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ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN
FASCISM AND THE FAR RIGHT



Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities

Edited by Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš



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This is a groundbreaking volume which will be of particular interest to scholars with an interest in the extreme right, social movements, political violence, policing and criminology.

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Edited by Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš



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THE SOLDIERS OF ODIN FINLAND

From a local movement to an international franchise

Tommi Kotonen

The Soldiers of Odin Finland (SOO) is a street patrol organization that has or has had chapters in most of the cities in Finland, and which at its peak was also present in more than 20 countries. The members patrol on the streets, especially late at night, in order to protect people from violent behavior and inform the police when something happens. However, they see the purpose more broadly than sheer auxiliary policing, emphasizing that they act as a preventive force, and also work in the “grey zone,” on cases that are not directly illegal but more like “bad behavior.” Especially, young refugees are seen as a security threat, and SOO sees itself as their “physical counter-force” (interview, SOO 1). Besides patrolling, the SOO has also taken part in demonstrations and done charity work.

According to its official rules, approved by the Finnish authorities, the Soldiers of Odin aims “to maintain and to support the security culture at its territory, and to enhance voluntary maintenance of the secure environment by the citizens” (PRH, 216.621). Their programmatic statement draws a more nuanced picture: they are “a patriotic street patrol organization, which opposes harmful immigration, Islamization, EU and globalization, and aims at tackling the byproducts caused by the aforementioned problems, like weakening of the security.” To negative developments they add also “multiculturalism,” which brings “foreign cultures to Finland, cultures that are incompatible with Finnish culture” (SOO Finland, 9.6.17). As a nationalist, anti-immigration program, the SOO statement is pretty similar to those of other movements born in the wake of 2015 refugee crises (cf. e.g. Finland First: PRH 217.654).

A local SOO leader who has been active in writing their political statements has stressed that what all members share “100%” is anti-Islamism, and that “Islam should be declared as a political ideology instead of a religion” (interview SOO 1). An anti-Muslim leaflet they have distributed lists several fundamental cultural and psychological differences between Finnish society and Islam, emphasizing the lower

level of civilization in Islamic countries. The Soldier of Odin sees the integration of the Muslims as impossible. According to them “the Islam is both a bellicose religion and a political system seeking world domination”(Muslimit on ongelma n.d.). SOO chapters often deny their apparent racism, but this depends to some extent on definitions: As has been pointed out, SOO does not see its all-encompassing anti-Islamism as racism (ADL 2016; cf Hafez 2014; Cleland et al. 2017).

In this chapter I will analyze the growth and development of the Soldiers of Odin in Finland in the light of online observation, court and police files, interviews with both rivaling street patrolling organizations and representatives of the Soldiers of Odin, and the official statements and media interviews given by the members of the SOO. As a part of my research I have also analyzed the Facebook profiles of 26 SOO leaders. In this analysis, political opportunity, organizational resources, and communication strategy are scrutinized more closely in order to highlight reasons behind the growth of the SOO.

Founding the Soldiers of Odin and its connections to Nordic Resistance Movement

The Soldiers of Odin was reportedly founded in October 2015 in Kemi, a small town in Northern Finland (Yle 2016b). According to some reports, it was initially a spin-off from a Facebook-based closed group “Kemi vapaakeskustelu” (“Kemi non-restricted discussion”), founded in July 2015 by Mika Ranta, a truck driver from Kemi who is now in his early thirties. That new group was founded after the immigration discussion at the open Facebook group Kemi got heated and discussion on immigration was banned (see the guidelines for Facebook group Kemi). The group had among its first members several of those people who would later form the Kemi chapter of the Soldiers of Odin (Kemi vapaa keskustelu, list of members, Facebook).

