Techno-cultural opportunities: the anti-immigration movement in the Finnish mediascape

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ABSTRACT Horsti’s article analyses how transformations in the media environment shaped the political success of the anti-immigration movement in Finland from 2003 to 2013. The qualitative textual analysis of blogs and mainstream media debates that relate to racism and the national populist Finns Party demonstrates how changes in the mediascape in general and in new media technology in particular have provided opportunities for the emerging anti-immigration movement. These changes facilitated the earlier development of the Finns Party but the fragmentation of online space later hindered the internal coherence of the movement and its integration into the populist party political family. In order to regain unity, the Finns Party performed the public scapegoating of individuals for racist speech, thus distancing itself from racism. Horsti shows that, rather than being isolated and marginal, the anti-immigration movement and the ‘uncivil’ public sphere overlap with traditional politics and the mainstream media.

KEYWORDS anti-immigration, Finns Party, journalism, mediascape, nationalism, populism, new media technology, racism, scapegoat mechanism

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

This ‘media manifold’ constructs a space of appearance, a new visibility by means of which awareness of the world unfolds. Roger Silverstone’s concept of ‘mediapolis’ covers well the complexity of the contemporary media environment. He addresses mediascape as a singular unit, but also recognizes

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1 Nick Couldry, Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice (Cambridge: Polity Press 2011), 220.

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‘the manifest fragmentation of the platforms and cultures of the global media’. This normative and descriptive notion of mediapolis includes an idea of connections and networks, namely, the multiple ways that the various separate platforms and cultures are connected.

Social researchers on prejudice need to consider these transformations and the rescaling of the mediapolis that crucially shape society and social relationships. The development of a networked public sphere also includes new openings for those who spread ‘uncivil’ ideologies of racist prejudice. Moreover, previous literature on the media’s role in the anti-immigration movement has focused on the gatekeeping function of the mainstream media but largely neglected new media technologies. One of the rare exceptions is Clare Bratten’s analysis of the French Front national’s use of websites and online chatrooms as a means to circumvent mainstream media’s often negative representations of the party. Thus, in order to understand fully the construction of prejudice in contemporary society, we need to examine the new opportunities afforded by particular media practices and platforms. This study aims to fill the gap in the existing literature on the connection between new media and the anti-immigration politics of nationalist populist parties.

As well as connecting people and society, new media technology also fragments, individualizes and polarizes communication. The social networks in online space are often closed or limited to like-minded individuals or groups. Many right-wing groups, such as the English Defence League, are known to use social media for their networking and organization. Furthermore, white supremacist and Islamophobic groups disseminate their ideologies online. In his analysis of Belgian right-wing websites, Bart

2 Roger Silverstone, Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis (Cambridge: Polity Press 2007), 31.
3 Antonis A. Ellinas, The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2010); Julianne Stewart, Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Bruce Horsfield, ‘Conclusions: power to the media managers’, in Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart and Bruce Horsfield (eds), The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis (Westport, CT: Praeger 2003), 217–37.
4 L. Clare Bratten, ‘Online zealotry: la France du peuple virtuel’, New Media & Society, vol. 7, no. 4, 2005, 517–32.
5 Zizi Papacharissi, ‘The virtual sphere: the Internet as public sphere’, New Media & Society, vol. 4, no. 1, 2002, 9–27.
6 Chris Allen, ‘Opposing Islamification or promoting Islamophobia? Understanding the English Defence League’, Patterns of Prejudice, vol. 45, no. 4, 2011, 279–94.
7 See, for example, Gavan Titley, ‘They called a war, and someone came: the communicative politics of Breivik’s ideoscape’, Nordic Journal of Migration Research, vol. 3, no. 4, 2013, 216–24; Liz Fekete, ‘The Muslim conspiracy theory and the Oslo massacre’, Race & Class, vol. 53, no. 3, 2012, 30–47; and Jessie Daniels, Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2009), 117–34.
Cammaerts concludes that the exposure in the mainstream media of racist speech and those who produce it, together with legal complaints, are important and fairly effective tools for countering racism.\(^8\)

Taking Cammaerts’s argument as a starting point, this article examines the mediated connections between mainstream media, online communities and political movements in the context of the heated immigration debate in Finland. The general public became aware of an anti-immigration movement in 2008 when blogger Jussi Halla-aho enjoyed electoral success as an independent candidate for the Perussuomalaiset (PS, Finns Party) list in the local elections in Helsinki.\(^9\) The nationalist populist PS made advances in the same elections throughout the country, and its success continued in the general elections of 2011 and 2015, when it became the third and then the second largest party in Finland. The political success of the PS connects with the relatively recent rise of nationalist populism in the Nordic countries, although its rhetoric is not as extremely xenophobic as that of the Danish People’s Party or the Swedish Democrats. The party can be defined as a populist radical-right party that mixes traditional conservatism and anti-establishment views. However, its core element, Finnish ethnic nationalism, connects it to other populist right-wing parties.\(^10\)

This study asks how the changing mediascape has shaped the development and rise of the anti-immigration movement in Finland in the context of nationalist populist party politics. By examining blogs, discussion sites and mainstream media coverage qualitatively, the article demonstrates how transformations in the mediapolis have created opportunities for the emerging Finnish anti-immigration movement in the early 2000s. However, subsequently, when the movement merged into the Finns Party, its social networking sites and online discussions also proved problematic for the creation of coherent programmatic messages. The PS and the anti-immigration faction within it have balanced racism and ‘recalibration’ on their journey to more mainstream politics in ways that have required intra-party political sacrifices. The mainstream exposure of online hate speech has put the racism of some PS party politicians on the public agenda, but it has not countered the anti-immigration movement in ways that many anti-racists hoped for. By sacrificing provincial individuals, the movement has grown more united and stronger.

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8 Bart Cammaerts, ‘Radical pluralism and free speech in online public spaces: the case of North Belgian extreme right discourses’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2009, 555–75 (571).

9 The English name of Perussuomalaiset (literally ‘Basic Finns’) was originally True Finns; since 2011, it has called itself the Finns Party in English.

10 David Arter, ‘The breakthrough of another West European populist radical right party? The case of the True Finns’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2010, 484–504 (485, 501–2).
The role of new media technology in the rise of the anti-immigration movement should not be taken as a sign of technological determinism. Rather, this analysis suggests a broader angle to understanding the complex connections of various social processes, including political participation, everyday racism, structural racism, changing technology, journalistic practice and new forms of spreading and interpreting mediated content.

