

Neo-Nazi Imagery and Musical References in Finnish Far-Right Group Soldiers of Odin Online Videos

ANNA-ELENA PÄÄKKÖLÄ 

Abstract In this article, I study three videos by the Finnish far-right grouping Soldiers of Odin and investigate their audiovisual messages, which present different ‘cultural politics of emotion’ for members and non-members of the group. Special attention is given to the concepts of nationalism, masculinity, and their intertwined meanings, which play a defining role in many neo-fascist cultures. Despite their slap-dash, DIY nature, the videos’ use of global popular culture contradicts their logic of an exclusively ‘national’ Finnish culture, as every reference has global reach. This shows that the group’s nationalism is not about Finnishness, but about a hegemonic, global, Euro-Western, white masculinist, and xenophobic culture.

Soldiers of Odin (henceforth SoO) is a quasi-militant right-wing nationalist group from Finland that has promoted racist neo-Nazi attitudes since its formation in 2015. One factor that sets SoO aside from more covert Finnish far-right extremist groupings is its online presence. They communicate with their followers through social media and sporadically published YouTube videos, which are characterized by the presence of music. In this article, I offer an audiovisual analysis of three Finnish-made radicalist videos. The phenomenon of extreme far-right online activist videos is a growing area of study, but as is often the case in studies of new digital media, few existing studies focus on their sound and music. Instead, they discuss mainly the videos’ meanings and functions both within the radicalistic subcultures and in relation to culture in general. For example, Benjamin R. Teitelbaum has pointed out that some far-right groups akin to SoO ‘claim to be defending cultural or religious norms’ and might be understood as using their online presence to promote an idealized nationalism in a non-violent way.¹ Mattias Ekman conversely claims that videos are a ‘key strategy in [the] communicative repertoire’ for Swedish neo-Nazis and participate in creating, facilitating, and disseminating extremist political agendas.² Cottee and Cunliffe suggest that ‘while

Email: anna-elena.paakkola@abo.fi

This article is a part of my postdoctoral research project, ‘Depictions of Finnishness in Popular Music of 2000s’, funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation (2016–20).

¹ Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2017, Kindle edition), location 1.

² Mattias Ekman, ‘The Dark Side of Online Activism: Swedish Right-Wing Extremist Video Activism on YouTube’, *Mediekultur*, 56 (2014), 79–99 (p. 80).

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Royal Musical Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

extremist online content is not in itself a sufficient cause of radicalization, it plays an important contributory causal role in the complex process by which ordinary people become radicalized towards violence.³ Radicalistic videos produced in Finland raise questions about far-right notions of Finnishness and resonate with global neo-fascist aesthetics.

I approach the images, sounds, music, and storyline of the videos by means of audiovisual analysis, which implies that interpretations rest on the simultaneous legibility of the auditive and the visual.⁴ Most audiovisual theorists claim sound and vision are synergistically interconnected: change either one and the effects will be different. Therefore, analysing their meanings simultaneously will yield more accurate results than separately. I therefore investigate music, voices, and other sounds that, informed by the visuals, express SoO's principles of political thinking in an audiovisual way. My analysis extends to cultural musicology,⁵ where I look into how aesthetic, historical, and sociological factors of neo-fascist subcultures contextualize and explain these audiovisual messages. I focus especially on notions of nationalism, masculinity, and their intertwined meanings, which play a defining role in many neo-fascist cultures. Far-right groups often invoke a narrow set of prescriptive and proscriptive rules governing their ideas of 'proper' manhood, while authenticating their nationalist ideals. Indeed, Michael Kimmel claims that sometimes masculine identities are a more important factor than political ideology in recruiting new activists.⁶ Moreover, some scholars have analysed the extremist far-right through what Sara Ahmed calls 'cultural politics of emotion'.⁷ Far-right nationalists tend to emotionalize their convictions through narratives of heroism, threat, and even love. Ahmed suggests that their 'love' of native culture justifies 'protecting' it from threats.⁸ This is where music comes into

³ Simon Cottee and Jack Cunliffe, 'Watching ISIS: How Young Adults Engage with Official English-Language ISIS Videos', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 43.3 (2020), 183–207 (p. 186). See also Ekman, 'The Dark Side of Online Activism', 82.