The SOO was born as a part of the anti-immigration protest movement in Finland, which had its peak of mobilization during the summer and autumn 2015, when refugees arrived in unprecedented numbers. Arrival of the refugees was followed by mass demonstrations demanding closing the borders, and some violent attacks followed too, like throwing Molotov cocktails against the refugee reception centers. To counter some unwanted behavior some people expected especially by the refugees, several street patrols were created as well. The most successful of these became the Soldiers of Odin, which was soon labeled in the media as a far-right or even neo-Nazi organization.

The early history of SOO shows several links to the national socialist Nordic Resistance Movement. Chairman and founder of the SOO, Mika Ranta, used to be a member of NRM, although probably, as he claims, just in the role of a supporter (Yle 2016b). Ranta says he is still a national socialist. Besides a connection to NRM, he has had some other radical initiatives: for example, in November 2015 Ranta asked for a permit to create a chapter of Combat 18 in Kemi, emphasizing it is a national socialist group. C18, a group of British origin that promotes racial war,

was shortly visible in Finland in relation to anti-refugee demonstrations in Southern Finland, with one former B&H activist as a leader (Mika Ranta, Facebook).

Ranta had written anti-Islamic messages against refugees in Kemi already in 2009 (discussion forum Suomi24). This was related to growing tensions between local youth and refugees in 2009, when the number of refugees in Kemi rose sharply, and some anti-refugee attacks followed (Kemi Police, 8690/R/5910/09, 8690/R/5908/09). The number of hate-crimes also peaked in Kemi in 2009 (Police College of Finland 2010). Following clashes in 2009, a group of men from Kemi came up with a plan to start a local NRM chapter, and a meeting took place between them and NRM (interview Holappa). However, for reasons unknown, nothing came of this idea.

The refugee situation escalated in Finland in 2015, and during the summer and early autumn, the number of asylum applications in Kemi increased twelvefold (MTV 2015).¹ In Kemi as well as in other places the number of hate-crimes peaked again (Police College of Finland 2016; cf. Kemi-Tornio district court R09/260). A group from Kemi came up with a new idea, street patrols. They contacted NRM again, asking for a permit to organize patrols (interview Holappa; cf. Yle 2016b). This was possibly due to the fact that NRM had its own patrols too and overlapping of the activities was something to be avoided.

The connection to NRM has not disappeared since; in early 2016 SOO withdrew from cooperation with Finnish Defence League – an anti-Islamic organization based on the British model – right after NRM claimed FDL was a covert Zionist organization (Vastarinta.com 2016). In 2017 SOO participated in at least two demonstrations organized by NRM, members and chapters share Facebook posts by the NRM, and some members even spread NRM propaganda during the SOO patrols. The cooperation with the NRM is something they are currently quite open about, although a local leader emphasized that “we do cooperate to some extent, but it concerns topics we agree upon” (interview SOO 1). These topics include shared anti-EU and anti-immigration positions. Unlike in the case of NRM, anti-Semitism does not seem to stand out in the communication of the SOO – which is, besides the lack of a coherent political program, one of the reasons NR supporters have criticized SOO (Dahlberg-Grundberg 2017 cf. Bjørgo 1995).

For the purposes of this article, 26 online-profiles of SOO leaders have been analyzed. The analysis shows that unlike NRM, key members of the SOO do not have a clear background in skinhead subculture. Typically, a SOO leader has a wife and kids, works in a blue collar job, and quite often has been or is a member of some motorcycle club or similar group. Membership in motorcycle clubs is common – however, these seem not to be “outlaw” style groups like Hells Angels or Bandidos. The age of the leaders analyzed is most commonly between 25 and 35 years, although especially among the rank and file there are much older people too – some of them are over 50. The skinheads have also shown some interest in joining the SOO, but in most of the cases they have not been accepted because, as an interviewee claimed, they “try to recruit people who know how to behave.”

This may at least partly explain the relatively non-violent behavior, especially when compared to NRM: even if many of the SOO members are former petty-criminals with violent behavior, they have no such organizational and cultural experience of violence as in skinhead subculture where violence is an essential part of the cultural heritage.

