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V for pissed-offedness:

Anti-immigrant subversion of dystopian superhero intertexts

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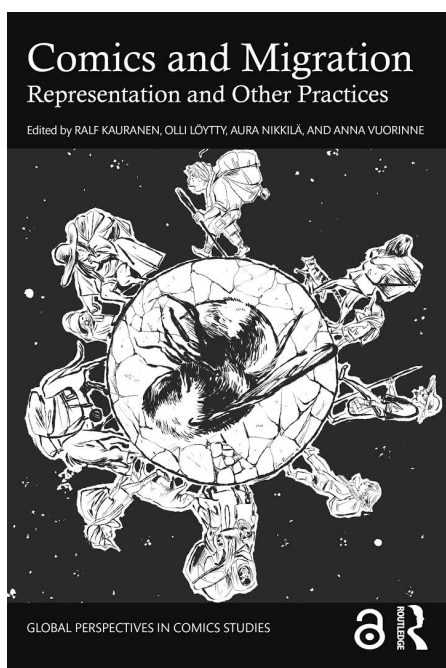
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Chapter 7

V for pissed-offedness: Anti-immigrant subversion of dystopian superhero intertexts

Oskari Rantala

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset) defied expectations and became the second largest party in the Finnish parliament. The nationalist and populist party succeeded in increasing its number of seats despite major challenges during the previous term, including a party split and most of the MPs exiting. A significant component of the highly successful campaign was a video advertisement titled *V niin kuin ketutus*. The phrase is tricky to translate precisely, but literally it means “V for being pissed off”, or “V for pissed-offedness”, as *ketutus* is a noun.¹ Being a narrative short film rather than a simple advertisement, the video caused controversy and was a topic of heated discussion due to its depiction of violence and the portrayal of immigrants as sexual predators. Nonetheless, it reached hundreds of thousands of views before the elections, and one of the main actors even became an MP.

From the perspective of comics studies, *V niin kuin ketutus* is interesting especially because of its intermedial relations with comics. It depicts a dystopian Finland governed by corrupt politicians and overcome by high levels of immigration; this dystopia is situated inside the story world of a comic book in the video. Furthermore, the advert extensively appropriates *V for Vendetta*, a comic by Alan Moore and David Lloyd (1982–1985, 1988–1989), and its 2005 film adaptation directed by James McTeigue and written by the Wachowskis. Whereas the original dystopian graphic novel takes a strong political stand against English fascist movements, as well as the anti-minority policies of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservatives, the film adaptation is more concerned with the erosion of civil liberties in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the “War on Terror”.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the narrative strategies and aesthetics of these works are employed and their politics subverted in order to advance an anti-egalitarian and anti-immigrant agenda and manufacture exploitable political controversy in the contemporary media landscape. The first sec-

¹ Other possible translations would include annoyance and irritation, but being pissed off is the translation used in the official English subtitles.

tion addresses the political context and publication of the advert. In the second, I detail the contents of *V niin kuin ketutus* before delving into a discussion of the similarities and dissimilarities of the heroes and villains portrayed in the advert, the graphic novel, and the film adaptation. The final section of the article focuses on the connections of *V niin kuin ketutus* and the emerging style of right-wing politics foregrounding culture war, controversy, and transgression.

Introducing the renewed Finns Party

The parliamentary elections of 2019 were crucial for the Finns Party. Two years prior, the party had split after a contested leadership race when Jussi Halla-aho became the party leader. The majority of the party's MPs and all the government ministers left in protest, and it was also ousted from government as the other members of the centre-right coalition rejected Halla-aho's radical anti-immigration program (Seuri, Palojärvi, and Teittinen 2017). The 2019 elections were essentially the first time that the renewed Finns Party was able to fully introduce its new approach to the voting public. Not counting the inconsequential 2018 presidential elections, no major elections had been held since the leadership change. An important shift in Finnish politics had taken place, but it was yet to be determined whether there was support for a more unapologetically anti-immigrant party in the mould of the Italian Lega Nord, Alternative for Germany, Austrian Freedom Party, or French National Rally (formerly National Front). These are all parties that the new Finns Party would soon align itself with in the European Parliament.