Racism and new media

The dissemination of racism on websites and social media sheds a darker light on the generally widely held assumption that new media technology increases democracy and freedom of speech. However, claiming that some speech is injurious is not a simple matter ethically, as Judith Butler insightfully argues in her work on ‘excitable speech’. She points out that the core problem of injurious speech is the thinness of the line between the words and representations that wound and those that do not. Moreover, legal measures against hate speech can also draw attention to prejudiced agents spreading their ideology beyond like-minded social networks. And such attention by the general public can lend credibility to what might otherwise have been marginalized phenomena. This paradox of publicity has been well known and relevant even before the era of new media. Antonis Ellinas, for example, explains how the mainstream coverage of Le Pen and the Front national in France in the 1980s pushed the party to the centre ground. Despite the media exposure being critical of the party, it also increased the awareness and legitimacy of the Front national, and made immigration a mainstream political issue.

Bart Cammaerts discusses this paradox from a different angle in his analysis of racist Belgian websites. He argues that, in a globalized mediascape, the regulation of online content is difficult ethically, legally and technically. For him, an effective way to counter racism online is for mainstream media and civic actors to expose those who are disseminating it. By publicly shaming politicians and other public figures, extreme speech might cease to be appealing, and this may turn out to be effective in overcoming it. Especially when it exposes words that were intended for a closed network or for ideologues behind ‘cloaked websites’ that pretend to be neutral. However, focusing on extremist sites and extremist groups can create the impression that racism is located only in these ‘exceptional’ social spaces. As Gavan Titley argues, research on these sites must be integrated into a more fluid understanding of mediated communication since

11 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge 1997).
12 Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe*, 217–18.
13 Daniels, *Cyber Racism*, 117–34.
ideas and discourses are circulated and translated across trans-media environments.¹⁴

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

Background 1: restructuring of the Finnish media

This article connects two simultaneous transformations in Finnish public life since the 1990s: the restructuring of journalism and platforms of public debate, and the rise of an anti-immigration movement associated with the Finns Party. In the following the backgrounds to both will be discussed.

Digitalization and globalization have significantly transformed the media market, along with its production and consumption. For instance, in Finland in 2009, the readership of the traditionally strong newspaper market dropped 10 per cent since 1991.¹⁷ In their search for audiences, newspapers increased the number of their online forums for readers’ comments. The forums of the mainstream media providers were largely anonymous until about 2010 when most of their hosts began to regulate content through moderation, registration and identification of commentators.¹⁸ Debates

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¹⁴ Gavan Titley, ‘No apologies for cross-posting: European trans-media space and the digital circuitries of racism’, Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, 41–55 (51).
¹⁵ Graham Macklin, “‘Onward Blackshirts!’ Music and the British Union of Fascists”, Patterns of Prejudice, vol. 47, no. 4–5, 2013, 430–57; Ryan Shaffer, ‘The soundtrack of neo-fascism: youth and music in the National Front’, Patterns of Prejudice, vol. 47, no. 4–5, 2013, 458–82.
¹⁶ Les Back, ‘Aryans reading Adorno: cyber-cultural and twenty-first-century racism’, Ethnic and Racial Studies, vol. 25, no. 4, 2002, 628–51.
¹⁷ ‘Regular reading of newspapers has diminished’, May 2011, available on the English version of the Statistics Finland website at www.stat.fi/til/akay/2009/03/akay_2009_03_2011-05-17_tie_001_en.html (viewed 1 July 2015).
¹⁸ Kaarina Nikunen, Enemmän vähemmällä (Tampere: Tampere University Press 2011), 71–3, 77.
among professional editors and journalists escalated, resulting in the self-governing body Julkisen sanan neuvosto (Council for Mass Media) in Finland creating an addendum to the journalists’ guidelines for monitoring content generated by users in 2011. Journalists maintain that, on the one hand, online readers’ comments provide direct access to audiences, creating a sense of community among readers and providing journalists with important feedback and viewpoints. On the other hand, though, many journalists feel that commentary forums are ‘sewage’ and ‘vomit’, and the constant interaction with aggressive speech is oppressive.19

The tightening of guidelines for anonymity and moderation by the Finnish mainstream media in 2010 and after resulted in a decreasing number of comments in discussion threads.20 Based on my observation of the Finnish mediascape, discussions of news stories moved in three directions: towards more intimate, identified spaces, such as Facebook; towards more anonymous spaces in which comments were moderated after posting (such as Suomi24.fi and murha.info); and towards anonymous chat spaces provided by technology (such as Tor). News stories are copy-pasted into or linked to those discussion spaces and unregulated debate then flourishes. This development characterizes the typical trans-platform circulation of content in online spaces. Copy-pasting content, modifying, adding and translating it from one context to another is fundamental to the networked public sphere. Moreover, the architectures of discussion sites and social networking sites invite action and participation. The diffusion of news stories and the discussions they provoke on multiple platforms reflect what Yochai Benkler calls a folk-cultural production model: a more reflexive and participatory production of culture than the mass production model.21 A folk-cultural model, rather than a professionally polished model, is created through the active participation of people. Benkler stresses that the plasticity of digital objects improves the degree to which individuals can begin to produce a new folk culture.

This plasticity, and the practices of writing your own culture, then feed back into the transparency, both because the practice of making one’s own music, movie, or essay makes one a more self-conscious user of the cultural artefacts of others, and because in retelling anew known stories, we again come to see what the originals were about and how they do, or do not, fit our own sense of how things are and how they ought to be.22

19 Author’s interviews with two Uusi Suomi editors, 14 June 2011. See also Reeta Pöyhtäri, Paula Haara and Pentti Raittila, Vihapuhe sananvapautta kaventamassa (Tampere: Tampere University Press 2013), 164–7; and Nikunen, Enemmän vähemmällä, 71–3.
20 Pöyhtäri, Haara and Raittila, Vihapuhe sananvapautta kaventamassa, 176.
21 Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 2006).
22 Ibid., 299.
Benkler and others writing about the transformation of cultural production rarely refer to uncivil or nationalist populist groups in this context. But racist and anti-immigration groups communicate and produce their ‘culture’ within this same mediapolis, gaining strength in the opportunity structures it offers.

In general, the mainstream media in Finland have tended to cover immigration and ethnic minorities in problem-oriented frameworks in which the voices of the authorities dominate, giving little space for immigrants themselves to define their agendas and frames. Media monitoring studies conducted between 1999 and 2005 concluded that the Finnish media were ‘politically correct’ and lame in covering the issue of migration. However, more qualitative analysis demonstrated that mainstream publicity was divided between celebratory and accepting discourse in cases of suitable individuals and ethnicities, and threatening discourse in the case of others, particularly asylum-seekers. The Finnish mainstream media have avoided explicit racism. Extremist groups, as well as individuals, did not receive mainstream media attention between 1999 and 2005, although they had an online presence in various websites and blogs during those years.