The organizational schema of SOO follows a structure with local chapters, regional divisions and the leadership at the hands of a board-like group. Local groups may decide independently on their activities, as long as they follow the rules and some general guidelines given by Kemi. The recruiting process runs a path from a supporter to prospect and ending in full membership. A common way of joining is by invitation from friends, but SOO recruits people via social media too. They also take part in discussions and debates, and join other movements at their demonstrations. What is, to some extent, also remarkable is that SOO did not have a proper web page at all until 2017, apart from a couple of chapters that have created modest pages for selling SOO items. This reflects the development of the field in Finland also more generally: in contrast to NRM and several other groups created during the 2000s, SOO represents the new form of mobilization via social media, alongside with other similar new phenomena like the Close the Borders movement. Establishing a local chapter is also based on social media: one asks a permit from the HQ, creates a Facebook group, and starts to invite new members and organize patrols via support pages. Communication between leaders used to happen via Messenger groups, but these were shifted to the Telegram-messaging platform after some leaks in 2016 (interview SOO 1; online-observation.)

Expansion and decline

The Soldiers of Odin started as a modest local group, but a few months after its establishment it gained large media attention, and soon also international media took a notice of the group. The growth snowballed in late 2015 and in early 2016. The count of local chapters reached 27 by the end of January 2016. The number of international chapters grew similarly.

The boom in January 2016 happened to some extent due to the escalating media attention, and even if the news were negative, initially it seemed to create more support for the SOO – and they even claim they did not avoid controversy but added fuel to the fire on purpose (interview SOO2; cf. Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2018). A local leader has commented this by noting that “the group Ranta got together in Kemi, it was something exciting, it was great. There was something mystical about it” (interview SOO 1). The first reports on street patrol groups were not all negative either, and, among others, even the chair of the national police board showed his support for them (Helsingin Sanomat 2016a), although back-pedaling later. To the horror of her party comrades, one city council member of the Social Democratic Party in Oulu gave even the NRM patrols her support (Kaleva 2015). If a sign of anything, it perhaps tells of initial chaos and confusion at the face of a new situation. The “mystique” started to vanish soon, however.

After a rapid start, the growth of the SOO stabilized during the spring of 2016, and new chapters were created only at a similar pace as that with which others were closing down. It is noteworthy that two of the original division centers ceased their operation, too. The decline in membership and number of chapters reportedly occurred when some local groups saw their patrolling as meaningless and recruiting new members, or even keeping the old ones active, appeared difficult (Helsingin Sanomat 2016b; Satakunnan Kansa 2016).

One factor in the decline may have been that the SOO officially distanced itself from the more moderate groups, such as Finnish Defence League. At about the same time as the stagnation, a promotional video was shown on their Facebook account, with logos of the NRM visible (YouTube 2016a). These developments were followed by internal fighting, which led to some chapters closing their activities and in some cases starting to patrol under different banners (YouTube 2016b). For example, in Helsinki one member who left the SOO established his own group, Sons of Nemesis, which was inspired by SOO but appeared as more violent, and later faced charges for running a criminal organization (Helsinki District Court, R16/8576). Several counter-movements were also created, the most well known of these being the Loldiers of Odin, a group of clowns following the SOO patrols.