V niin kuin ketutus was published online on 20 March 2019, two weeks before advance voting was set to begin. The nearly seven-minute video first caused dispute when a shorter teaser version was aired in movie theatres. Moviegoers who objected to the advert started to voice their concerns through social media, criticising the cinema chain Finnkino for giving a platform for an ad that was commonly described as “racist propaganda” and “far-right violent fantasy” (see tweet Finnkino 2019a and the replies). On 25 March, the feminist and anti-racist advocacy group Fem-R accused Finnkino of mainstreaming racism (Fem-R 2019). Finnkino individually replied to this and nearly a hundred other calls to discontinue airing the advert with the same short statement, which was posted repeatedly. According to this statement, they supported “tolerance, freedom of speech and democracy”, pledged to “not accept racism or discrimination”, and announced that the Finns Party campaign would be ending the next day (e.g. Finnkino 2019b; 2019c; 2019d). Even though the campaign ran its course and ended as planned (Sunila 2019), several foreign far-right news sites such as *Voice of Europe* and *Fria Tider* suggested falsely that the Finns Party advert was taken down due to accusations of racism (Emma R. 2019; *Fria Tider* 2019).

An English-language version of the ad was uploaded a week after the original *V niin kuin ketutus*, but its views comprise but a fraction of those found in the original. In the English version, the “V for” wordplay of the Finnish title has understandably been replaced and the title is *KETUTUS – A story of being seriously pissed off*.² The Finnish title does require some interpretation. “V niin kuin” means “V

2 I use the original Finnish title in this article, as it highlights the intermedial connections that are relevant for this discussion.

for”, but the title is somewhat humoristic, as the word *ketutus* does not start with the letter “v”. For a Finnish-speaking audience, it is obvious that the last word of the title is a placeholder for the stronger expletive *vitutus*. The meaning of both expressions is roughly the same but *ketutus* is a more playful and less vulgar term. This underscores the issues around what can be said in a political advert aimed at a mainstream audience. Similarly, a great deal of the political subtext is not stated explicitly. Instead, certain things are clearly hinted at with a knowing wink at the audience, as I will demonstrate in the next section. Strategies involving doublespeak and flexible play with symbols and meanings have a strong history in the European radical right (Vaarakallio 2017, 199–200).

The election cycle was marked by high tension and even some acts of violence, which are exceptional in Finnish politics. The former Finns Party chairperson and a leftist candidate of Somalian origin were assaulted at the same time as *V niin kuin ketutus* was making headlines. As a result, politicians in many parties condemned the advert and accused the Finns Party of inciting racist hate crimes. Being in the spotlight was beneficial for the party, however. Scholars have suggested that manufacturing controversy is a viable strategy for populist parties in the contemporary media landscape; thus, by criticising the video, the political opponents of the Finns Party in fact increased its visibility and reach (Laakso, Puukka, and Koivisto 2019).

As the storyline of the video featuring corrupt politicians, predatory immigrants and a violent vigilante monster is ultimately framed as fiction, condemning the advert can be played down as a lack of sense of humour or irony. As scholar Maria Mäkelä (2019, 458) points out, the film is a pastiche of speculative fiction, making it easy to argue that the narrative was not supposed to be taken at face value to begin with. She argues that this rhetoric of fictionality provides an effective counterargument to any criticism of the story: it was not supposed to be true and therefore its supposed racist elements do not warrant a discussion. Specifically, Mäkelä (2019, 457) considers it a parody of “Marvel comics, dystopian Hollywood blockbusters and video games”. Undoubtedly, several references to various kinds of popular culture narratives can be found, but a more thorough discussion is in order. Above everything else, *V niin kuin ketutus* references a single comics work (which is not a Marvel comic) and a specific dystopian Hollywood blockbuster.

