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6 Performing Disgust

Affective Intersections of Misogyny, Racism, and Homophobia in Radical-Right Online Discussion

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A populist Zeitgeist manifests itself in contemporary societies as an attraction to charismatic or strong leaders (Mudde 2010; Donovan 2020), as political polarization (Prior 2013; Palonen and Saresma 2019), as hardening rhetoric and an upsurge of hate speech targeted against women, minorities, and marginalized groups of people (Mudde 2000; Sundén and Paasonen 2018; Saresma, Karkulehto, and Varis 2020). Populism is fundamentally based on constructing an imaginary ‘us’ and antagonistic groups of hostile ‘others.’ We suggest that populist rhetoric utilizes disgust in the process in which populist logic produces a division between us and the others. Populist communication includes means such as simplifying topics, evoking emotions (as opposed to appealing to reason), and continued repetition of certain messages (Rautio 2019).

Populism is not a clearly identifiable ideology itself, but, according to Ernesto Laclau (2005), is an empty signifier that attaches itself to other ideologies. For example, populism does not necessarily connect with racism or extreme nationalism, but it can be attached to far-right fantasies of white supremacy. Nationalism refers to an ideology in which people understand themselves as belonging to a clearly defined nation. Following Benedict Anderson’s (1983) definition, however, a nation is always an imagined community held together by a belief in the unity of a geographically or ethnically defined group of people who, in reality, may have no connection to one another. A shared national identity of ‘us’ is produced via varying methods, processes, and representations that enable an understanding of ‘us’ as a nation. One of the central platforms where the nation as an imagined community is produced is in the media. In contemporary culture, online media, in particular, is the medium where nationalist fervor is incited.

One manifestation of extreme nationalism is the radical right movement. It is inherently against immigration, and its affective anti-immigration discourse is used to arouse emotions sometimes conceptualized as negative or harmful, such as disgust and shame (Nikunen and Pantti 2018; Saresma and Tulonen 2020). Social media is an increasingly important tool for the dissemination of nationalist radical-right messages. As xenophobic modes of communication spread on the internet and trickle into societal discussions, affective, polarizing communication also becomes normalized in traditional media and everyday discussions (Pettersson 2017; Saresma 2020).

In this chapter, we trace how disgust as an affect becomes politicized in radical-right populist rhetoric online. Disgust directed at the female body is typical of texts published in online environments described as “the manosphere” (see, e.g., Ging 2019; Nurminen 2019). We are interested in how repulsion toward women affectively

intersects with repulsion towards other gendered, sexualized and racialized others, and how it works performatively on a far-right online site. We analyze the role of disgust as an affect that is “normatively constructed, reflecting, and reinforcing social hierarchies and inequalities and . . . therefore, problematic” (Moore 2016, 1.5). We focus on a particular website: *Patriootti.com* [Patriot]. This far-right Finnish website is an example of transnational affective rhetoric that fuels disgust, hatred, and violence against those constructed as others, and is a part of a larger network of malicious far-right sites. Contemporary white supremacist nationalism appears on these sites as a gendered and racialized ideology in a neoconservative right-wing climate, where the nationalistic performance of ‘us’ manifests as a need to exclude disgusting ‘others,’ and, as Pantti (2016, 363) suggests, “the vocabulary of disgust serves to draw boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘others.’”

Our analysis draws on research on populism and Sara Ahmed’s (2014) affect theory. We pay attention to how adversarial groups are constructed, helped by affective mobilization, and enquire who are the us and who are the others (cf. Norocel et al. 2020). By mobilization, we mean the way affects are used in organizing certain groups of people for action against others. Disgust as a moral emotion, we suggest based on our empirical findings, serves as an instrument for mobilizing people with populist rhetoric used in promoting racist and even fascist politics.

Disgust as a Performative Affect

Generally, disgust is “reserved for those things that remind us of our animal bodies” (Moore 2016, 6.2). Disgust may be understood simply as a primal affect that is related to survival: it shields us from poisonous foods and other dangers; it makes us beware of threats and helps us decide what is edible and what is not. For Charles Darwin (cited in Ahmed 2014, 82–89), disgust, or repulsiveness, is something that is against a certain person’s taste or liking. It is noteworthy, however, that disgust is not only a primal gut feeling; it is also a complex and even paradoxical affect that also incorporates desire or fascination toward disgusting objects. The objects of our disgust simultaneously inflict rejection and capture our attention (Ahmed 2014, 84). As Martha Nussbaum (2004, 72) suggests, it is a social emotion that culturally marks some groups of people as bearers of contamination. Contamination is socially, culturally, and historically constituted. Thus, disgust can be a powerful mode of disapprobation that “serves important ideological objectives of reinforcing and reproducing social order” (Moore 2016, 6.2).