Background 2: anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party

In the Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland, nationalist populist right-wing politics have achieved electoral success in recent years. Despite the differences between the parties and their origins, they all oppose immigration and minority rights, particularly those of Muslims. Moreover, the Nordic right-wing parties articulate these positions in the context of gender, sexuality and the welfare state in ways that resonate with the dominant self-image of these countries as being equal welfare societies. The parties depict immigrant cultures and values as

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23 Camilla Haavisto, ‘Conditionally One of “Us”: A Study of Print Media, Minorities and Positioning Practices’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Helsinki, 2011; Pentti Raittila and Susanna Vehmas, ‘Etnisyys ja rasismi sanomalehdissä 1999–2004: seurantatutkimusten yhteen vetoa ja arviointia’, in Pentti Raittila (ed.), Etnisyytä, rasismia ja dialogia sanomalehdissä ja Internetissä (Tampere: Tampere University Press 2005), 11–32.

24 Karina Horsti, Vierauden rajat: Monikulttuurisuus ja turvapaikanhakijat journalismissa (Tampere: Tampere University Press 2005); Karina Horsti, ‘De-ethnicized victims: mediatized advocacy for asylum seekers’, Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism, vol. 14, no. 1, 2013, 78–95.

25 Anna-Maria Pekkinen, Rasismia Internetissä: vierasvihaisen nettiaineiston kartoitus (Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto journalismin tutkimusyksikkö 2002).

26 Arter, ‘The breakthrough of another West European radical right wing party?’.

27 Hans-Georg Betz and Susi Meret, ‘Revisiting Lepanto: the political mobilization against Islam in contemporary Western Europe’, Patterns of Prejudice, vol. 43, no. 3–4, 2009, 313–34; Tjitske Akkerman and Anniken Hagelund, ‘“Women and children first!” Anti-immigration parties and gender in Norway and the Netherlands’, Patterns of Prejudice, vol. 41, no. 2, 2007, 197–217.
violent’, ‘patriarchal’ and ‘backward’, and claim that they threaten the liberal Nordic values of equality. This culturalization of the immigration debate focuses particularly on Muslims and it connects with the broader discursive shifts in Europe and beyond. Ferruh Yılmaz argues that the hegemony of the attitudes of right-wing parties on immigration is not just about discourse but also about ‘the redrawing of the political/social horizon in terms of culturally based political/social identities’. These parties have therefore been able to shift the notion of the incompatible Other to the political mainstream, making certain types of immigration ‘a social problem’. There is a danger that this hegemonic vision, in which ‘our values’ are threatened if ‘they’ enter and are granted cultural rights, can erode the fundamental principles of diversity and democracy. Nevertheless, the discourse of ‘protecting women and gays’ from Muslims, which appears in some (though not all) Finnish anti-immigration rhetoric, does not prevent those who use it from holding overtly misogynist and homophobic attitudes.

The Finns Party is not on the traditional neoliberal right as its core message is welfare chauvinism. However, the party combines this with nationalism, anti-immigration and Eurosceptic agendas, all of which are important for populist European right-wing parties. Through its ethnonationalist position, which understands ‘Finnishness’ as racial and cultural, the Finns Party connects with broader Nordic and European right-wing nationalist politics. In 2011 the party won 39 seats in Finland’s 200-seat parliament and became the third largest party in the country after the Conservatives and Social Democrats. In 2015 the Finns Party increased its vote and became the second largest party in parliament, with 38 seats, and for the first time entered the government of 14 ministers with 4 ministers. The party has wide electoral support in municipalities across the country although a lot of its popularity rests on its verbally talented chairman Timo Soini. Based on an analysis of party institutionalization, David Arter and Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen conclude that, while the Finns Party is a typical entrepreneurial party with a long-term charismatic leader, it rests on a firm foundation. It has a core constituency of male voters (70 per cent of supporters are male) and is highly cohesive in the legislative arena.

Nine of the elected Finns Party members of parliament in 2011 were explicitly against immigration. Six of them signed the anti-immigration

28 Ferruh Yılmaz, ‘Right-wing hegemony and immigration: how the populist far-right achieved hegemony through the immigration debate in Europe’, Current Sociology, vol. 60, no. 3, 2012, 368–81 (369).
29 Tuija Saresma, ‘Miesten tasa-arvo ja kaunapiuhe blogikeskustelussa’, in Hannele Harjuinen and Tuija Saresma (eds), Sukupuoli nyt! Purkamisia ja neuvotteluja (Jyväskylä: Kampus Kustannus 2012), 13–34.
30 David Arter and Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen, ‘Measuring the extent of party institutionalisation: the case of a populist entrepreneur party’, West European Politics, vol. 37, no. 5, 2014, 932–56.
election programme ‘Nuiva vaalimanifesti’ before the 2011 elections. The key figure of this anti-immigration faction is Jussi Halla-aho, a Ph.D. in linguistics and a Helsinki city councillor who achieved unprecedented electoral success in the municipal elections of 2008 and 2012, in the parliamentary elections of 2011 and in the European elections of 2014. In the first elections in 2008 he stood as an independent candidate on the Finns Party list, but he signed up as a full member of the party in 2010. Halla-aho is the second most well-known member of the Finns Party after Timo Soini, and was the most googled Finnish politician in 2009. Halla-aho arrived in the political arena via the unconventional path of blogging, being a prime example of the new politics in the transforming mediascape. His blog attracted a wide online following that culminated in the establishment of the anti-immigration discussion space Hommaforum.

Halla-aho and all the other signatories of the anti-immigration programme were new members of parliament, advocating the recognition of the importance of a ‘new’ or ‘repressed’ social issue, namely immigration. The anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party have been successful in framing immigration in cultural terms and in taking ownership of the topic. This has made them as political agents more central and relevant in Finnish politics. Accordingly, they have been able to present themselves as ‘independent’ from traditional politics in ways that resonate with the mobilization of right-wing populism elsewhere in Europe, at a time when people have distanced themselves from mainstream parties and party politics in favour of new political movements. The Finns Party appeared to be ‘offering an alternative’ on the Finnish political landscape, since the larger parties were already well known to the general population and had become more alike in a culture of ‘Finnish-style consensus politics’. The three largest mainstream parties have taken turns in government without politics changing significantly.

**Research questions, materials and method**

The aim of this article is to examine how the transforming mediascape has shaped the development and rise of the anti-immigration movement in Finland in the context of nationalist populist party politics. In so doing, the study adds methodological, empirical and theoretical depth to research on the interplay between the media and nationalist populism in general. The analysis is divided into two interconnected sections. First, I analyse the

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31 The Finns Party election programme on immigration, ‘Nuiva vaalimanifesti MMXI’, is available online at www.vaalimanifesti.fi (viewed 2 July 2015). Three members of parliament also campaigned on anti-immigration (Tom Packalén, Reijo Tossavainen and Teuvo Hakkarainen).
32 Yılmaz, ‘Right-wing hegemony and immigration’, 371; Carlo Ruzza, ‘Populism and euroscepticism: towards uncivil society?’, *Policy and Society*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2009, 87–98.
33 Arter, ‘The breakthrough of another West European populist radical right party?’, 487.
connections between mainstream media, online anti-immigration communities and the Finns Party more generally. I ask how the transformations in media have created technological and structural opportunities for the anti-immigration movement to organize itself and, later, to integrate into national populist politics in Finland. While the networked public sphere has clearly turned out to be an asset for the movement, it has also created problems for its internal cohesion and programmatic coherence. Second, in this context, I examine in more detail the specific problems that the new media environment has set for the recently developed political movement. A series of mediated debates around Finns Party racism online took place right after the 2008 electoral victory of Jussi Halla-aho. The public exposure to this kind of racist speech in online ‘echo chambers’, as Bart Cammaert has argued, shamed Finns Party members who were concerned about it harming the party’s hopes of respectability. I examine three cases of public debate about racist speech online in which mainstream attention pushed the Finns Party leadership to respond to accusations of intra-party racism.