Imagining an immigration dystopia

V niin kuin ketutus opens in a dimly lit space filled with old posters and books. An unidentifiable person walks through this library, picks up a comic book titled *V niin kuin ketutus* from the shelf, and sits down to read it. When the comic book is opened, the camera zooms into an illustrated image of Helsinki Cathedral. At this point, the viewer is transported into the story world of the comic and the drawing is replaced by a real-life video image of the same tower with the camera soon panning over the city. A voice-over narrator starts reciting the text that was some seconds earlier visible in captions on the

comic book page: “There was once a small nation, inhabited by content and happy people” (*V niin kuin ketutus*, 00:34).³ Even though the name of the country is not mentioned, it is obvious that the events are taking place in Helsinki, Finland. In addition to the cathedral, other recognisable landmarks such as the Parliament House soon make an appearance. The narrative starts like a fairy-tale and the narrator quickly paints a picture of a country where people are patriotic and everything is well. Then a stain in the idyll is introduced: “One day, the country’s democratically chosen leaders decided to betray the promises they had made to the people” (*Vnnk*, 0:50). The narrator informs the audience that the corrupt political elite do not care about the people and instead are focused on making themselves rich by taking in too many refugees. How this economic arrangement actually works remains a mystery.

Visually, the narrative shifts back and forth between video segments recorded with live actors and illustrated comics panels, reinforcing the experience of reading a comic book. Especially the scenes filling in the backstory with a larger cast and more action are represented in comics format. In one scene, a young white woman is pulled by dark hands into a car that stops next to her on the street, suggesting that a rise in immigration leads to sexual violence. In another, bribed mainstream media brands anybody taking part in an anti-rape demonstration a racist. According to the narrator, “the country that once was safe for women and children [...] was now a thing of the past” (*Vnnk*, 2:45). The verbal narration is often vague and does not make as specific accusations as the visual storytelling. As the comics panels explicitly reveal a harrowing and violent kidnapping, the narrator laments the irresponsible immigration policy, which leads to “those who were never in need of an asylum” (*Vnnk*, 1:50) also moving to the country. When the safety of women and children is mentioned, the images reveal a hooded figure with a knife in his hand. It is a clear reference to the deadly knife attacks in Turku, Finland, in August 2017, perpetrated by a radicalised asylum seeker. The attacker, who was inspired by jihadist terror groups and targeted women especially, was the first person to ever receive a sentence for terrorist crimes in Finland. The illustrated image shows the actual scene of the crime with the Turku Market Square and Orthodox Church in the background.

The video also contains some aggressive jabs at the perceived opponents of the Finns Party’s agenda. When the corrupt politicians bribe a newspaper editor to make the mainstream media their propaganda platform, a money-filled briefcase changes hands in front of the headquarters of *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest Finnish newspaper, which is often vilified by right-wing populists for its liberal bent. A moment later, the narrator describes the instructions that members of the political elite hand down to their suffering people: “Most importantly, people were told not to give way to fear and hate” (*Vnnk*, 3:01). The lines echo a phrase frequently used by the former Finns Party chairman and founder Timo Soini, who acted as the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of terrorist attacks in Nice in 2016 and in Stockholm in 2017. While Soini urged people not to give way to fear (e.g. Saroniemi 2016; Waris 2017), the more militant wing of his party demanded that it was, on the contrary, “time to give way to fear” (Waris

3 Subsequently, I will refer to *V niin kuin ketutus* as *Vnnk* (in references, see Finns Party 2019) and provide an approximate timestamp for the quotations. I use the English subtitles of the original rather than the English version, even though the differences between the two seem to be minimal. All word choices and timings are not identical, however.

2017). After Jussi Halla-aho took power, Soini was expelled from the party and became a prime example of a person who was not aggressive enough in pushing the anti-immigrant message. Ironic wishes of “not giving way to fear” are frequently used quips in the new and more radical Finns Party circuit (e.g. Halla-aho 2019).