Establishing new chapters during the summer of 2016 may be explained also as a reaction to news claiming the SOO is in decline; SOO calls these “fake-news” (e.g. SOO Finland, Facebook 24.8.2017). Revitalization by uniting the forces of several cities, thereby gathering bigger patrols, was probably also one of these efforts to counter the news. That way they could show their force, and collect more than the usual handful of patrollers. SOO has also acknowledged in public that the number of activists peaked in the spring, the number of members growing to about 600, and then diminishing by about 25% (SOO Finland, Facebook 6.1.2016). As stated by the Finnish Security Intelligence Service, some of the leaders have apparently reacted to the decline by radicalizing their message (Etelä-Suomen Sanomat 2016; cf. Della Porta 1995, 84): they started to share national socialist material without restraints. But some members were also fired due to the negative publicity even if they thought they were only doing what was expected from them. One fired member, who was convicted and fined for an assault, explained his ending up in a fight with quarrelling drunken people: “I was then a member of Soldiers of Odin, and saw it as my duty to intervene” (Imatra Police Station, 5620/R/4495/16). Since the start of the SOO, quite a lot of people have indeed left active participation, partly due to their behavior: “At the start there came people who were very short-tempered. There were some fights [...] but those disappeared quite soon. Here in Jyväskylä there is only one original member left” (interview SOO 1).

Decline in activity is clearer when analyzing the reports on patrolling. The silent period in the SOO activities during the summer was reported in several newspapers and has been confirmed by observation. It is striking that especially in the summer of 2016 there was an obvious gap in several otherwise active localities. For example

in Joensuu, patrols were reportedly organized between February and April, and after a long silent period the activity started again in October 2016.

Soldiers of Odin as an international phenomenon

Originally, the idea of the Soldiers of Odin was to focus on the Kemi area; there was no intention to spread the organization to the whole of Finland, let alone grow the movement into an international phenomenon. As later became apparent, this unpreparedness to lead an international organization was the cause of many of problems – not to mention the fact that the SOO leaders did not have much previous leadership experience whatsoever.

The international dimension of the far right may be seen to act in two different ways, international or transnational: building an actual international organization or creating a loose transnational network for sharing ideas and patterns of action (Virchow 2013). To some extent SOO has both dimensions, but at the practical level it works more as a network and brand than as an organization. On the ideological level the issue that binds chapters in different countries together, is their anti-Muslim prejudice, which, according to some analysts, is also the lowest common denominator on which the European radical right can agree (Caiani 2018). Very often, the anti-Muslim messages are shared via images, so called memes, which makes it easier also to overcome the language barriers (cf. Doerr 2017).

The international franchise of the Soldiers of Odin started to grow especially fast after international media noticed the presence of the group:

Partly with the help of the media the knowledge was spread all over the world, and then came requests [for permit to form a chapter], but this was mainly via Facebook through foreign acquaintances. Later we started to look more carefully at who are suitable to join, and started to weed out those who did not follow the rules.

(interview SOO 2)

The weeding out has been quite heavy: currently, in April 2018, officially recognized foreign groups exist only in eight countries, with Finland included. This is a remarkable decline from the highest figures presented: in the autumn of 2016 they claimed to have groups in 22 countries. In the USA, SOO claimed to have chapters in more than 40 states, but now only two remain.

The organization has indeed seemingly suffered problems with foreign groups not fulfilling their obligations and submitting themselves to the command of Kemi. Kemi has tried to control groups abroad by moderating their Facebook groups, some Finns being members in several groups and leading the franchise (interview SOO 1.). Currently, the foreign contacts are taken care of by a team of members, mostly Finns but also one Maltese member, and they also make occasional visits to foreign chapters. Some foreign groups, especially Swedish ones, have also visited Kemi HQ, but most of the communication happens via Facebook, and sometimes

by phone. A peculiar case is the Estonian chapter, which is led by Estonians living in Finland. In some cases, like in Russia, language problems have prevented the building of new foreign chapters. They have also avoided making official connections with countries where the activity may be found to be illegal (interview SOO 2.)

According to some foreign chapters Kemi acts in a dictatorial manner, and tries to bully other groups to make them pay for the costs of the Finns and, as they claim, their new clubhouse. But like local chapters in Finland, SOO claims the foreign groups are relatively independent as long as they follow the rules (interview SOO 1). However, some foreign groups dissociated from the Finnish SOO have been dissatisfied with public image of the SOO, distancing themselves from the racism of the Finnish group, and have also been unhappy with membership fees (SOO Finland, 2.8.2017, Facebook; interview SOO 1). The Finnish SOO members have acknowledged some mistakes were made in this respect:

It was actually a fundamental mistake, that when this [SOO] was spread abroad, there were no payment obligations. [...] Then there was a lot of work for those, who lead this foreign thing, and we thought one has to somehow compensate them for their efforts, and had to create a fee.