My research has involved observation of the Finnish media landscape and the collection of different types of media materials from 2003 to 2013. The sources of the materials used in this article include the anti-immigration discussion site Hommaforum, the news sites of the mainstream newspaper Helsingin Sanomat and the public service broadcaster YLE, the blogs of Finns Party politicians involved in the racist speech scandals and the blog of the party chairman Timo Soini, the Finn Party’s political newspaper Perussuomalainen, and interviews with Finns Party politicians that were published in the mainstream media and in Perussuomalainen. I explain the genre, the social, political and cultural context of the materials used and the method of collection, as well as provide an analysis as the argumentation and discussion proceeds. Methodologically, this study falls into the cultural studies tradition, and aims to explain and interpret a cultural phenomenon, namely, the rising anti-immigration sentiment in Finland. The methods are based on virtual ethnography,34 and the close reading of texts. I analyse the architecture of the blogs and Hommaforum, paying attention to the structure, organization, connections and opportunities for participation. Virtual observation focuses on both inter- and intra-communication within the platform and between platforms.35 The construction of identities is of particular interest in this observation. In order to analyse the development of the anti-immigration movement in the new mediascape, I pay attention to the positioning of actors and the construction of identities.

34 Christine Hine, ‘Virtual ethnography: modes, varieties, affordances’, in Nigel Fielding, Raymond M. Lee and Grant Blank (eds), The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods (Los Angeles and London: Sage 2008), 257–71.
35 I follow the research ethics developed for online research by the Association of Internet Researchers. See Annette Markham and Elizabeth Buchanan, ‘Ethical decision-making and Internet research: recommendations from the AOIR Ethics Committee’, August 2012, available on the AoIR website at http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf (viewed 2 July 2015).
How does the architecture of platforms and the language used in the communication create certain identities and online communities?

Transformations in the media environment and anti-immigration sentiment

Without a specific political aim, Jussi Halla-aho began writing his blog *Scripta: Kirjoituksia uppoavasta lännestä* (Writings from the Drowning West) in 2003.\(^{36}\) The blog attracted a wide following and an active community of commentators who, later, in 2008, created a separate anti-immigration discussion forum named *Hommaforum*. Some 8,700 registered members have written about 1.5 million entries on the forum.\(^{37}\) In the early phase, Jussi Halla-aho’s blog invited discussion and comments and, thus, functioned according to the culture of the blogosphere where liveliness of debate and participation equals success. Halla-aho participated in the discussions with his readers. However, as the number of participants grew and the followers began to develop their own discussions, they all decided to set up a separate discussion platform, namely, *Hommaforum*. The technology involved offered more opportunities for structured discussion among a growing number of participants. Halla-aho’s interaction with the community became less regular, and his participation on *Hommaforum* is now only occasional. But discussions provoked by his blogs continue on the site where his blog texts are copy-pasted. Thus, after 2008, Halla-aho’s role in the anti-immigration community shifted towards being a more traditional and undisputed authority.

Due to the great number of entries on *Hommaforum*, it is impossible to read all of them. For this study, on the development of the movement, I have closely read the sections that discuss the role and meaning of the forum: *Homman nimi*, *Hommary* and *Hommawiki*. I have focused only on the material available for public viewing and excluded the members-only section of the site.\(^{38}\)

The materials on *Hommaforum* are produced more or less spontaneously within discussion threads on different topics. The mode of discussion falls between public and private communication. Some address a broad public audience and others engage in more private discussions that are nevertheless visible to all. Most *Hommaforum* commentators use pseudonyms. Many argue that they would be stigmatized in their working life if they revealed their participation on the site.\(^{39}\) Despite this, they are registered users and moderators can censor and ban unwanted content.

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36 Jussi Halla-aho, *Scripta*, available at [www.halla-aho.com/scripta](http://www.halla-aho.com/scripta) (viewed 2 July 2015). On 2 July 2015, the blog contained 391 entries.
37 *Hommaforum*, available at [http://cms.Hommaforum.org](http://cms.Hommaforum.org) (viewed 2 July 2015).
38 These methodological decisions are based on the ethical recommendations in Markham and Buchanan, ‘Ethical decision-making and Internet research’.
39 ‘Yleinen esittäytymsiketju’, 4 January 2009, on *Hommaforum* at [http://Hommaforum.org/index.php/topic,903.0.html](http://Hommaforum.org/index.php/topic,903.0.html) (viewed 2 July 2015).
Hommaforum has constructed a networked public of like-minded individuals, an imagined community that emerged out of the intersection of shared interests, technology and practices of sharing and discussing blogs and news. The discussion forum and the anti-immigration movement, broadly speaking, are examples of communities that have adopted strategies from new social movements, such as human rights and environmental activists. Hommaforum itself has the characteristics of a social movement. Its participants are connected through an online network and, based on their communications, members make distinctions that distinguish them from other social agents. Eventually, they construct a collective identity. This online community shares the assumption that immigration is a crucial issue in society as well as a unified perspective on the issue. The anti-immigration movement is male-dominated just like the Finns Party. However, whereas the Finns Party is particularly popular among the blue-collar working class, the anti-immigration debaters on Hommaforum tend to be more middle class. According to a linguistic study of Hommaforum, the participants are able to write in Finnish quite well, which means that they are reasonably well educated. While the members collaborate mostly anonymously and online, they have created a sense of belonging and identity that some members, such as Jussi Halla-aho, have transformed into more traditional political capital.

Language and language use are important in the construction of collective identities, and the formation of a distinct discourse has played a crucial role in the anti-immigration movement. Language is particularly interesting in this case since the network grew originally out of written online communication. The peculiar language and invented names for ‘us’ and ‘them’ highlight a sense of community and indicate group boundaries. The forum participants have developed a distinct sense of humour and manner of expression. They have invented words to describe themselves (netsit, nuivat) and those they oppose. In their linguistic universe, the national daily Helsingin Sanomat is called Pravda, referring to a belief that the paper is dominated by ‘elitist’ multicultural ideology. Similarly, other mainstream media are considered to be against the nuivat. Immigrants are called rikastuttajat (enrichers), ridiculing the kind of discourse that argues that migration ‘enriches’ Finnish society. Moreover, Hommaforum participants use the term ‘enrichment’ as a...