After establishing the dystopian world, the main storyline of *V niin kuin ketutus* begins. As a result of the influx of immigrants, there is financial hardship and “ordinary Finns” – all played by white men – lose their jobs and end up homeless. The people who are not listened to become frustrated or, as the title puts it, pissed off. Their growing anger is depicted as black smoke rising all around the city and finally taking embodied form, as a monster is created in the depths of the earth. This quasi-superhero is a naked and growling muscular man with a long beard and superhuman strength. The creature tracks one of the members of the leading cabal to his limousine, in which he is cruising around the city with scantily clad women. The monster attacks the people in the car, scaring away the politician’s companions. He then forces the man to repent his wrongdoings, resign, and leave the country in shame. When his work is done, the monster vanishes into thin air.

At this point, the reader in the library closes the comic book and it is revealed that he is the Finns Party leader Jussi Halla-aho. Looking straight into the camera, he announces that in reality, “there is no Pissed Off Monster, and it is not going to come and save anyone” (*Vnnk*, 6:18). Instead of waiting for a supernatural saviour, he urges the electorate to vote for his party and for change. The sole reason Halla-aho gives is that the old parties will not “change their objectives” (*Vnnk*, 6:24). What exactly needs to be changed and how his party plans to accomplish it remains unsaid. It is an interesting political advert in the sense that it does not promise anything. *V niin kuin ketutus* simply depicts a dystopian reality that is itself fictional. The rhetoric is negative: voting for the Finns Party will lead to something else. The crux of the advert is obvious, of course – namely, that the party plans to heavily restrict immigration if it gets into power – but no promises are made or plans laid out. In fact, immigration policies in Finland are already strict and the percentage of the foreign-born population is lower than in any other Nordic or Western European country (OECD 2021).

Pissed Off Monster versus V

V niin kuin ketutus plays with many tropes of popular culture but an obvious reference point, already apparent from the title, is *V for Vendetta*. Written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd, the dystopian tale about a postapocalyptic Britain under a fascist regime first appeared in Britain in 1982–1985 and in the US in 1988–1989.⁴ In the story, a lone terrorist of seemingly superhuman competence attempts to take down the regime by assassinating prominent party members and inciting a popular insurrection. His goal is to plunge the country into chaos, out of which a new system of free citizens might grow: “With anarchy, from rubble comes new life” (Moore and Lloyd 1990, 258).

4 Originally, the strip appeared in the comics magazine *Warrior* between 1982 and 1985. When the magazine folded, the story remained unfinished for a few years until it was picked up by DC Comics and published in comic book format in the US. The black-and-white *Warrior* segments were coloured and republished in 1988 and the story concluded the following year in the last four comic books of the 10-issue series.

The enigmatic main character, known as V, hides his face behind a Guy Fawkes mask that has later been popularised as a symbol of anti-establishment rebellion by a plethora of movements, ranging from the hacker-activists of Anonymous and wealth-inequality protesters of Occupy Wall Street to Arab Spring demonstrators. More recently, it has been used by democracy protesters in Hong Kong as well as Donald Trump supporters who stormed the US Capitol in 2021 (Siu 2019; Pengelly and Luscombe 2021). There is some irony in the fact that aspects of the story have been liberally employed by agents across the political spectrum, even by the far right (e.g. Nyqvist 2019), when the original hero of the comic strip was fighting fascism and espoused an anarchist ideology. Against the backdrop of nuclear war, brutal secret police, and ever-present surveillance cameras, V wages a one-man war against the one-party state. Moore and Lloyd's comic discusses the justification of political violence, the philosophy of anarchy, and resistance against authority. In addition to the unconventional content, the drawing style is somewhat experimental, with Lance Parkin (2013, 90) dubbing Lloyd's approach a visual joke. Strong contrasts and the omitting of object outlines lead to a striking black-and-white style that is at odds with the story the images are telling: "morally, there was nothing but gray. We were asking the reader to consider some interesting questions" (Moore, quoted in Khoury 2003, 75).