Afterwards, the SOO leadership noticed there were actually very many chapters, for example in the USA, so the amount of money to be paid was huge. Demands for payments caused fights, and allegedly in some cases the leaders disappeared with the money. Too much money caused problems in Finland too: “Then came the fights: We have 10,000 on our bank account, what shall we do with it? At some stage money is counterproductive.”

Building an international “franchise” or an actual organization has faced similar problems elsewhere too, as can be observed in, for example, the cases of organizations like the World Union of National Socialists and brands like Combat 18. Groups abroad may be interested in the “brand,” but not in following the foreign leadership, and there may be suspicions that the foreign leaders are just making money for themselves. Stealing money and mismanagement are common accusations (Jackson 2014, 15, 26). Problems faced by the SOO are thus in no way unique.

Reasons for the early success of the SOO in Finland: political opportunity and organizational resources

The Soldiers of Odin was born in the middle of the mobilization wave around the refugee-issue. Even though other street patrol organizations were founded, the SOO became the market leader in Finland, outbidding its rivals, and soon was the only one left on the streets. The growth of the SOO happened in interplay with local authorities, media and counter-movements (cf. Quent and Schulz, 2015), but was also helped by the political climate, which created political opportunity.

Open access to political decision-making and institutions tend to facilitate protest, but moderate its form. Where these opportunities are lacking, the protest

often takes more radical, sometimes violent form (Caiani et al. 2012, 11). This suggests that when radical right parties have electoral support and thus larger share in political decision making, they work as a safety valve, moderating the protest. But in order to channel the protest, the party in question needs to be a credible alternative to the ruling elite.

In Finland, the anti-immigration Finns party had already in previous elections gained much new ground, and managed to hold their positions in 2015 as well, becoming a government party. Due to their shift from opposition to a party in government, the “safety valve” effect was to some extent diminished. As a member of a coalition government the Finns party had to compromise some of their relatively radical positions on immigration, and instead of channeling the protest, they became a target of criticism from anti-immigration circles (interview Street Hawks; interview SOO 1; cf. Hatakka 2016).

Discussions at the largest Finnish anti-immigration forum Hommaforum exemplify their disappointment and search for new alternatives (see e.g. Hommaforum 2016). Behind the electoral success of the Finns was to a large extent extra-parliamentary groups, especially the anti-immigration organization Suomen Sisu, which itself saw the representative form of democracy as a “travesty” (Vaarakallio 2015). In 2015 the protest started to channel away from the Finns Party – which sank heavily in the polls – and outside the representative political system. Relatively large demonstrations during the refugee crisis in the autumn 2015 were one sign of this development. Also, the Suomen Sisu got hundreds of new members – most of them without any previous political or organizational activity – the growth was “explosive” (interview Suomen Sisu).

At the local level, SOO found an early supporter from a Finns Party city-council member in Kemi, Harri Tauriainen, who is also a member of Suomen Sisu. Tauriainen had promoted anti-Islamic views, and wrote messages supporting “white power” in his blog and in social media. For example, one of his blog posts stated it bluntly: “100% white, 100% proud” (Kunnollisvaalit 2013). Before the SOO made its first appearance in 2015, Tauriainen took part, he claimed as a private citizen, in a demonstration against “uncontrollable refugee policy” organized by Mika Ranta (Lapin Kansa 2015). Tauriainen labeled the immigration as an “invasion by the Islamists” and, despite being a member of a government party, acted like an opposition politician and claimed he and the crowd were sending a message to the government against their refugee policies (YouTube 2015).

