainen*, the default position is to assume that the party rank and file is male. Following the populist tenet to defend the “people” against elites (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; Saresma 2017a), praise is given to the “common (Finnish) man.” He is generally described as “your average guy” from either the countryside or the suburbs, who

does “honest work,” but still has difficulties making ends meet, echoing the descriptions of those Republican male supporters in the American Rust Belt (Kimmel 2017). 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. Extra weight is given to the working-class background of these men, which appears to be both a virtue but also 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 vulnerable position, the semiosis in *Perussuomalainen* discussing widespread unemployment, small salaries, and insufficient pensions as grounds for welfare chauvinist policies. Interestingly, some of the party representatives embody themselves this working-class ideal. This is manifested through a programmatic disregard for the middle-class masculine ideal of the “proper looking gentleman,” in a sense presenting this as the anti-establishment hegemonic masculinity within right-wing populism. A case in point is long-serving chairman Timo Soini (1995–2017). Soini was often portrayed in the pages of *Perussuomalainen* with rather greasy hair, slightly overweight and in ill-fitting suits, and adorning never-quite-fitting eyeglasses. Interestingly, Soini is a practicing Catholic in a country where over 70% of the population belongs 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 a man of the people, in no way different than his voters. Soini underscored his “ordinary” background, and cultivated the image of an authoritative patriarch, a man with a Messianic task embracing a quasi-religious language, and a bold and

hardened leader (Parkkinen 2017). 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 Master’s Degree) and *Peruspomo* (2014) (Basic Boss, alluding to the much used *perus-* lexical particle in the party discourse), which we argue represent Soini’s attempt to strengthen his credentials as “a common man,” and dissociate himself further from the elite (he is a “boss,” but a “basic” one, and so on). This claim is made however despite his multiple mandates in both the Finnish and European parliament, and more recently 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 the various party candidates presented 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 genetic heritage (that 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” and then adds “I live a happy married life, and my family is the most important resource and background support for me” (*Perussuomalainen* elections #/2014, 17). This articulation aims to legitimize, in our view, white Finnish masculinity by embedding it into the social framework offered by the heteronormative nuclear family

(though such a discursive move is not uncommon among political forces across the board throughout the world).

The family as key social institution serves as discrete proxy for references to (hetero)sexuality, which is rarely addressed explicitly in *Perussuomalainen*; rather, it is weaved 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,” thus out of reach for any such earthly powers as the Finnish parliament. The different organization of intimacy is ridiculed, and even presented as a potential threat to “children’s development,” wherein children are incarnations of the (nation’s) future. 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.”

Worth mentioning here is that the experience of war casts long shadows in Finland, particularly the “Winter War Spirit,” which ensured the country’s survival as a democracy in its conflict with the Soviet Union in World War II. This is another key dimension in the construction of masculinity in *Perussuomalainen*, rooted into Finnish history and 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). Most effort is put instead on 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 those few veterans still alive today are warmly welcomed at the Presidential palace for the Finnish independence celebrations every year. In *Perussuomalainen*, then, in a right-wing populist fashion, the fact that these veterans had actively participated in the conflict is juxtaposed to the alleged carelessness of the Helsinki elite, to emphasize further 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 described 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; 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*. We link this to the growing importance during the 2010s of the right-wing anti-immigration and nationalist faction within the party, which originates 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. Halla-aho joined then the Finns Party in 2010, and was elected on their behalf first into the Finnish Parliament (2011), and then into the European Parliament (2014). He has built his entire political career on courting controversy (allegedly speaking what previously was “unspeakable”), and rabid attacks against Islam (often presented as the poisoned gift brought to Finland by the “unintegratable” Muslim migrants) (Keskinen 2013). Modern-looking and more urban in character, the Finns Party Youth changed the previous ideological focus on addressing poverty and consolidating economic solidarity. Instead, it brought closer to the party’s ideological core xenophobia and culturally justified racism, particularly with regard to the slowly growing presence of Islam in Finland (Palonen and Saresma 2017), paving the way also to more hybrid forms of masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). In the examined semiosis, a breaking point is marked by the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections. During the campaign, the Finns Party Youth chairman revealed a much 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 matter 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 interested in defending is clearly not the white "Europe" that embraces multiculturalism. Second, under the guise of cultural difference, it ascribes racial distinction to the migrant others. "Pernicious multiculturalism" here is merely a shorthand for the danger posited by Islam. In the later issues of *Perussuomalainen*, Muslim migrants are often portrayed as an unwanted economic burden onto the welfare state, strengthening welfare chauvinist arguments, and undercover bearers of Islamist religious extremism, feeding onto fears of cultural and religious diversity. However, the request to help for example Syrian refugees in the countries neighboring Syria was accompanied by demands to significantly cut the Finnish development aid, which could potentially benefit these refugees (*Perussuomalainen* #7/2014, 14–15). This ideological shift from native inward-looking masculinity to manifestly xenophobic nationalist masculinity ideal was cemented in mid-2017, when Soini's chosen successor lost the chairmanship competition to Halla-aho.