40 Danah Boyd, ‘Social network sites as networked publics: affordances, dynamics, and implications’, in Zizi Papacharissi (ed.), A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites (London and New York: Routledge 2011), 39–58.
41 Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, Social Movements: An Introduction (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell 2006), 20–1.
42 Arter and Kestilä-Kekkonen, ‘Measuring the extent of party institutionalisation’.
43 Leena Vänni, ‘Yhteisöllisyyden ilmeneminen verkkokeskustelussa: Tarkastelussa yhteiskuntakrittisen keskustelufoorumin sanasto’, Master’s thesis, University of Vaasa, 2009.
44 Della Porta and Diani, Social Movements, 106, 187.
code word for rape, in connection to the recurring trope ‘Muslim rape’ that circulates in global counter-jihadist and Islamophobic networks. Authorities involved in immigration issues and those labelled ‘multiculturalists’ are the main targets of Hommaforum’s ridicule. The words kukkahattutäti (flowerhat women) and mokuttajat (multicult) are examples of new words that members have invented to describe those in favour of multiculturalism. Like the term ‘flowerhat women’ indicates, much of the anti-immigration discourse in this male-dominated networked public sphere overlaps with misogyny and anti-feminism.

However, the most successful discursive manoeuvre has been the coining of the term maahanmuuttokriittisyys (immigration criticism). Jussi Halla-aho and Hommaforum commentators define themselves as ‘immigration critics’, claiming that their position is not racist but ‘critical’. This has opened up space for people who do not feel comfortable in identifying with extreme groups of white supremacists or neo-Nazis. The adjective maahanmuuttokriittinen (critical of immigration) and the noun maahanmuuttokriitikko (immigration critic) entered the mainstream vocabulary in the national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat in 2008, first in opinion pieces like editorials, letters to the editor and columns. However, the term was soon taken up in regular journalistic language and began to appear without quotation marks in other genres, such as news and current affairs articles.

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

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

45 Fekete, ‘The Muslim conspiracy theory and the Oslo massacre’.
46 Since 1990, ‘immigration criticism’ appeared 55 times in different forms in the main national daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. The first appearance was in 2005 in a letter to the editor. In 2008, the term appeared 6 times in the domestic section of the newspaper; in 2009, 20 times; in 2010, 78 times; in 2011, 77 times; and in 2012, 20 times.
the architecture and the functions of Hommaforum reward committed participants. The most active and core members are marked visually, offering them prestige and a label of expertise.

The sense of community that emerged in synergy between online technology, architectures of the online spaces, language use, commitment of certain key people and the practices of moderating participation was crucial for the political success and the agenda-setting power that followed the anti-immigration movement’s initial vernacular phase from 2003 to 2008. Halla-aho’s Scripta blog constructed the architecture of communication that invited and encouraged others to share their views. Jussi Halla-aho, who is also ironically called ‘the Master’ among Hommaforum members, provided an example, and his writings generated a direction for discussion. He was also seen as a brave individual who dared to speak about immigration in ways that were generally considered ‘politically incorrect’. Halla-aho recognized the sense of belonging and the energy that his blog following created. In an interview with Perussuomalainen magazine, he explained how the sense of community served as the main force that pushed him into a political career: ‘I happened to be in the right—or wrong—place at the right time. I ran for [the seat] in the 2007 parliamentary elections because my blog readers encouraged me, and that’s where I am [now].’

Mainstream media attention, although critical and negative, often facilitates the success of new political populism. In the case of Jussi Halla-aho, mainstream journalism did not recognize the movement around him before 2008. This, however, did not prevent him from reaching a constituency. After his electoral success in 2008, traditional news values required the mainstream media to cover the political newcomer, a consequence of success that was repeated in similar cases of populist politics elsewhere.

The landslide victory in the municipal elections of 2008 raised the profile of the anti-immigration movement on the mainstream news agenda, and key figures on Hommaforum were invited on to talk shows and other mainstream media spaces as representatives of the new movement. Both Hommaforum members and the mainstream media framed the movement as a ‘citizens movement’, characterized as the voice of the silenced common man. The first appearance of Hommaforum on a public television talk show increased the number of visitors to the forum so quickly that it temporarily crashed the site. This was highlighted as a key event in Hommaforum’s own timeline. Halla-aho himself became the most googled politician in Finland in 2009. Although the publicity was often negative or critical of his ideas, his electoral

47 Jussi Halla-aho interviewed in Heli-Maria Wiik, ‘Kritiikki ei keikutaa Halla-ahon laivaa’, Perussuomalainen, 14 April 2013, available on the Suomen Uutiset website at www.suomenuutiset.fi/kritiikki-ei-keikutaa-halla-ahon-laivaa (viewed 2 July 2015). Translations from the Finnish, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.
48 Ellinas, The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe.
49 Pippa Norris, Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), 9.
success continued; in the national elections of 2011, in which he ran as a full Finns Party candidate, he received the second highest number of votes in his constituency in Helsinki. His visibility in the media was largely based on his provocative blog writings from 2006 to 2008. His political opponent, the Vihreät Naiset (Green Women’s Association), was the first to file charges against him for committing an offence in his blog, when he sarcastically hoped that ‘the right kinds of women will be caught in the claws of the predators who randomly select their victims’.  

The ‘right kinds of women’, he went on to explain, were ‘green-leftist world reformers and their voters’. While investigating the report, the police decided to press charges because of evidence found in another blog. This resulted in mediatized court proceedings in 2009, and to a legal process that ended in 2012 when the Finnish Supreme Court fined Halla-aho for violating the right to free exercise of religion and for inciting racism against an ethnic group. At that time he was a Finns Party MP and the chairman of the parliamentary Hallintovaliokunta (Administrative Committee). Eventually, he had to resign from the latter position.

In our analysis of the interplay between social media and mainstream media in relation to the immigration debate in Finland, Kaarina Nikunen and I concluded that the mainstream media accepted the polarization of agendas that the anti-immigration movement offered, the one that constructed a division between the ‘multiculturalist’ authorities and the ‘immigration critics’. Consequently, while the mainstream media coverage was technically balanced, it failed to cover the debate in ways that reflected cosmopolitan sensibility. Juxtaposing official authorities with the anti-immigration movement, the media ignored both minority actors and multiculturalist advocates.