⁴ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (Columbia University Press, 1994 [1990]), 21–22, 32; John Richardson and Stan Hawkins, 'Introduction', in *Essays on Sound and Vision*, ed. John Richardson and Stan Hawkins (Helsinki University Press, 2007), 13–21; John Richardson and Claudia Gorbman, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–35 (pp. 20–21).

⁵ Alistair Williams, *Constructing Musicology* (Ashgate, 2009), 1, 36; Richard Middleton, 'Introduction: Music Studies and The Idea of Culture', in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2012), 1–14 (pp. 5, 13); Derek Scott, *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

⁶ Michael Kimmel, 'Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage: Ex-Nazis in Scandinavia', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36.2 (2007), 202–18 (pp. 207, 213); see also Robert Futrell and Pete Simi, 'Free Spaces, Collective Identity, and the Persistence of U.S. White Power Activism', *Social Problems*, 51.1 (2004), 16–42 (p. 21). Some would disagree, though: see Andrea S. Dauber, 'Not All Nazis Are Men: Women's Underestimated Potential for Violence in German Neo-Nazism', in *Continuation of the Past or Novel Phenomenon? Gendered Perspectives on Conflict and Violence: Part B*, ed. Marcia Texler Segal and Vasilikie Demos (Emerald, 2014), 171–94.

⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

play, in both audiovisual and other auditory settings, where music plays an essential role in creating moods, evincing visceral reactions, and establishing and reinforcing group identities. Indeed, neo-Nazi radicals have often described an especially meaningful relationship to music that propels their dedication.⁹

When considering Finnish extremist nationalism, SoO uses threatening and violent expressive means in their videos to ascertain whom they deem not to be Finnish enough. Finnishness, at least when extremists are concerned, is defined as a cultural but also ontological concept. ‘Finnish’ connotes both a person who considers Finnish culture as their own and appreciates it to an accentuated extent, and a person whose family has been born in Finland many generations over.¹⁰ The nationalist codes and symbols used in the videos convey extremist ideals of Finnishness that invite affective responses and prompt suspicion of mainstream cultures, violent actions, and confrontations with authority and perceived adversaries.¹¹ Finnishness and Finnish masculinity bring a specific set of meanings to this process. I explore the videos with reference to ‘crisis of masculinity’, which often attributes to bolstering far-right attitudes.¹² My research questions are condensed in the following points:

1. What kind of Finnishness is promoted in Soldiers of Odin’s videos – their music, sounds, and images?
2. What kind of Finnish masculinity is constructed in them, and how is it used to negotiate nationalist identities?
3. How do ‘cultural politics of emotion’ operate within the admixture of Finnish nationalism and masculinity, and how do the sounds and/or music of the videos contribute to the emotional impact?
4. What messages are communicated to members, potential members, and non-members about the group’s convictions?

⁹ For example, see Kimmel, ‘Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage’, 210; Nancy S. Love, *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy* (State University of New York Publications, 2016), 13.

¹⁰ This is usually considered as the difference between conservative and far-right political views, as cultural appreciation is the trademark of a conservative whereas the genetic difference interests only extremists. See Dan Koivulaakso, Mikael Brunila, and Li Andersson, *Äärioikeisto Suomessa* (Into, 2012), 300, 332. The far-right concept of ‘genetical pureness’ takes sometimes laughable forms, as evidenced by research into reactions to genetic ancestry tests; see Eric Boodman, ‘White Nationalists Are Flocking to Genetic Ancestry Tests. Some Don’t Like What They Find’, *Statnews.com*, 16 August 2017 <<https://www.statnews.com/2017/08/16/white-nationalists-genetic-ancestry-test/>> [accessed 28 October 2021].

¹¹ On nationalist codes and symbols, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983); Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Sage Publications, 1995); Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far-right Youth Culture in Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2018). On suspicion of authorities as a Finnish trait, see Arto Jokinen, *Panssaroitu maskuliinisuus: Mies, väkivalta ja kulttuuri* (Tampere University Press, 2000); Anna-Elena Pääkkölä, ‘Reappropriations and Criticism of Finnishness in *Tom of Finland*, the Film and the Musical’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 95.4 (2023), 451–80.