### **The Discursive Construction of Masculinities in *SD-Kuriren***

Examining *SD-Kuriren*, we observed the same right-wing populism positioning "in the service of the common man" like in *Perussuomalainen*. The construction of "your average

Svensson” takes place however at the intersection of gender and (hetero)sexuality, social class, and (white) race, with the heteronormative nuclear family as its background, 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, the Sweden Democrats cautiously walking “the line between radicalism and extremism—to avoid accusations of the latter” (Hellström 2016, 92). Indeed, the examined semiotic 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* is carefully dressing up racism 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 in *Perussuomalainen* “basic” is the key attribute associated to the white Finnish masculinity ideal, in *SD-Kuriren* the main feature of white Swedish masculinity is “democracy-loving,” which allegedly characterizes the party (as for example in - *demokraterna* lexical particle in the party name). Love for “democracy,” narrowly understood as respect for 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 are described as the unholy union of “multiculturalists, Sweden-haters, [and] EU-federalists” (*SD-Kuriren* #87/2010, 5). This was facilitated by the fact that Swedish media elite, which initially ignored the Sweden Democrats, had unanimously sided with the mainstream parties, particularly after the 2010 parliamentary elections, thereby cementing the perception that the “entire” Swedish establishment united against the party (Hellström 2016, 166; Norocel 2010, 177). The Swedish elites are often disparagingly labeled “Sweden-haters,” and described in a manner 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, particularly supportive of working-class men (Norocel 2013, 151), and pursuing “a Sweden-friendly politics,” stressing 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 perhaps best personified by the party’s chairman Jimmie Åkesson. Very much like Soini, Åkesson enjoys an uncontested leadership position, being elected in 2005 on a mandate to shake off the Sweden Democrats’ reputation of a racist party. Åkesson successfully took the party into the Swedish parliament in 2010. Since then he even managed to widen the party’s appeal outside its xenophobic core of supporters (Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Norocel 2010, 2013, 2017). In the examined semiotic data (both visual and textual), Åkesson embodies a well-polished, balanced, and youthful masculinity, both when adorning the traditional folk costume at the opening ceremony of Swedish parliament, or