Protest channeled via extra-parliamentary routes and through internal opposition of the Finns Party thus also enabled the establishment of the SOO. In some cases local representatives of the Finns Party acted as organizers, even if occasionally the party members started their own, rivaling patrols too (Ilta-Sanomat 12.1.2016). Since 2017, after the split within the Finns and the anti-immigration faction of the party went into opposition, SOO has publicly supported their candidate Laura Huhtasaari in the 2018 presidential election and spread leaflets for her support, and in some cities local representatives of the party meet regularly with the SOO (interview SOO 1).

One of the keys to the success of SOO in Finland was also how it resonated with society's larger interpretational frames on immigration and refugee crisis. How the other movement organizations and especially the politicians defined matters was highly relevant. An older example by Ruud Koopmans shows, that when "the extreme right suddenly found support for its view of foreigners and refugees as an unbearable burden for Germany, [it] was able to reach a number of substantive victories, which encouraged further mobilization" (Koopmans 1996). A similar growth of support for anti-refugee statements occurred in Finland during the autumn 2015.

Political discourse on the refugee crisis in Finland echoed themes present in the SOO community. It is notable, that also the members of the government started to use language referring to uncontrollable crisis soon after the first refugees arrived in Finland. The prime minister used metaphors relating to natural disasters, like the dehumanizing term "refugee flood" (Yle 2015d), and the Minister of the Interior spoke of the situation as an uncontrollable phenomenon (Yle 2015c; STTK 2015). President Niinistö noted that all of the refugees came with good intentions and that some of them are just seeking better life (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2016). As Jouni Tilli (2016) has noted, framing the debate on refugees in Finland in 2015–2016 had three differing dimensions: discourses focused on economic aspect, threat, or humanitarian viewpoints. Welfare chauvinist statements or those seeing a potential threat did not follow party lines. Current needs of the refugees were to some extent sidelined and focus was on their future potential. One may also note that in speeches of the political elite, a certain kind of nationalism was present: Questions regarding refugees were usually framed from national perspective, i.e. how Finland as a nation is going to survive this crisis.

Instead of focusing just on anti-immigration rhetoric and security issues, SOO provided people with possible culprits, and also a solution to the Islamization: At the core of the problem lay, according to them, the ideology of multiculturalism, which caused the flow of refugees and was seen as a cultural threat to original, white Finnish culture. Other groups, like Streetpatrols or Katuhaukat (Street Hawks), seemed to avoid the deeper political interpretations (Helsingin Uutiset 2016; Oulu-lehti 2016). From the perspective of the SOO, those groups have been "too cautious" in their activities and in avoiding racist language (interview SOO 1). Rival groups, on the other hand, saw the activities of the SOO as counter-productive from a security perspective (interview Suomen Sisu), and some even avoided using the term "street patrol" and talked instead of outdoor activities or jogging, and did not use any signs or vests (interview Street Hawks). There was no "mystique" or confrontational aspect in their work, and politics as well as use of discriminating or racist language was avoided – the lack of counter-movements underlines this issue.

A more radical, openly political message and militant appearance secured the media attention for SOO, which was seen as a reason why they won the out-bidding between rivaling patrol-organizers (interview Suomen Sisu; cf. Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2018). Among the SOO the demand for more openly political

position-taking is still present, and has even increased. According to an interviewee, the majority of the SOO members see, that “nothing will change if they only patrol, even if 24/7.” One needs to go more political, “otherwise we cannot influence the root causes of the problems” (interview SOO 1).

Values, language and violence

Especially after first setbacks in organizing patrols, SOO seems to have focused on community issues, and references to brotherhood and unity are very common. Self-promotion constitutes a large part of the communication: out of the images shared by the SOO Finland via Facebook almost one quarter depict their troops on patrol (analysis of the images, 17.8.2017). The use of similar clothing with SOO logos also helps in creating group solidarity and to show loyalty. The significance of common logos was shown in return of some members who left the SOO in 2016. After a year of trying to organize patrols under their own label, Finnish Home Guards, they rejoined the SOO, and one of the returnees justified this, claiming that patrolling under no visible logos was just not satisfying: they “did not stand out, because there was no common dress code” (Facebook 29.5.2017). Visible presence on the streets and demonstrations differentiates SOO from other street patrol groups, which act without any recognizable signs or outfits.