In this chapter, we are not interested in the biological or essentialized aspects of disgust. Our focus is on how affect functions on a social and symbolic level. We are interested in how disgust is not only experienced bodily but is also cognitively and culturally constructed. Thus, we follow Ahmed’s approach to disgust as a performative affect. The performativity of disgust as an affect refers to the fact that disgust arouses reactions and produces action, such as the nervousness someone may suddenly experience while in the proximity of the body of an ‘other.’ Performativity means that affects are consciously aroused (e.g., far-right digital media sites also make readers *react* to the texts on a bodily level and mobilize them to *act* in concrete ways). Ahmed (2014, 82–84) emphasizes that affect – here, she referred to hate – is not an act *done* but something that emerges as a chain of effects. In Ahmed’s example, hatred toward a certain black body “sticks,” so every black body is assigned a certain negativity.

In the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Ahmed describes how affective texts organize us both as individuals and as members of groups. Affects are not innate, and they do not even *exist* inside us or in the texts themselves but are brought into being as they are *directed toward* someone or something: we become moved by the affects the texts arouse. Emotions are socially, culturally, and historically produced; they are experienced in relation to others, and they are oriented intentionally toward others. Affects are not inherently something that belongs to an individual, but they *produce* both their subjects and their targets (Ahmed 2014).

Affects (e.g., disgust) are particularly effective when aroused and circulated in social media. Certain affective communities are born of and held together by, for example, misogyny, or racism based on hate or anxiety (Nurminen 2019; Vainikka 2019; Saaresma 2020). These affective communities are constructed through recycling certain ideological contents, such as fervent nationalism and xenophobia, and discursive conventions, such as irony (Nikunen 2015). Like Ahmed (2014, 10), we think that the emotions evoked and performed in texts circulate and spread in a contagious manner. For Ahmed, the stickiness of feelings means that affects directed at certain bodies stick to all similar bodies, and they stick to people who come into contact with them. Stickiness refers to the bodies of the ‘other,’ which in this chapter means the bodies of racialized, sexually marginalized, and gender-non-binary people, and which become the objects of disgust.

These bodies, marked as others, do not belong to ‘us’ and thus become loathsome. Something despicable is easily made *abject*. Abject, as Julia Kristeva (1982, 2), famously suggests, threatens the subject and confuses its identity. The ‘other’ that becomes an abject causes aversion and nausea. The only way to escape the threat the abject poses to the self is to deny its existence and repel it. For Kristeva, then, the abject is a cast-off object. Moving from psychoanalysis to political othering, there is the same tendency to construct the other as a stranger who is not like us. In populist rhetoric, the other is then performed as a threat, and this threatening other becomes the object of repulsion and an abject who deserves loathing.

In what follows, we examine the workings of online right-wing populist rhetoric, both empirically and contextually, as suggested by Maussen and Grillo (2014, 178). We analyze online stories, the pictures used in them, and the readers’ comments that accompany them.

Online content is interpreted as an “important 21st-century tool in the shaming and humiliation of those who have transgressed gender norms” (Moore 2016, 1.5), or otherwise crossed the border between what is traditionally understood as “normal” and what is deemed a disgusting deviation in the context of a conservative white hetero-patriarchal gender, sexual, and racial order. By combining our analysis with the theoretization of right-wing populism, nationalism, affect, and rhetoric, we demonstrate how affects in general and disgust in particular work in a performative manner.

The *Partisaani* website illustrates the performativity of affects because, like other misogynous far-right sites (e.g., *Breitbart*) it is based on tireless repetition of the publisher’s core message through texts and images. Repeating disgust toward others, whether they are women, homosexuals, or racialized foreigners, is an effective tool for propaganda. With our analysis, we aim to demonstrate that the combination of arousing affects (e.g., disgust) and constructing a threatening other as its target is powerful.