Despite fighting genocidal villains, V is an ambivalent antihero who comes across as a potentially deranged and morally compromised character capable of murder and torture. V is a borderline case between an extremely competent but still ordinary human being and one with clearly superhuman abilities. In this sense, he resembles comics superheroes such as Batman and Night Raven, who are mentioned as inspiration alongside dystopian writers like George Orwell and Aldous Huxley in Moore's 1983 essay describing the genesis of the character (Moore 1990, 270). Like the Pissed Off Monster of the Finns Party advert, V is not a superhero in the classic sense. Peter Coogan (2009), for example, defines the superhero as the trinity of mission, powers, and secret identity. Both characters do have exceptional powers and a clearly defined mission, but they lack the double identities of hero and their secret alter ego.

On the other hand, V does have an intriguing origin story, a prevalent trope in superhero narratives. He had been an inmate and a human guinea pig in the fascist administration's research facility, in which most test subjects died horrendously. However, one of the inmates, known as "the man in room five", manages to destroy the whole facility and escape. In a pivotal scene, the comics narrative shows the threatening naked silhouette against the burning buildings, a sight witnessed by the doctor whose diary entries constitute the textual channel of the comics narrative in the episode. That is the moment when "the man in room five" – the number that the Roman numeral V stands for – is transformed into V. The importance of the moment is underlined by the repetition of the panels in different comics scenes (Moore and Lloyd 1990, 67, 83), representing the persistent memories tormenting the doctor. Bishop Lilliman, another one of V's victims who had been present, states that he is still having horrifying nightmares about "a black shape against the flames" (Moore and Lloyd 1990, 60), before V kills him.

In the movie adaptation, some major plot elements are rearranged, but this scene and the origin story of V remain intact, even though some details have been altered. Now, the research is instrumental for manufacturing a virus scare which helps the totalitarian regime win crucial elections. What remains, however, is the striking visual of a dark silhouette of a man standing against the flames when he has set himself free. Mimicking the panel repetition in the comic, the film employs the same frames in several scenes even more extensively (McTeigue 2005, 33:14, 57:16, 1:22:20, 1:37:55). *V niin kuin ketutus* also mimics the scene when the anger of fed-up Finns has reached a boiling point. As the Pissed Off Monster is rising from the volcanic depths, he is presented in a similar way: a threatening, naked figure in the dark set against fiery lava streams. He even has a flaming V emblem on his chest.

Both the Pissed Off Monster and V are avenging figures, ready to fight for oppressed people and violently meting out punishments for political crimes. Even though one features in a seven-minute ad and the other in a 250-page graphic novel (or a two-hour film), the arc of the story is similar. There is injustice caused by the morally and politically bankrupt leaders, which the avenger is going to take out, vanishing after his work is done. In the end of Moore and Lloyd's story, V is killed by police bullets, but his protégé Evey Hammond takes his place as V at the crucial moment to incite the masses to take down the dictatorship. In the graphic novel, a period of brutal chaos ensues, and it is unclear whether V's insurgence is successful. The film ends on a more hopeful note, as the police state is toppled in a seemingly bloodless coup. The vigilantism of the cinematic V is more unproblematic and the ending less ambiguous, and in some respects the Finns Party advert is a descendant of the film rather than the graphic novel.

Villains, fascists, elites

The most striking difference between *V for Vendetta* and *V niin kuin ketutus* stems from the political dimensions of the narrative. Whereas the Orwellian government of *V for Vendetta* is run by militaristic fascists, the Finns Party's dystopia seems to be a product of corrupt liberal elite. Suitcases filled with money, expensive suits, private limousines, and the dramatic cut to a European Union flag when the sinister abuses of power are discussed reference the stereotypical conception of a globalist elite. Outlined in various conspiracy theories, globalism has been adopted by more mainstream nationalist and populist politicians, such as Donald Trump and Jussi Halla-aho, who have used it prominently (e.g. Borger 2019; *Suomen uutiset* 2018b).