The appeal to potential members is increased by showing solidarity among the members and active community building (cf. Meadowcroft and Morrow 2017). The Soldiers of Odin has created what resembles a subculture of its own.² Unlike other street patrol movements in Finland, the SOO has been able to bond its members into a common cause, even if there have been inevitable internal schisms. There are lots of similarities with the values of the skinheads as observed e.g. by Mark Hamm (1994, 25; on Finnish skinheads, see Lähteenmaa 1991, 34–36): skinheads were proletarian, puritanical, chauvinistic, clean-cut, and aggressive, with rough machismo demeanor, had traditional working class community values and pride in the neighborhood territory. Besides local security culture, which is emphasized in their program, concern about local community is also a broader issue: “If the decision making is taken away from homes and villages and apartment buildings and municipalities and cities, and even outside the state, people lose their ability to decide on their own lives” and become “apathetic zombies.” Smaller and larger worries are shared between members, who may spend time together also outside the SOO activities (interviews SOO 1 and SOO 2).

To support the local community, the Soldiers of Odin also does occasional charity work –echoing the Finnish political discourse on the refugees, which did not lack the welfare chauvinist aspect. Referring to SOO in Canada, Emil Archambault (2017) has summed the goals of the charity work: “The group purports to help ‘Canadians’ (defined largely as white, ‘European’); excluding migrants and refugees is part of the same ploy: for ‘Canadians’ to win, Muslims and refugees must lose.” Or as a Finnish Odin member argued, the issue was that “the welfare

services and health care, they must work, they are for us Finns. Our dads and mothers and grandparents have built this system” (interview SOO 1).

Loyalty has been a central theme in the SOO communication and is often repeated using visual elements. In their recruiting they also stress this point: “Trust and loyalty between the members must be steadfast” (SOO Joensuu, Facebook 13.2.2016). When these principles are broken, the response may be aggressive. This had its most dramatic manifestation when a former Southern Division capital city Kouvola decided to cut its ties to SOO. A photo of a burning clothing item, apparently a SOO jacket of Kouvola chapter, was circulated within SOO media, alongside with text “Kouvola batch. Our rat city. Fuck you guys.”³

Reactions may be similar when an individual leaves the group. For example, when one of the leading members announced he will no longer be active within SOO due to family reasons and apparently also due to fighting at the local SOO club, most of the commentators understood the decision. But one member commented he will “come and nail those signs back,” another one agreeing and writing that he has “a nail gun in his car, and a box of 9mm nails, if needed ... So that those signs surely will stay” (Facebook 22.9.2016; cf. North-Carelian district court, R 17/731).

The SOO employs a dual communication strategy when appealing both to “concerned citizens” as well as more radical elements, which may also be a factor explaining their success within the Finnish far right. In itself, the strategy is not new, but, as Luca Tateo (2008, 290) has pointed out, has been used for example in the online communication of the Italian far right already in the 2000s. The strategy aims at “self-legitimizing toward the outgroup and increasing the cohesion toward the ingroup.” A similar type of dual communication can also be found in action within the Finns Party and especially within its extra-parliamentary wing Suomen Sisu. Tuula Vaarakallio (2015) has described their communication as a hybrid model using calculated ambivalence and differing ways of appeal to ingroup and outgroup.