¹² Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, 2nd edn (Nation Books, 2017, Kindle edition). See also Ekman, ‘The Dark Side of Online Activism’; Love, *Trendy Fascism*, 9, 33.

The first video I analyse is a recruitment video published – and quickly deleted – in 2015 on YouTube. The second video, similarly posted and deleted in quick succession, is a menacing warning directed towards immigrants.¹³ In the third, which is the most recent one (and at the time of writing it is still available on YouTube), SoO present their actions through a collage of photographs portraying themselves as a congenial brotherhood. The first two videos were selected for this analysis because, at the time of publication, they caused media outrage and they were subsequently deleted. This might suggest that media pressure caused the videos to be withdrawn at the beginning of the group's history, but at the same time, they had perhaps already achieved their goal by gaining public recognition and thereby positively influencing recruitment. The last video was chosen to represent the group's later activities at a time when their presence in the mainstream media had dwindled. It conveys a general idea of the group as an established one, no longer new and unpredictable, but a group with a history and a code of conduct.

Similar to the USA and the UK,¹⁴ extreme right-wing attitudes in Finland revolve around reactions to multiculturalism and immigration, as well as liberal capitalism and high-tech industries, which in their view have led to the demise of the local market economy and traditional handicraft employment.¹⁵ Soldiers of Odin was established in Kemi, Finland, in 2015 as a counter-reaction to an increase in refugee numbers in Finland following the humanitarian crises in Syria and Iraq.¹⁶ Ostensibly deeply

¹³ These two were acquired for research by me and a musicology student at the University of Turku, Finland.

¹⁴ See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun* (NYU Press, 2001), 5–6; Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North*.

¹⁵ The history of far-right extremism in Finland extends back to the 1930s, when some of the civil war victors considered the conciliatory politics of the president insufficient for 'purging' the communist agenda from their fellow Finns. Far-right groups such as the party IKL (Isänmaallinen kansanliike, Patriotic People's Movement), born out of the political movement 'Lapuan liike' (Lapua Movement), became a strong political force at this time. They had a terrorist side to their politics, in which known voters of leftist parties became prey for social ostracizing, shaming, and violence, including kidnappings ('muilutus'). These half-tolerated antics were eradicated with the Second World War and, afterwards, the anti-Fascist politics that was put in place. Far-right activism went underground, only to reappear twenty years later through the party Suomen maaseudun puolue (Finnish Rural Party), which was the ideological starting point for the populist Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset). The 1990s, the economic depression, and the first immigration rise of Syrian refugees resulted in an increase in racist rhetoric, the rise of the Finns Party, the radical political movement Suomen Sisu, and the first sub-cultural neo-Nazi radicalist gangs. By the 2010s, the Finnish populist parties had joined the European 'intellectual conservatism', which justified far-right attitudes through economics and rose vocally against the values of leftist liberalism. In 2015, the Finns came third in the parliamentary election and worked in the Centre Party-led government until the 2019 election. See Koivulaakso and others, *Äärioikeisto Suomessa*, 78, 132, 215; Tuukka Ylä-Anttila and Eeva Luhtakallio, 'Contesting Gender Equality Politics in Finland: The Finns Party Effect', in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, ed. Michaela Göttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 29–48.

¹⁶ In this article, I use the terms 'extremist far-right', 'neo-Nazi', and 'neo-fascist' as near synonyms. They have somewhat different connotations, but all have some traits in common. While debates about the definitions of these terms, their origins, and their emphases are complex and extensive, it is worth noting that SoO is not a clearly politicized group who state in detail what they support or oppose. It is common for there to exist tension within groups like this as to what they stand for, and in what order of importance. For differences between these terms, see Roger Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From Consensus to New Wave?', *Fascism*, 1 (2012), 1–17; Sami Kolamo and Jani Vuolteenaho, 'Natsit kansojen välisen ystävyiden asialla – propagandan toimintalogiikka