By analyzing manifestations of disgust on the *Partisaani* website, we show how disgust is used to support and undermine various causes. Following Ahmed, we understand the evocations of disgust as affective and performative. We ask what emotions

and affects in general and disgust in particular *do*. We analyze how disgust is *used*, and we suggest that disgust is used strategically to either support a phenomenon under discussion or to work against it. Our premise is that news and discussions on online websites are affective and performative; they mobilize us and yield tangible results. We show, via case analyses, how this is done.

Through close readings of a selection of articles published on the *Patriootti.com* website, we demonstrate how seemingly nonaffective and allegedly rational and objective news-like argumentation can be used to incite negative affects. We analyze the stylistic and rhetorical means used on the website, and we pay attention to the affects expressed and performed in the texts (understood here in a broad sense, encompassing both textual and visual expressions), particularly disgust. In doing so, we understand disgust as a social, shared emotion experienced in certain affective communities rather than as something psychological or individual. Affects and emotions are shared and experienced in relation to other humans.

***Partisaani.com* as a Platform for Extremist Othering**

Partisaani.com is a Finnish far-right alternative news site founded on 3 May 2020. It states that it has no ties to any certain political party or organization, and that its goal is simply to be a “force that connects nationalists with each other,” and a “platform for in-depth cultural analysis and radical attacks against the decadence of the contemporary elite” (*Partisaani* 2021a). Numerous articles posted on the site promote contemporary Finnish far-right organizations and actors, such as the neo-fascist political organization Sinimusta Liike [Black and Blue movement] and Veren Laki [The Law of Blood], a neo-nazi fight club. The site also hosts advertisements from far-right businesses, such as Kielletyt Kirjat [Forbidden Books] and No Compromise Clothing, and nationalist projects, such as Operaatio Kotkanpesä [Operation Eagle’s Nest] – a project that aims to improve the infrastructure of nationalist activist groups (Hommaforum 2021).

The articles published on *Partisaani.com* consist mainly of brief news stories, often based on citations from or references to content from other news sites. The news sites cited are often other far-right sites, both Finnish and international, but more traditional outlets are cited just as frequently. Some articles are based on original reporting, while others are based solely on tips from readers or news taken from social media.

The articles published on the site deal with a wide variety of topics pertinent to far-right ideology, from aggressive reporting that targets so-called political opponents (e.g., left-wing politicians, climate activists, the LGBTQIA community, and the Muslim community) to COVID-19 denialist content, antisemitic articles, and violent and sexual crime and pedophilia, which are usually tied to political opponents or non-white individuals. The site also publishes columns and opinion pieces, mostly written by far-right agents, and reports on the activities of various Finnish far-right groups.

All articles published on the site are illustrated with graphics. The imagery used on the site includes stock photos, political cartoons, meme imagery, photos taken from social media, and photoshopped graphics. Mostly, the imagery is provocative, and in conjunction with the texts of the articles, it is used to amplify the emotional responses that readers have to the site’s content.

The articles analyzed in this chapter were chosen from an initially larger set of approximately 40 articles, which was made by gathering PDF copies of all the articles

present on the front page of the *Partisaani.com* website on 21 September 2021. This set was narrowed down to include only articles that were thematically pertinent to our research questions and that included clear connections to other far-right media outlets.

Mobilizing Disgust: The Workings of Gendering, Sexualization, and Racialization

“The vagina is the perfect representation of the nature of females. An empty vessel, a hole, a void with no identity of its own. Without a man to fill her with his essence, she is as useless as a crabapple rotting on the sidewalk.” (Anti-defamation league 2018, 6.) This misogynous comment by an alt-right blogger illustrates the disgust-laden quality of the rhetoric of the manosphere. The writer suggests that without a vagina, a woman is nothing but a piece of garbage comparable to feces. It is not uncommon to belittle women in the manosphere and claim that a woman has no value without her counterpart, a man.

Misogyny is also a common characteristic of online right-wing or radical-right political discussion forums (Sundén and Paasonen 2018; Saesma 2020; Horsti and Saesma 2020; Saesma, Karkulehto, and Varis 2020). However, women are not the only targets of loathing, contempt, and disgust. In what follows, we present cases found on *Partisaani.com* where misogyny is intertwined with other reactionary ideologies, particularly racism and homo- and transphobia. We also discuss climate denialism as an ideology that draws from loathing the others.