**Public debate on racist speech acts**

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

50 ‘Jussi Halla-ahon raiskauskirjoituksesta tutkintapyyntö’, Vihreä Lanka, 19 November 2008.
51 Karina Horsti and Kaarina Nikunen, ‘The ethics of hospitality in changing journalism: a response to the rise of the anti-immigrant movement in Finnish media publicity’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2013, 489–504.
| Politician                          | Online presence                                                                 | Background                                                                 | Racism controversy                                                                                     | Political outcome of controversy                                        |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jussi Halla-aho                   | Blog Scripta since 2003                                                        | Ph.D. in linguistics                                                      | 2006 and 2008: blog posts resulted in legal proceedings in 2009–12                                      | 2012: forced to resign as chair of parliamentary Administration Committee |
| (Finns Party):                    | Hommaforum member Active open Facebook profile 2011                            | Teaching and research (but no permanent position) at the University of Helsinki | 2012: Supreme Court conviction for breach of religious sanctity and incitement to ethnic or racial hatred |                                                                          |
| City Council 2009                 |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| Finns Party member 2010           |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| MP 2011                           |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| MEP 2014                          |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| Teuvo Hakkarainen                 | Blog Teuvo Hakkarainen on Uusi Suomi news site since 2012                      | Basic education                                                          | 2011: racist remarks about Muslims and Black Finns, quoted by the mainstream press and in his blog 2013 | No legal proceedings but reproached by Finns Party leader Timo Soini      |
| (Finns Party):                    | Open Facebook profile                                                          | Saw mill entrepreneur                                                    |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| MP 2011                           |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| MP 2015                           |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| James Hirvisaari                  | Blog Finland Is the Country of Finns on Uusi Suomi news site since 2008        | Train engine driver                                                      | 2010: blog text resulted in conviction for incitement to ethnic or racial hatred in 2011                | 2012: reproached by the chair of the Finns Party Parliamentary Group      |
| (Muutos 2011):                    | Twitter and open Facebook profiles                                            | Gospel musician                                                          |                                                                                                        | 2013: expelled by Finns Party                                           |
| Municipal Council 2009            |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| Finns Party MP 2011–13            |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| Muutos 2011                       |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
| MP 2013                           |                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
The second part of the article focuses on three cases of public controversy concerning racist speech (see Table 1), and analyses how the public exposure of the racism of Finns Party politicians affected the internal dynamics of the party and the anti-immigration movement. Social media played a crucial role as racist gestures and utterances were originally shared and intended for members of these networked communities. However, political rivals and the mainstream media picked up on such racist utterances and gestures, and pressured the party leadership for a response. I identified the cases by searching the archive of the national daily Helsingin Sanomat using the keywords ‘perussuomalais*’ (Finns Party) and ‘rasis*’ (racism). After identifying them, I then searched for news stories connected to the cases on the news website of the national public service broadcaster YLE (yle.fi). In addition to these mainstream sources, I collected related entries from the party leader Timo Soini’s blog and the blogs of the three individual Finns Party politicians who were involved in the scandals.

The Finns Party leader Timo Soini has publicly kept his distance from the anti-immigration faction of the party, and has not participated in Homma-forum discussions. In his own blog, that is, in the discursive space he controls himself, Soini writes very little about immigration and avoids taking up the issue politically. His blog does not invite or allow comments from readers, a decision that keeps him at arm’s length from the blogosphere as such. Thus, rather than being a standard blog, Timo Soini’s ploki (blog in Finnish) is actually a website with an architecture that confirms his position as an unquestioned authority, a celebrity. Soini’s online presence is based on traditional authority and has little to do with open participation or decentralization.

However, Soini’s attitudes towards immigration appear indirectly, in the way he manages racist comments made by others in the party, and tolerates members who explicitly oppose immigration, as the analysis of the three cases of racism scandals will demonstrate. In 2008, when the Green Woman’s Association accused Jussi Halla-aho of publishing offensive comments in his blog, Soini wrote: ‘They challenged Halla-aho. Now, the challengers and the challenged one deal with the matter among themselves. I am not interfering more that I have already said.’ He actually did criticize the Green Women’s Association for ‘taking politics to court’ and for going after writings that were published in 2006, ‘years ago’. The following year, in relation to emerging mainstream concerns over Halla-aho’s blog, Timo Soini said in an interview that, if a party member were convicted in court for racist speech (for inciting ethnic or racial hatred), that person would be expelled from the party. This, however, did not happen although two members of parliament — Jussi Halla-aho and James Hirvisaari — were later convicted and fined for racist speech.

52 Timo Soini, ‘Ajatuksia adventtina’, 30 November 2008, blog on Timo Soini ploki at http://timosoini.fi/2008/11/ajatuksia-adventtina (viewed 7 July 2015).
In 2011 Halla-aho was temporarily suspended from the parliamentary group because he had written on his open Facebook wall that ‘right now Greece needs a junta that would not have to worry about its own success, and could control the strikers and the rioters with tanks’. Timo Soini did not explicitly criticize or support Halla-aho; he stepped aside and acted as if neither he nor his party were directly involved. Moreover, he allowed Halla-aho to take up important positions such as the chair of the parliamentary Administrative Committee. Similarly, in 2012, Soini avoided saying anything particular about Halla-aho’s conviction for his earlier offensive remarks about the Green Women’s Association:

There is no reason for explanations in politics—your opponents will not believe you, your supporters will not need your explanations. I have said everything I have to say about Halla-aho’s fine conviction. . . . Today, I am going to focus on football, both live and on television.54

Here Soini downplays Halla-aho’s conviction by noting that the punishment was only a ‘fine’ and by quickly moving to his favourite leisure activity, football. Although he claimed that ‘he had said everything’, he had actually said nothing about the conviction in the Finnish mainstream media. In the twenty-six relevant news items from 2012, only one response to journalists by Soini was quoted: ‘This punishment is enough. Publicity is tough, ruthless, sometimes justified. I am not going to take this further.’ Here, again, he downplays the conviction (including it in a longer piece about football) and characterizes the dispute as being one between the media and Halla-aho.

While Timo Soini is the charismatic and undisputed leader of the Finns Party, he managed to avoid public leadership during the scandals about racist speech. He downplayed the crises and made the eventual court rulings look like the party’s own collective decisions. Rather than Soini, it was the parliamentary chairs of the Finns Party delegation who responded publicly to the media pressure when the controversies surfaced. Soini appears thereby to have outsourced the public debate on immigration and the party’s political programme on the issue to the anti-immigration faction led by Jussi Halla-aho.