In *V for Vendetta*, V's opponents have ethnically cleansed Britain and violently repressed minorities, mirroring the objectives of real-life fascist groups that were active in the 1970s. The fascist organisation that took power in the comic strip is called Norsefire, the letters of which are obviously reminiscent of the British far-right party National Front. In the 1970s, National Front campaigned against non-white immigration, organised violent demonstrations, and enjoyed some electoral success until Thatcher took the Conservative Party in a more nationalist direction and marginalised the more radical right-wing movements (Trilling 2013). In Moore and Lloyd's alternative future, that did not happen, and the fascists remained a strong – and ultimately the strongest – political force.

In the film adaptation, the politics are Americanised to some extent (Parkin 2013, 322). The Norsefire are not called fascists and they win an election by staging terror attacks. As the film plays with ideas of a false-flag terror attack and the ways in which a resulting climate of fear can be capitalised on, it is easy to see its connections to the various 9/11 “Truther” conspiracy theories that posit that the Republican administration had a role in the attacks on the World Trade Center (Parkin 2013, 324). By 2005, concerns about the erosion of civil liberties in the aftermath of the “War on Terror” were widely shared, and V frequently makes comments that can be applied to the contemporaneous political situation in the US. It can be argued that the film adaptation tapped into the Zeitgeist and made the story the cult classic it is today. However, the shift in politics is interesting. There is a huge gap between the film adaptation and the Finns Party advertisement, but it is not quite as large as the one between *V niin kuin ketutus* and the original *V for Vendetta*.

As far as politics are considered, one of the most important scenes in *V for Vendetta* takes place when V infiltrates the government television station and forces the network to air his statement to the British public. This scene reveals some of the changes in political orientation between the comic and the film adaptation. Moore and Lloyd’s V delivers a dark and threatening monologue about humans’ inability to make their own decisions. With images of Stalin and Hitler behind him, V accuses his listeners of giving power to oppressive rulers and causing atrocities. The video message is something of an ultimatum, urging people to take more responsibility and “to be your own boss” (Moore and Lloyd 1990, 114). This is an important scene in the film adaptation as well, but the contents and the tone of the speech have shifted dramatically. In the film, V is still inciting the people to take down the government, but much of the wider political argument is missing, and a major line is that “there’s something terribly wrong with the country” (McTeigue 2005, 19:05). The people are not called out as enablers of a fascist dictatorship. Instead, V suggests that something is wrong, and if the viewers feel the same way they should join him and take back control. The political message has been significantly watered down, even though more general scepticism towards authorities resonated much more with the audience at the time than any discussion focused on anarchy and fascism would have. “There is something wrong with this country” is a flexible sentiment, and it can accommodate different takes on what is specifically wrong – be it the erosion of civil liberties or the rising level of immigration.

Whereas the comic and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the film are egalitarian, anti-fascist, and anti-conservative works, *V niin kuin ketutus* is certainly not. *V for Vendetta* portrays a fight to take down a dystopian, patriarchal order, but the Finns Party advert pursues an agenda that can be described as anti-egalitarian and anti-feminist, subverting the politics of the work it is emulating in an interesting way. Is there some accidental irony in the fact that a work explicitly attacking fascism and the political far right is appropriated in a political advert of a radical nationalist anti-immigration party – or was it a deliberate

choice by the creators? That is impossible to say. However, one should bear in mind that other aspects of the film are meticulously planned, and the narrative is carefully constructed. All things considered, the end product is extremely professional and there is no comparison to it in the history of Finnish political advertisements. With only few exceptions, the producers have not been willing to discuss the advert in public and the identities of most of the creators are not mentioned anywhere. Even the director Timo Peltokangas is not credited, although he has discussed his role in one e-mail interview in general terms. Answering questions about whether he saw the violent aspects of the advert to be problematic, he stated that they used “the methods of the world of movies in order to evoke and amplify feelings” and that the mode of storytelling should be compared to “Marvel comics and movies” (Heinonen 2019).