By closely reading articles published on the site, we wish to demonstrate that disgust is one of its *modus operandi*. We aim to show how disgust is produced and performed using words and visual juxtapositions that are purposefully derogatory, value-laden, and offensive. Exaggeration, distortion of facts, and misinformation are utilized in portraying the other as abject. In doing so, the abject is differentiated from ‘us’ as a norm. This supports Nussbaum’s suggestion about the relationship between the stigmatization and humiliation of individuals and characterizing the others as having less moral worth (cited in Moore 2016, 7.5).

Holy Heteronormativity and Its Filthy Others – the Workings of Homophobia and Transphobia

Hegemonic understanding about the connectivity between sex, gender, and sexuality is easily interpreted as evidence of the immutability of the category of sex and acceptable ways of ‘doing’ gender that conforms to the heterosexual matrix (Moore 2016, 1.4). This traditional understanding of the gender system as a rigid and hierarchical bipolar system based on strict heterosexuality is the fundamental basis of extreme nationalism that builds on reproducing the white nation, ethnonationalism, and white supremacy. Within this understanding of gender and sexuality celebrated in neoconservative movements, such as the “anti-gender” movement, the fundamental premise is a hetero-patriarchal ideology in which the two sexes complement each other but are simultaneously hierarchically organized: the man is superior to the woman, whose main responsibility is to take care of reproduction both in the family and the nation by breeding.¹ Everything that is considered in opposition to this hetero-patriarchal regime, understood as ‘natural’ and ‘holy,’ is doomed wrong and filthy. Thus, it is not

only women's rights and gender equality that are understood as threats to the system. Also – or even more so – the prominent emergence of and the demand of rights to sexual minorities and gender-non-binary people are seen as a menace.

An article published on *Partisaani.com* on 18 September 2021, titled “A Swedish gay priest refuses to join hetero couples in marriage” (Partisaani 2021b), illustrates how liberal values are discordant with the ideology promoted on the website. The article reveals an openly gay priest whose name and parish are also mentioned; the priest announced that he would not marry hetero couples, thus wishing to amend public discussion and demand that the church not consecrate priests who think homosexuals are inferior to heterosexuals. In Sweden, priests may refuse to marry gay couples, so some priests demand the same right to refusal regarding hetero couples.

This brief article is accompanied by a photo collage of two images: a wedding picture of a white young heterosexual couple and a clownish image of a middle-aged man sporting a priest's garment and wearing makeup. The couple in the wedding picture looks happy and healthy, and the bride is wearing a traditional white wedding dress that signifies innocence and purity (Rossi 2011). There is a thick, bright-red cross drawn over this happy image. The image of the priest, in comparison, is an amateurish, blurry quickshot of a middle-aged man, obviously an enlargement from another photo, complete with messy cropping. The caption in its entirety reads “[the name of the priest] on the right. He is really a priest.” Juxtaposing these two photographs may arouse disgust in those who have a strongly negative attitude toward LGBTQIA rights because the neat and tidy wedding picture is inconsistent with the picture of the priest, who is represented as a clumsy and clowning rainbow person. This juxtaposition seems to highlight a certain moral superiority associated with heterosexuality compared to dubious homosexuality.

The laconic article offers only hints to arouse disgust in readers, who seem to take the bait. This discussion demonstrates how mobilizing people with affects works in practice. In a suitable context, just the simple caption “He is really a priest” triggers readers to have strong reactions, such as via the comment that suggests he is not a real priest but “a false priest of the church of Satan.” In the comments, disgust is the mobilizing force incited by affective references to contamination and slurs that emphasize the allegedly deviant quality of homosexuality and bolster heteronormativity. The readers consider the priest's announcement a misapprehension that is “as hallucinatory as Greta [Thunberg] and other people with climate anxiety” and “an example of how the Christian church is polluted by the followers of Lucifer.” Thus, the gay priest is interpreted as a polluted and misled loser who even “looks crazy.” He is, in many ways, an abject to the normalcy of ‘us.’

In the comments, the priest is called a ‘faggot,’ emphasizing his alleged abnormality. Two discussants who comment on the article claim that no healthy person or hetero couple would want this man to be their wedding priest. In one comment, we are reminded that certain people, such as fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, slanderers, and cheaters, are not welcome to the Kingdom of God. The longest comment in this discussion starts with asserting that “the aim of matrimony is to create a family” and that “a family consists of a father, a mother, and children,” thus expressing a conservative attitude and echoing the discourse of the anti-gender movement that opposes what it refers to as “gender ideology,” women's reproductive rights, and LGBTQIA rights.