Jussi Halla-aho was rarely far from the public eye during the racist speech scandals from 2009 to 2012, which coincided with the years of his growing electoral success. His conviction in 2012 and, more importantly, his dismissive comments about the Supreme Court that had found against him, led to political pressure on the Finns Party, prompting Halla-aho to resign his chairmanship of the Administrative Committee. His public persona veered between provocative figure and respectable leading Finns Party politician. As the key

53 ‘Halla-aho: Kreikkaan tarvittaisin sotilasjuntta’, Helsingin Sanomat, 14 September 2011.
54 Timo Soini, ‘Kuningas jalkapallo’, 9 June 2012, blog on Timo Soini ploki at http://timosoini.fi/2012/06/kuningas-jalkapallo-2 (viewed 7 July 2015).
55 Teija Sutinen, ‘Soini veti sanansa takaisin’, Helsingin Sanomat, 8 June 2012.
person of the anti-immigration movement, he also balanced his energy between the movement and the party. In a discussion thread in Hommaforum, he commented on the expulsion of MP James Hirvisaari from the party in 2013 after racism scandals:

We should remember the political realities and priorities. If we [anti-immigration Finns Party members] had slammed the door and left every time the leadership [of the party] did not please us, we would not be where we are now. And we are much further than we were some years ago.\(^6\)

The balancing act between the two groups has been tough for Halla-aho, but his extremely wide-ranging electoral support and his excellent education, as well as his ability to communicate his own views, have proved to be exceptional political capital and have protected him throughout the scandals.

After 2011, as Halla-aho became more careful in writing articles on different online platforms and his public profile shifted definitively from provocateur to respectable party member and politician, the mainstream search for crude racist remarks shifted from Halla-aho to other targets. In particular, two parliamentarians, James Hirvisaari and Teuvo Hakkarainen, became the central figures of recurring scandals. Hirvisaari was originally one of Halla-aho’s protégés who ended up misbehaving in parliament and publishing racist ideas in his blog. The parliamentary party temporarily suspended Hirvisaari, thereby demonstrating to other parties and the public that it did not approve of such racist speech. Simultaneously, however, Halla-aho and the anti-immigration faction showed solidarity with Hirvisaari by paying his penalty after he was convicted of incitement against an ethnic group in 2011. Nonetheless, unlike his mentor, Hirvisaari continued on the provocative road and, finally in 2013, he was expelled from the Finns Party. The final straw was his invitation to a well-known Finnish neo-Nazi to visit parliament, where he was photographed raising his arm in the ‘Hail Hitler’ salute inside the chamber. Subsequently, the neo-Nazi circulated the image on social media networks and it finally leaked to wider media.

Another MP, Teuvo Hakkarainen, was at the centre of continuous scandals because of his racist remarks both on social media and in his interviews with mainstream journalists. Hakkarainen’s hate speech, however, was never prosecuted, nor was he ever temporarily suspended from the parliamentary group. At the time of these controversies, both Hirvisaari and Hakkarainen were new and inexperienced in politics. They did not have much political experience at the local level before entering parliament, and they were not nationally known figures before the scandals. Nor had they held important positions within the Finns Party or in parliament.

\(^6\) Jussi Halla-aho, 20 April 2012, comment no. 766 on the thread ‘2012-04-17 Yle: Hirvisaari erotettiin eduskuntaryhmästä’ on Hommaforum at http://hommaforum.org/index.php/topic,69785.750.html (viewed 7 July 2015).
Following his strategy *vis-à-vis* Halla-aho’s scandals, Soini never remarked in his blog on the controversies concerning Hakkarainen’s and Hirvisaari’s anti-Muslim and racist comments. He mentioned Hirvisaari only after the party had decided to expel him: ‘The Hirvisaari case was solved fast and in a correct fashion. . . . We lost a few members but got thousands more voters.’ In this political calculation, Soini presented the expulsion as a political gain for the party. The case of Hakkarainen appeared in Soini’s blog only as a symbol of the media’s simplicity and general small-mindedness. The media had already treated Hakkarainen as an inexperienced rural character who did not have good manners in civilized society. Soini continued to rely on his own construction of Hakkarainen as a simple and rural figure whose words could not be taken literally. Thus, for Soini, Hakkarainen’s hate speech did not qualify as racism. As often previously, Soini dismissed Hakkarainen’s offensive comments in his blog by arguing that the focus on him took the public’s attention away from ‘more important’ things: ‘Mr Hakkarainen is more important [for the media] than the secret lost billions [of euros].’

The story lines that were repeated in these public scandals began, first, with racist, uncivil or provocative comments by rather marginal figures circulated on social networking sites. Next, the mainstream media tapped into these debates and began to pressure the Finns Party to take responsibility. And, finally, the party leadership dismissed the seriousness of the speech act and/or symbolically punished the ‘black sheep’. At this stage, after the anti-immigration movement had entered national parliamentary politics and integrated with the Finns Party, the social media and the blogosphere proved to be problematic as not all members followed the leadership’s party line.

The expulsion of James Hirvisaari from the Finns Party, in particular, follows the logic of René Girard’s ‘scapegoat mechanism’, which provides psychological relief to a community in crisis. The presentation of one individual as the cause of the crisis, as the one who has transgressed, brings the rest of the community together. Even former enemies and rivals come together. Girard argues that this process of scapegoating a single victim is foundational in cultural life. It offers communities a civilized way out of violence and conflicts, and restores peace by expelling one individual or group. In this case, the scapegoat mechanism offered a strategy for coherence and further integration between the anti-immigration faction and the rest of the Finns Party.

Although the Finns Party leadership has often been besieged by racism scandals, the party has in fact benefitted through the anti-immigration

57 Timo Soini, ‘Galluppi sojottaa ylöspäin’, 23 October 2013, blog on *Timo Soini ploki* at http://timosoini.fi/2013/10/galluppi-sojottaa-ylospain (viewed 7 July 2015).
58 Timo Soini, ‘Politiikan ja talouden pullasorsamedia’, 2 March 2012, blog on *Timo Soini ploki* at http://timosoini.fi/2012/03/politiikan-ja-talouden-pullasorsamedia (viewed 7 July 2015).
59 René Girard, ‘Sacrifice as sacral violence and substitution’, in René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad 2000), 69–93.
movement. Timo Soini and Jussi Halla-aho have complained that the media-
tized attention to racist speech was a ‘political witchhunt’ aimed at harming
the party. Such an imagined ‘witchhunt’ fits with the general aim of the
party and the movement to represent themselves as a ‘citizens’ movement’
and as the voices of ‘citizens’ as opposed to ‘elitists’. Positioning themselves
as an underdog has created sympathy for the party and the anti-immigration
movement. Moreover, in the case of the Hirvisaari scandal, the more elite poli-
ticians within the anti-immigration movement, such as Juho Eerola and Jussi
Halla-aho, emerged as rational and responsible politicians. In one interview,
Juho Eerola, who was a member of the board of the Finns Party that expelled
Hirvisaari, said that the decision was a warning signal to ‘provincial arm
wavers’ that the party would not accept such behaviour or neo-Nazism.60
Eerola made a distinction between ‘provincial arm wavers’ and respectable
party members, positioning himself with the latter group. Similarly, Jussi
Halla-aho positioned himself against the more radical individuals by
saying: ‘I believe I have played a pretty significant role in making immigration
criticism into a serious political movement, and neo-Nazis and village idiots
no longer represent it.’61 Here Halla-aho takes credit for making ‘immigration
criticism’ politically relevant and respectable by contrasting its activities to
neo-Nazism and claiming to be a moderating force in the immigration
debate. Halla-aho, moreover, is a supporter of Israeli policies along with
other Islamophobic bloggers and groups that he provides links to in his
blog, such as the Gates of Vienna. On this basis, he often points to a clear
rupture with neo-Nazism. The discursive strategy of supporting Israel has
worked powerfully as a counter-argument against accusations of racism
and prejudice among European right-wing parties.62