An alt-right vendetta

In the recent study of populism and political extremism, one of the most discussed topics has been the movement that is often referred to as alt-right. It is an amorphous, loose network of provocative right-wing actors which emerged as a formidable political force after it played a significant role in the surprise win of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton in 2016 (Heikkilä 2017). The movement grew out of transgressive internet culture, beginning as something of a sarcastic reaction to mainstream liberal politics and modern feminism (Nagle 2017, 10–27). On the other hand, it has been intentionally shaped by different far-right operatives (ADL 2021; SPLC n.d.). One of the most interesting aspects of the movement is that it has co-opted the playbook of progressive movements of past decades. Angela Nagle (2017, 40–53) writes about the Gramscian right, which believes that political change follows cultural change, and that one must wage culture war in order to win in politics. It is indeed useful to consider *V niin kuin ketutus* as cultural warfare. It is not as relevant as a political advert for a specific elections campaign as a creation seeking to challenge the ways in which immigration can be framed in public discourse.

The central issues that the alt-right is preoccupied with include “IQ, European demographic and civilisational decline, cultural decadence, cultural Marxism, anti-egalitarianism and Islamification”, as well as challenging “the right-wing conservative establishment” – that is, what the alt-right is an alternative to (Nagle 2017, 12). These currents are present in European right-wing populist movements, and the allies of the Finns Party have forcefully challenged the established mainstream conservative parties around the continent. Under Jussi Halla-aho’s leadership, the Finns Party has been approaching these same concerns; indeed, many of the issues above were topics that Halla-aho himself wrote extensively about when he first entered the political scene (Saresma and Tulonen 2020). Discussion on the theory of replacement and Cultural Marxism have moved from the fringes to *Suomen uutiset*, the official news website of the party (e.g. *Suomen uutiset* 2018a; Hamilo 2017).

Nagle actually mentions *V for Vendetta* in her book, writing that “*V for Vendetta* [...] and the ‘dark age of comic books’ influenced the aesthetic sensibilities of this broad online culture” (Nagle 2017, 13). However, she does not elaborate on the impact of comics culture on the alt-right movement. In the cultural history of comics, the so-called dark age signifies the period that began in the 1980s after works such as *Watchmen* by Moore and Dave Gibbons (1986–87) and *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller (1986) brought more adult themes and inventive storytelling strategies to the fore in anglophone commercial mainstream comics, resulting in a wave of violent and grim superhero narratives which dominated the 1990s (Voger 2006, 8). However, Nagle is probably referring not to comic books themselves but to the influx of action movies based on comics gaining momentum during the first decade of 2000s. The film *V for Vendetta* is certainly part of this cultural shift, which is visible in the success of such titles as *Hellboy* (2004), *Sin City* (2005), *300* (2007), the Dark Knight trilogy (2005–2012), *Watchmen* (2009), *Kick-Ass* (2010), and the first films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

In the aggressive inside jokes, popular culture appropriations and the attacks on the boundaries of acceptable political speech, the alt-right ethos is apparent in *V niin kuin ketutus*. An aggressive approach and the efforts to break political taboos are not surprising but employing a work like *V for Vendetta* is intriguing. On the one hand, it is a testament to the impact that the comic and the film adaptation have had in the cultural mainstream and political imagination. On the other, this choice produces irony and complex double meanings. When a narrative opposing nativism is remixed to present refugees as violent criminals, the subversive shift in the politics is apparent.