The article under discussion is based on an article published in the Swedish tabloid *Expressen*, which is based on an article published by the Russian *Sputnik News*. It is noteworthy that, whereas Sputnik International describes itself as “a global news agency keeping you updated on all the latest world news 24/7,” many media professionals and experts in Russian politics have taken a cautious view of this site. Independent news outlets, such as *Suomen Kuvalehti* (Kivioja 2015), describe it as a propaganda site maintained by the Russian state. It is also worth noting that *Sputnik News* employs a former *Breitbart* reporter (Gray 2017).

Both the article itself and the comments it spawned are tinged with disgust. It could be interpreted that disgust is both the underlying affect that motivated the publishing of the article and the affect that it has produced. However, while the commentators distinguish themselves from the priest whom they describe as a “dirty freak,” they also seem drawn to the object of their scorn. They appear to feel the urge to comment on his actions and remind others about his inferiority just because they are given the possibility to loathe him. As Ahmed (2014, 84) suggests, it is hard not to take another look at something that disgusts us. To apply Ahmed’s theory, people are driven by the opposite impulses of desire and disgust. In this case, the strengthening of the orientation toward and away from the figure of the priest as an object of disgust may make the commentators feel that the object – this man – has a grip on them through their disgust. They may, then, because they recognize this fascination, feel the need to express an opposite affect, a strong disgust, and thus emphasize their moral superiority to this ‘fallen priest.’

Besides homosexuals, trans people are also seen as threatening holy matrimony and the sacred gender order. They do not neatly fit into the categories of men and women constructed by transphobic online commentators; thus, they, too, are doomed as unnatural and abject.

The next article we analyze reports on a fine imposed on a blogger who was mocking a German trans politician. This article, “Germany: 24,000€ fine for mocking a tranny politician,” published in *Partisaani* on 13 September 2021 under the tag ‘decay culture’ (Partisaani 2021c), was originally published in Free West Media (2021). The word ‘tranny’ is a derogatory, insulting term for trans people. This article mocks a trans woman who is an active politician in the Green Party (*Die Grünen*) – thus already poisoned by ‘wrong,’ multiculturalist ideology to start with (about the green-leftist traitors of the nation, see Saaresma and Tulonen 2020).

This article begins by provocatively claiming in a satirical tone that “it is not allowed to mock politicians in the free and democratic West.” It then observes that a German blogger was imposed a 24,000 euro fine for mocking the “Green party tranny member of Parliament and two other ‘women;” the word women was put in quotation marks to emphasize the alleged unnaturalness of their gender. The blogger wrote that this woman is the object of ridicule in German politics. It is also claimed that “these three trannies should be placed as warnings on a cigarette packet.” The repetition of the derogatory word ‘tranny’ demonstrates how the power of the politics of naming discussed in trans studies (Halberstam 2018) can be used for negative and even violent purposes.

In the picture that illustrates the article, a skinny woman with long hair looks like she is about to say something. The caption reads, “[The name of the MP] Nobody laughs at them without punishment.” The disparaging of the MP and her looks continues in the comments. In all the comments, there is moral and aesthetic disapproval

of this person who does not fit into the naturalized category of a woman and who is then made abject, an object of scorn, something that does not belong to 'us,' that violates 'our' norms with their existence, and whose existence and value as a woman must be denied. Freedom of speech is mocked in the title of the article, and commentators continue it. Again, in this discussion, the alleged 'freakiness' of the protagonist of the article refers to her disgusting characteristics and abjectness. Again, it could be interpreted that the writers tackle to distance themselves from her by portraying a sense of moral superiority, yet they are also intrigued.

Again, the complex and paradoxical quality of disgust as an affect that simultaneously entralls and nauseates is perceptible. Many commentators loathe a contemporary society that demands equal treatment of all, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Not surprisingly, the so-called value liberals are seen as the culprits of this moral decay associated with the visibility of trans people, who are then referred to and described as disgusting objects, feces, and vermin.