The scapegoating of ‘provincial arm wavers’ and marginal politicians who
lack cultural and political capital has also made other politicians in the same
movement seem less racist. This was part of the broader strategy of both the
anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party in their attempt to increase
legitimacy and respectability in the national political arena. They have been
able to present themselves as moderating forces, as agents who actually
reduce racism in society. This discursive strategy, typical of other European
right-wing populists, like the British National Party, has been used to dis-
tinguish one’s own group from more extreme groups and individuals.63

60 ‘Provincial arm wavers’ refers to the ‘Heil Hitler’ salute that a well-known neo-Nazi
gave in parliament as Hirvisaari’s guest. Mika Moksu, ‘Eerola: Hirvisaaren erottaminen
on viesti maakuntien kädenheiluttelijoille’, YLE News, 3 October 2013, available at
http://yle.fi/uutiset/eerola_hirvisaaren_erottaminen_on_viesti_maakuntien_kadenheiluttelijoille/6862792 (viewed 7 July 2015).
61 Wiik, ‘Kritiikki ei keikuta Halla-ahon laivaa’.
62 See Simon Goodman and Andrew J. Johnson, ‘Strategies used by the far right to counter
accusations of racism’, Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines, vol. 6,
no. 2, 2013, 97–113 (101).
63 Ibid., 101–2.
However, the scapegoat mechanism went further than the Finns Party in its implications. As a consequence of the anti-racist tactic, Finnish media and society at large were also positioned as non-racist, civil and responsible. Thus the mainstream media could also be seen as actors in the scapegoating activity, in which they seem to have taken on an anti-racist role, while the more structural issues of inequality and the more powerful forces of the anti-immigration movement remained untouched. In such mediatized public scandals, the mainstream media and Finnish society were able to remain aloof from the disturbing complexity of structural racism, allowing everyone to proclaim themselves as advocates of tolerance. Consequently, the mainstream media opened up a discursive space for the more serious anti-immigrant politicians, allowing them to represent themselves in respectable terms. The anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party played this game at the border between civility and uncivility. Some members of these groups voiced uncivil racist opinions, but this only offered an opportunity for others to perform their ‘civility’. The expulsions of some members, Hirvisaari in particular, pacified the groups and generated a sense of programmatic coherence, togetherness and unity.

Entangled political publics

In this paper, I have analysed how the anti-immigration movement’s political success and mainstreaming of prejudice against immigrants unfolded in Finland between 2003 and 2013. My main intention was to demonstrate how changes in the mediascape in general and in media technology in particular allowed for the emergence of the movement and its transformation into a political force. In the earlier years, decentralized anonymous online spaces facilitated the development of the anti-immigration movement. It was able to circumvent the mainstream media and, later, counter negative representations by allowing for direct communications between movement ‘believers’. Later, however, in the years when the movement integrated with the Finns Party, online spaces and social media created problems for unity. Undisciplined members circulated racist comments that offered ammunition to political rivals and attracted the attention of the mainstream media. Nonetheless, the movement and the party have survived by strategically playing the role of the underdog and by sacrificing marginal figures.

The first transformation considered was the restructuring of Finnish journalism and the media environment. Economic crises and uncertainties in competition resulted in some loosening of journalistic guidelines, and the blurring of the boundary between edited and non-edited journalistic content. As immigration was among the topics that generated most debate in online discussion.

64 For a comparable development in the Front national in France, see Bratten, ‘Online zealotry’.
spaces, its salience in the mainstream public sphere increased. Heated discussions put the topic firmly on the mainstream agenda, and it was the anti-immigration movement that began to set that agenda as far as immigration was concerned.

But this was only part of the story. Instead of dividing the space in which immigration is discussed between the ‘civilized’ mainstream media and the aggressive online ‘echo chambers’, this paper suggests understanding the media environment as a system of connectivities or as a mediapolis, to use Roger Silverstone’s term. This mediapolis is a techno-cultural construction: its connectivities and opportunities exist in the intersections of technology and human activity. The Hommaforum discussion space is an exemplary case in this respect. The architecture of the site facilitates the construction of a community, creating a sense of belonging and commitment. This was crucial for political mobilization in the early phase of the movement, before it achieved electoral success and political power with the Finns Party. Moreover, active human agency guided the discussions in ways that prohibited the site from becoming an unorganized hate site. Volunteer monitoring and the structuring of discussions into different chat rooms organized the otherwise anonymous and spontaneous discussions. In addition, Jussi Halla-aho, ‘the Master’, was the intellectual mind of the movement and he provided an example and direction for the debates.

The logic of popularity and connectivity on social media partly explains Jussi Halla-aho’s growing fame in the anti-immigration movement and Finns Party politics. He began as an unknown blogger but his growing readership formed a networked public, an online community that shared a sense of cultural belonging and membership so strong that it encouraged Halla-aho to stand for elected office. In this case, popularity in online spaces translated into popularity in electoral politics and, finally, into party political capital. The convergence of the anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party took place gradually and required public performances of scapegoating. The sacrifice of James Hirvisaari, in particular, created political power both for the anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party. The party weakened its internal division between the more radical anti-immigration faction and the more moderate members. At the same time, it cleansed its public image of racism and prejudice.

The rise of the anti-immigration movement is an example of a broader phenomenon in Europe, where people are not as attached to political parties as they were before the 1980s. The role of associational activities, social networks and other alternative political movements has grown in response. These civil society spaces use participatory media, such as social

65 José van Dijck, The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2013).
66 José van Dijck and Thomas Poell, ‘Understanding social media logic’, Media and Communication, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, 2–14.
media, and they are often celebrated for their pro-democracy efforts. However, as Carlo Ruzza argues in relation to new political movements, ‘uncivil’ developments—as well as democratic developments—have increased in European societies and political life.67 Right-wing movements have copied the discourses and strategies of civil society in ways that make them appealing as an alternative type of political participation. However, as the interconnections between Halla-aho, Hommaforum and the Finns Party show, these new movements can also translate their networked popularity into more traditional party politics. In the Finnish case, this has required public scandals and the ‘scapegoat mechanism’, which also involve the mainstream media. To conclude, the anti-immigration movement and ‘uncivil’ public spheres are not distinct from traditional politics and the mainstream media. Rather, they are being utilized in different ways in Finnish society, leaving the essential problems of ethnic and racial inequality in the margins.

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67 Ruzza, ‘Populism and euroscepticism’.