Another shift takes place in sexual politics. The advert purports to be especially concerned about the rights and safety of women. The increasing violence against women is portrayed as the primary consequence of immigration, an interesting choice considering that the Finns Party is a characteristically male party. Over 70 percent of party members and a similar portion of its MPs are male, and the party has been reluctant to act on women’s rights issues. For example, its stance on defining rape in the criminal code as based on lack of consent – a major feminist initiative in Finland during the past few years – has been negative (Härkönen and Sundman 2019). In the advert, women are either victims of violent crime or, alternatively, escorts who accompany the villain in his limousine, bringing into question his morality and integrity. Any active positive role for a female is lacking, in stark contrast to *V for Vendetta* in which Evey Hammond is the protagonist. As Heli Askola (2019, 59, 64) points out, the Finns Party has shown minimal interest in gender equality issues and has instead sought to depoliticise them. Despite the comparatively high rate of violence against women in Finland, party’s “manifestos are generally silent” about it (Askola 2019, 61). However, immigration proves a suspicious exception. In the context of immigration from non-Western countries, gender equality is suddenly under threat (Askola 2019, 56). Following this logic, restricting immigration protects women from violence, but it is rather difficult to

consider these concerns for women's rights as genuine. Calls for the safety of (white) women have, of course, always been integral in the propaganda of nativist and patriarchal movements.

It cannot be denied that *V niin kuin ketutus* was successful, and it possibly had an impact on the election results. It received a tremendous number of views, rose to the political agenda at the exact right time, and forced even the opponents of the Finns Party to discuss it right before the elections. It is impossible to say how the campaign would have played out without it. In polls, the party was gaining steam already prior to publishing the advert, but it was a vehicle for addressing a younger, more media-savvy audience. Many commentators did connect it with minor assaults against politicians that took place during the campaign period, so it is conceivable that the advert could have damaged the party's prospects, had the circumstances been different.

In subsequent elections, the same production company, Cinepic, has produced further video advertisements for the Finns Party. In the European parliamentary elections in May 2019, the party published one accompanied with a note saying that it was "from the creators of *Ketutus*". Apparently, the advertisement has left a legacy that is worth exploiting. It should be noted, however, that the new EU elections advert was a more humorous and light-hearted take on the supposed overreaches of the European Union. It is conspicuously less risqué and did not rely on popular culture intertexts or pastiche. Popular culture has political power and potential, but wielding it successfully is a serious undertaking, requiring significant effort and the right circumstances. The results, however, can have substantial impact in the contemporary media landscape.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has remained at the core of Finns Party politics. At the time of writing, campaigning in the municipal elections 2021 is under way, and the Finns Party election manifesto begins with accusations that the current centre-left government is using too much taxpayer money on harmful immigration, development cooperation, and EU packages (Finns Party 2021). The latest tweet by Jussi Halla-aho quotes a news story about an attempted crime that fits the Finns Party narrative: the victim was a Finnish woman, whereas the perpetrators "looked like they have Arab background", according to a witness (Halla-aho 2021). It seems likely that the Finns Party will strive to keep immigration a contentious issue in Finnish politics for the foreseeable future, despite the low numbers of immigrants in the country. Time will tell how the party will succeed and what shape the political messaging around the issue will take in the years to come.

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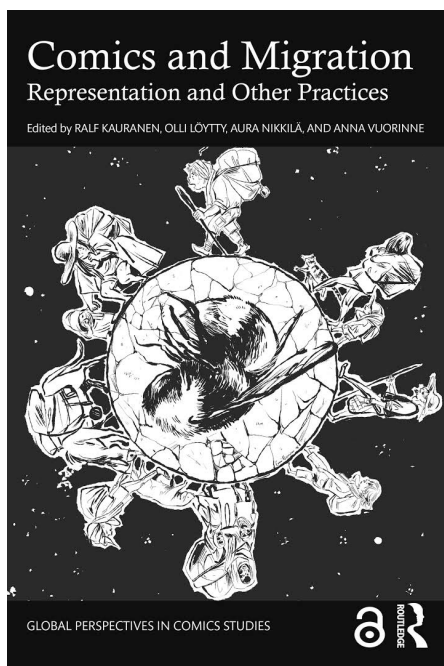
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