Circulating Suggestive Photos – Racism Enacted

Partisaani.com frequently publishes articles that report on violent and sexual crimes. These articles are, without exception, focused on the alleged perpetrators of the crimes who, due to the ideologically biased curation (i.e., cherry-picking) of the contents of the site, are always racialized as non-white. As racialized others, they are portrayed as either political enemies or otherwise abject. Many articles use misleading and unrelated imagery to further spin their narrative and strengthen the negative emotional responses evoked in a reader.

One example of this can be found in an article that covers the reported promise of German foreign minister Heiko Maas to 'bring in' 70,000 Afghan refugees after the Taliban attack on Afghanistan in Spring 2021. The article has an image of a plane full of male refugees supposedly fleeing Afghanistan under Taliban rule (Partisaani 2021d). This image is used in the article to build a narrative according to which refugees are mostly males who abandon their families in crisis zones and seek only to exploit the welfare of their target nations.

The narrative of the 'cowardly' refugee males allegedly fleeing from their responsibilities, protecting their women and nation, is often used by anti-immigration and far-right actors who wish to frame asylum seekers as having dishonorable motivations (see, e.g., Maasilta and Nikunen 2018, eds.). This connects to another racist narrative, also spread by *Partisaani.com*, in which male refugees are framed as predisposed to commit crimes, often of a sexual nature. The article is labelled on the site with numerous tags that relate to sexual violence and other violent crimes, despite the article having no connection to these topics. This narrative, arbitrarily strengthened by the use of false tags, also connects to the conservative and far-right narrative where white males have a duty to protect white females from the racialized 'invaders' (see e.g. Saresma 2018) that in this article are represented as the male refugees sitting on the plane.

The photo used in the article dates back to 2018, and the refugees shown in it are being returned from Turkey to Afghanistan, not fleeing from Afghanistan to Germany. The same image was circulated in a similarly misleading way on various social media platforms during the recent crisis in Afghanistan, with many of those who shared the image being especially outraged at the perceived gender disparity of refugees (McKenzie 2021).

A similar use of misleading and provocative imagery can be found in an article that reports a violent incident of street crime in Italy in September 2021 (Partisaani 2021e). In its article, *Partisaani* cites a version of the news story published by *Breitbart* (Zindulka 2021), which cites the original article on the subject published in the Italian news outlet *Il Mattino* (2021). The *Breitbart* article is faithful to the original story published by *Il Mattino*. A comparative reading of the articles published by *Partisaani* and *Breitbart* showed significant similarities between them. Every paragraph of the *Partisaani* version of the story has an almost identical counterpart in the *Breitbart* article, and it appears that the article is an abbreviated and simplified translation of *Breitbart's* version, accompanied by a different image.

The image used in the version of the story published by *Partisaani* depicts a hooded black person against a pitch-black background with his back turned to the camera, wielding a hidden blade. The image is obviously staged, and a reverse image search shows it is a photo that originates from a stock photo site called WallsHeaven (2021).

Partisaani uses similar staged photos in other articles dealing with racialized crime as well. For example, another commonly used stock photo depicts a close-up of a white female's mouth being forcibly shut by a black hand. A reverse image search revealed that this image has been used in several articles published in *Partisaani* and was even used on the website of the now-defunct *Kansallinen Vastarinta* [*National Resistance*] (Partisaani 2021f; Partisaani 2021g; Kansallinen Vastarinta 2019, 2020).

The use of these suggestive photos not connected to the events that the articles describe can be interpreted as an effort to arouse in the audience suspicion, hatred, and disgust toward racialized others. This is an enactment of the politics of fear (Wodak 2015). It is suggestive that countless invaders are coming from the outside and will endanger 'our' safety and threaten 'our' ways of life.

Anti-Semitism and Accusations of Rape and Pedophilia – Perceived Enemies Framed as Racialized, Perverted Criminals

The open anti-semitism on *Partisaani.com* is part of the continuum of disgust and loathing that supporters of radical-right ideologies feel toward practitioners of other religions, racialized as non-white and contrasted with white Christianity. Historically, a stereotypical representation of Jews as disgusting, referring to their appearance, religion, and behavior, has been circulated in Christian Europe. Anti-Semitism as a repulsion for and discrimination against Jewish people has functioned performatively throughout the centuries and culminated in the Holocaust.