Analyzing the profiles of the Finnish SOO leaders, one may note that white nationalism (Beirich and Hicks 2009) is one of the commonly shared ideological themes among them, and it is especially often shared in the form of memes. Regarding direct, written references to white nationalism, in one of the first public statements by Odins their Joensuu chapter claimed they are a “patriotic organization fighting for the white Finland” (Yle 2016a). Later their leader Ranta tried to minimize this statement, arguing “white Supremacists are welcome to join the Odins, but only five per cent of Odins hold these views” (Daily Mail 2016). Analysis of the leaders’ profiles shows, however, that the number of those leaders who have promoted white nationalism or white supremacy is actually around 20 percent – and may even be higher when considering the figure is based solely on their public profiles.

It is also notable, that even the official national support groups share messages and memes promoting white nationalism: among many others, the German national chapter has published an image which includes the unofficial slogan of the white nationalists, “14 words” by David Lane (Michael 2009), with only the minor modification of having “white children” changed to “our children” (SOO

Germany Support, 19.7.2016): “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for our children.”

As a “physical counter-force” and echoing themes of white nationalist ideology, the SOO Finland has an obvious violent potentiality. However, the analysis of the leader profiles shows, that, in most of the cases, they are not a part of the violent subcultures, and they also avoid recruiting members who may be seen as too aggressive. Violent inclinations have so far been channeled through violent messages and internal fights; there are only a handful of cases where SOO members have used violence towards outsiders. Also, in their public statements the SOO has stressed that they use violence only for self-defense and that they do not allow any illegalities.

The concept of self-defense seems to be flexible though (cf. Lööw 1993). Among others, one local chapter commented on Facebook that “stopping the harmful immigration, multicultural hell and islamization is no longer possible by democratic means” (SOO Jyväskylä Support 7.4.2017). Statements by the leader of SOO, Ranta, have been even more direct: “Our Fatherland, arm your sons and ask us to drive away those strangers, preferably right away” (Facebook 16.11.2015).

Militant outlook and militant rhetoric emphasize the Odins’ conviction Finland is under invasion.⁴ Loyalty, unity and brotherhood are needed at the battle against invaders, and those who are ruining the traditional Finnish lifestyle and culture and eventually the national unity, are seen as traitors. Fittingly a common theme in memes is the Winter War (1939–1940), which has often been depicted as an exemplary case of national unity against a common enemy (cf. Bjørge 1995).

Ranta is – like many right-wing extremists – influenced by the so called Islamophobes who consider civil war with Islam as inevitable (cf. Ekman 2015), and he has brought this ideology to SOO too:

If Civil War is needed to make our streets safe again, then a Civil War it will be, but we will never withdraw. If you want to take part in the fight for our living space, make contact and join us.

(Facebook 5.4.2016)

After the Turku incident in August 2017, currently investigated as an Islamist terrorist attack, Ranta declared that “this means war, Finland will have revenge” (Facebook 18.8.2017). So far, this war has been waged only on paper.

Notes

- 1 At that time hundreds of refugees travelled through Kemi and neighboring Tornio, which already belonged to the cities that had received most refugees per capita Finland during the past 20 years (Yle 2015a; Yle 2015c; Yle 2016c). Also, the unemployment rate was high in the Kemi-Tornio region.
- 2 The British subcultural theory has during the last 20 years been under debate, and several of its original assumptions have been either denied or shown to be incompatible with

- later developments, and its relevance outside the “original,” British subcultures, like punks, may be questioned. Not going into that debate here, it suffices to say that some elements of the theory may be useful in analyzing the extremist movements as well. Cf. Daniela Pisoiu (2015): “Subcultural Theory Applied to Jihadi and Right-Wing Radicalization in Germany,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27:1, 9–28.
- 3 Maybe worth noting but burning ones “colors” is also a tradition within MC-clubs when resigning from membership.
 - 4 This is also reflected in terms used at the extreme right in general: before 2015 perhaps the most common derogatory term for refugees in Finland was “pakoloiset,” a Finnish word referring to refugees as parasites, but since then it has been replaced by “matut,” short for “maahantunkeutajat,” invaders.

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