wearing well-fitting suits, and when anchoring ideologically the political priorities of Sweden Democrats in the column he publishes regularly in *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. He embodies instead 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 politics as same sex marriage and adoption rights are disparagingly described as harmful elitist "identity politics." This type of political endeavors 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 in a defensive position like white American men in the US, their masculinity 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 than in *Perussuomalainen* in the analyzed data (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, just like in *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), thereby confirming socially conservative values in right-wing populist key (Norocel 2017; Saresma 2018; Wodak 2015). The masculinity ideal is described in this context as the (biological) father figure firmly embedded in traditional family values, 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. Second, it points at the risk 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 cemented through such pictures as those of a blond and blue-eyed preteen boy holding hands with an equally blonde and blue-eyed girl set against a bucolic landscape (see, *SD-Kuriren* #81/2009, 16, #87/2010, 5); the happy family pictures of presumably 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 their manners, 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—serves as racial marker indicating a non-native status. Similar to how Donald Trump described the presence in the US of racialized foreign men, in the pages of *SD-Kuriren* Muslim masculinity is depicted in a complex position both as hypermasculine, whereby violent homophobia, honor killings, genital mutilation and religiously sanctioned violence against women, and gang rapes are the recurring descriptions (a description which is echoed in the Finnish context such as in the Kempele rape case, see Saresma 2017b). Muslim masculinity is concomitantly portrayed as hypomasculine, located in a 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 examined the right-wing populist media depiction of idealized white Nordic masculinities. It employed superordinate intersectionality (Leek and Kimmel 2015) as a theoretical perspective to interlink such diverse research traditions 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 white Nordic masculinities at the intersection of such interrelated axes of social structuring as gender (masculinities), social class (elites), sexuality (heterosexuality), and race (whitenesses).

Our analysis adds further complexity to the wider scholarly discussion concerning the “crisis of masculinity” and emerging hybrid masculinities in the context of neoliberal globalizing tendencies, and more specifically 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). We argue that in right-wing populist discourses, the traditional hegemonic masculinity ideal based 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 attributes describing exclusively the elites. This notwithstanding, the emphasis on (racially pure) whiteness and heterosexuality remain central in the construction of these hybrid masculinities. From this perspective, while traditional hegemonic masculinity is reinterpreted, hegemonic whiteness (Hughey 2010) remains 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. This however is instrumentalized for the right-wing populist agenda, gender equality being used as a marker for demarcation from, and subordination of the racialized migrant other, portrayed as a threat to women’s rights and their bodily integrity (Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Norocel 2017; Saresma 2018). From this perspective, this article is a complement to a different theoretical articulation, that of “femonationalism” (Farris 2017), which mainly explores how nationalism, neoliberalism, and certain streams 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. We evidenced how the discursive constructions of white masculinities are context contingent and subject to reinterpretation and repositioning—at times privileging some axes of social structuring over others—by fleshing out the subtle similarities and discrete differences of these discursive constructions in the pages of *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren*. A common discursive pattern we identified in the construction of white Nordic masculinities when analyzing both *Perussuomalainen* and *SD-Kuriren* concerns the synergy between the axes of gender (masculinity) and sexuality (heteronormative nuclear family), which emphasizes the socially conservative understanding

of “gender equality” as essentialist complementarity between men and women, and cements heterosexuality as desirable and necessary in reproducing the national bodies within the framework of traditional nuclear family (Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014; Saresma 2018). We recognized nonetheless a difference in degree, in *SD-Kuriren* the interaction between these axes being more distinctively emphasized, thus adding nuance to previous studies on gender analyses of right-wing populism in Sweden (Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Norocel 2010; Pettersson 2017). We identified a more substantial difference when analyzing *Perussuomalainen*, which confirms 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 also noticed an increasing convergence over time in how masculinities are articulated discursively in Finland and Sweden, whereby 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 separating 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 and relative deemphasis of social class as axes for such distinction, perhaps a consequence of the right-wing populist forces aiming for mainstream acceptance and even acquiring power positions. Furthermore, there is no one coherent masculinity being

constructed in these right-wing populist newspapers. On the contrary, the ideals of masculinity they formulate are under constant (re)negotiation. In their attempt to gain societal and political relevance, the right-wing populist forces in the Nordic semi-periphery reify hybridized ideals of masculinity, adopting a more women-friendly outlook while concomitantly harnessing such gender equality endeavors for racializing xenophobic aims.

This leads us to conclude that transnational studies pertaining to men's gendered and intersectional positioning need to include analyses of right-wing populist discourses, besides those concerning progressive and emancipatory transversal movements (Hearn 2014, 459–460). At the moment, these developments are insufficiently scrutinized. We hope our article paves the way 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 articulates discursively the anger of white American men.

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