This aversion, in the form of anti-semitism, is still alive and well in the far-right sphere. An example can be found in a *Partisaani* article that reports on a recent surge of child-sex lawsuits filed against Jewish institutions based in New York (Partisaani 2021h). The article is based on one originally written by the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Shalev and Rockart 2021), and, for the most part, *Partisaani's* reporting remains faithful to the original version. However, some key parts of the article are omitted, such as the statistics stating that thousands of lawsuits have been filed against Catholic institutions. However, *Partisaani's* article notes that the Boy Scouts of America were served with approximately 1,000 lawsuits. Regarding this, Partisaani states that "little boys were raped for years after the organization began to accept gays as Boy Scout troop leaders." This added homophobic implication would suggest that leaving out the information about Catholic institutions as representatives of 'our' Christian

values was a strategic choice and that *Partisaani* consciously cherry-picked the information from the article that best suited its ideological motives.

The article comes with an image depicting a rabbi and two small children and entices affective reactions. The rabbi is drawn in a traditionally antisemitic caricatural style with a sly expression and grotesquely exaggerated facial features, and the image seems intended to represent the rabbi as a sexual predator. The same image was also used by the Finnish far-right media outlet *Magneettimedia* as part of an antisemitic article similarly connecting rabbis and pedophilia. *Magneettimedia*'s article is itself based on a piece published by the Canadian far-right news site *Rebel News* (Pike 2016). It can be concluded that this imagery is repeated time and again to incite feelings of repulsion to a group of people who have been and continue to be stigmatized and labelled as the disgusting other.

Aggressive and malicious articles that target the political opponents of *Partisaani* are also common on the site. These articles aim to direct negative attention to activist groups, political parties, and politically active individuals that the site actively frames as its political enemies. Those whom the site deems as its political enemies are often connected with highly negative topics in a misleading way, or otherwise reported in a way that arouses the negative a reader's emotions toward them (Partisaani 2021i). For example, following the #punkstoo campaign, in which many cases of sexual abuse within the punk scene were uncovered and brought to public discussion, *Partisaani* exploited the phenomenon to arbitrarily label the punk festival Puntala Rock as a "rape festival" (Partisaani 2021j) and misleadingly frame individuals from the scene as having "defended pedophiles" (Partisaani 2020).

The 'pedophilia' tag is extensively used by the site to label numerous articles that cover the LGBTQIA community (Partisaani 2021k) and the punk scene (Partisaani 2021m), regardless of their actual contents, often in cases where there is absolutely no connection to the topic. One instance where the term 'pedophilia' is arbitrarily used can be found in an article that is based on nothing but hearsay on social media, which warns readers of a "dark-skinned" pedophile that has been spotted in Tampere and advises readers to form street patrols (Partisaani 2021l). The article is used to scare readers and evoke negative emotions to mobilize them to take to the streets to fight.

The aforementioned are examples of aggressive reporting, which is not a new phenomenon in the sphere of extremist activism and communication. It belongs to the continuum of aggressive targeting of political opponents, which often utilizes negative affects, such as disgust, resentment, and fear (Wodak 2015; Saresma 2018), and is based on racist and homophobic prejudices that often but not always intertwine with misogyny.

Conclusion: Performing Othering with Disgust

An examination of the uses of populist rhetoric and the performativity of affect is increasingly important in the contemporary societal situation, where politics is polarized into the radical right and the value liberal left. Concentrating on affects, and especially on the mobilizing forces of hatred, disgust, and fear, our article continues the research on negative or harmful emotions (Kivimäki, Kolehmainen, and Sumiala 2010, 4). Its additional value lies in the systematic examination of right-wing populist rhetoric as it becomes manifest in the corpus of text and images of the website *Patriotti.com*.

In our analysis, we aimed to illustrate how these textual and visual discursive representations incite and use affects, such as performative disgust, to mobilize people. Affects are used as ammunition in the escalating ideological struggle in social media. Our analysis, from the perspective of affects and particularly disgust, focused on an extreme right-wing website, *Partisaani.com*, and its intertextual references and concrete connections with other far-right sites.

We demonstrated how disgust functions as both the fundamental affect motivating the publication of selected news stories that present ‘the others’ as revolting and how it aims to mobilize readers to experience affects and even to take aggressive action against these others. Disgust is a powerful mode of disapprobation that fulfils ideological objectives: helped by disgust and the connotations of purity and contamination, superiority, and inferiority, social order is reinforced and reproduced (Moore 2016, 6.2) on *Patriootti.com*. The rhetoric used may be interpreted as hate speech that aims to destabilize societal order and silence certain individuals and groups, preventing them from participating in political discourse, and thus weakening the democratic system (Saaresma et al. 2020).

Disgust is often routinely expressed in debates on divisive social issues, such as racism, and the expression, incitement, and management of emotions “play an essential part in the crafting of public morality and reproducing social hierarchies” (Pantti 2016, 364). Interestingly, this mediated morality, with disgust as its driving force, is used in defining and maintaining boundaries between ‘us’ and others,’ no matter whether the ‘us’ is anti-immigration-minded people, as in this chapter, or those in solidarity with asylum seekers, as is the case in Pantti’s article.

The paradoxical character of disgust, as Sara Ahmed points out, is in line with the website’s insistence on focusing so heavily on violent, graphic, and overall negatively charged themes and content. There seems to be an attraction or even fascination toward the others who are constructed and described as disgusting. It almost seems obsessive how such reprehensible phenomena as pedophilia or rape are dealt with repeatedly, and how certain groups and individuals are compared to vermin and feces and, in doing so, described as disgusting.

As we showed, both in *Partisaani.com* article texts and in the discussion section, disgust is the modus operandi of rhetoric. It also functions to distance the allegedly repulsive ‘other’ from the pure and morally superior ‘us.’ In the examples we analyzed, gender, sexual orientation, and race became the basis of contempt and loathing targeted at the deviations of normative identity positions: whiteness, maleness, masculinity, and cis-gender heterosexuality. Additionally, reactionary ideologies attached to these social categories, namely misogyny, racism, homophobia, islamophobia, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, etc., intersect. What connects the use of these ideologies on the transnational web of (fake) news sites like this is the way disgust is harnessed to position the ‘others’ as repulsive, dirty, and disgusting. The presumed evil nature or moral inferiority of others threatens ‘our’ purity by making visible the vulnerability of the allegedly normal gender, sexual, and racial order. Thus, badness, immorality, and corruption are assigned to that other, who is sexually or racially debased.

The opposition of immigration and multiculturalism, the emphasis on the homogeneity of the white nation, and racism in the form of disgust directed at other or “wrong” ethnicities are at the heart of nationalist ideology. Related to these tenets is the idea of a woman as the embodiment of a nation and a man as the protector of a woman and a nation. In this misogynist patriarchal ideology reproduced via

heterosexual monogamy, a woman is a pure and virtuous emblem of a nation worthy of protection and admiration, and a man has unquestioned authority. No other gender or other sexualities are tolerated.

The far-right ideology is, besides drawing from male supremacy, based on the idea of white supremacy. On the website analyzed in this chapter, another focal issue is that of ‘race.’ Disgust is not only directed at non-heterosexual or non-cis-gender people but experienced and expressed repulsion expands so that feared and loathed characteristics are projected onto other vulnerable groups from whom the dominant group – white heterosexual men – wishes to distance itself. The racialized ‘others’ coming outside ‘our’ nation and our culture are marked as faulty.

The dynamic of disgust drives misogyny, racism, and homophobia. Affective online communities are often formed around these repressive ideologies, built on articles combining a judgmental or sarcastic tone, a moralizing attitude, and excessively repugnant visual images. The message of these articles is strengthened by comments that repeat, echo, and fortify readers’ disgust and moral superiority. The collective dislike of or aversion toward the qualities of the ‘other’ who is interpreted as deviant and disgusting is the glue that sticks these communities together.

Our findings indicate that even locally acting far-right media outlets can have a plethora of connections with other local and international actors. Internationally affluent sites, such as *Breitbart*, have a well-documented interest in branching out their franchise internationally, and it seems that smaller far-right actors have also found that internationally sourced synergy is an efficient communication strategy for the dissemination of their ideology. While smaller media outlets, such as *Partisaani.com*, may not engage in explicit or publicly announced cooperation with other actors, it is clear that, to some extent, these sites work in tandem, as they share, redistribute, mimic, or become inspired by each other’s publications and try to direct readers deeper into the ever-growing nebula of the online far-right and its affective communities, where performing disgust toward those who have been othered is the driving force of affect-based mobilization.

Note

1. Anti-gender movement was originally founded in Catholic Christian circles, but it has been adopted by the populist radical right around Europe (Bellé and Poggio 2018; Kumar and Paternotte 2017; Saresma 2019).

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