concerned by the growing popularity of Soldiers of Odin, the Finnish media looked for reactions from the political elite, who did not seem overly concerned by the group's racist rhetoric: Prime Minister Juha Sipilä (Centre Party) compared participation in the groups to hobbies that involved collective actions or parents carpooling their children. People who joined SoO, however, frequently had criminal and violent backgrounds, as well as close connections to organized extreme far-right groups working at both national and transnational Nordic levels. While SoO claims adamantly not to be a neo-Nazi group, they are vocally anti-Islamic and ethnopurist and have clear similarities to far-right radical movements.¹⁷ These include racist and ethnocentric thinking, emphasizing organic communities (the traditional home unit, brotherhood, Finns, Europeans), the belief that violence is acceptable to defend these communities, a nostalgic return to the 'unification' of a greater Finnish nation (including territories lost through war and occupation), and the glorification of physical strength. There are differences as well, such as unclear or at least unarticulated positions towards antisemitism (as opposed to adamant and outspoken attitudes towards Jewishness, although this is a feature of far-right extremism also in Finland), their lack of a clear leader or glorifying anyone's 'image cult', and their unwillingness to work within the structures of municipal or national politics to bring down the existing system and construct an alternative one.¹⁸

Concerning earlier musical associations with far-right extremism, many would still connect such agendas with punk and metal music, as within these genres, or their offshoot subgenres and subcultural extensions – some turned to fascist aesthetics and politics in the 1970s and 1980s. As a counter-reaction to the British 'Rock against Racism' movement in the mid-1970s, the UK-based far-right party the National Front formed 'Rock against Communism' (RAC), which quickly resorted to antisemitic and racist lyrics combined with black metal music to appeal to skinhead fans. Already at this early stage, music was used to promote not only nationalism, but also extremist thinking to an interested audience: 'This militant youth culture, exulting in gut feelings of anger, aggression and xenophobia, has been particularly susceptible to fascist myths of patriotic revolution, anti-communism and racial identity.'¹⁹ British skinhead culture was the musical source which Nordic radical activists imported from the 1980s onwards, with Swedish neo-Nazis at the forefront. Ever since the 1990s, extremist music has been globally named 'White Power Music' (WPM), which includes any music that describes and perpetuates racist, neo-Nazi, antisemitic, anti-Islamic and anti-LGBT attitudes, glorifies violence and hatred, and is composed and performed by radicalist white musicians, often but not exclusively male.²⁰ The genres of WPM have expanded from

Berliinin olympialaisissa 1936', *Läbikuva*, 1 (2019), 9–26; David Brolin, 'Vad är fascism?', *Nytid.com* <<https://www.nytid.fi/2012/06/vad-ar-fascism/>> [accessed 16 May 2020]; Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North*.

¹⁷ Similarly to their predecessor, Suomen Sisu; see Koivulaakso and others, *Äärioikeisto*, 106.

¹⁸ Griffin, 'Studying Fascism', 6; Koivulaakso and others, *Äärioikeisto*, 12, 24–27, 29–31.

¹⁹ Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 195.

²⁰ Women are in the minority in far-right movement and, by extension, WPM scene. However, some studies suggest that if women were to become WPM musicians, they would probably gain even mainstream attention, as they would be considered aberrations from their gender roles. This is acknowledged in the scene as well and seen as a possibility of further spreading their agenda, and it

metal and punk to experimental techno, folk music, and – ironically – hip hop and reggae.²¹ WPM is nowadays a multi-billion business that functions as a promotional tool and also as a means of acquiring funding for extreme far-right political powers.²² Online platforms such as YouTube are important formats for disseminating it.²³

When considering SoO's video materials, it is vital to understand how music promotes political motives in far-right extremist circles, especially if, like SoO, they claim not to have any such motives. As in all identity politics, music plays a key role in how members of a social group recognize each other and spend time together. In the case of SoO, a defensible hypothesis might be to assume that punk or metal music would have a noteworthy role in their audiovisual communication. Metal music in particular has been a key export genre in Finnish popular music over recent decades;²⁴ in a sense, this would be a patriotic choice. However, my first example will demonstrate that this is not invariably the case.

Soldiers of Odin Recruitment Video, 2015

The first video begins with an ominous image of a haunted house (Figure 1a). A flashlight light beam travels across the still image, shedding light on details in the mansion. Soon, the light beam falls upon still images of SoO (Figures 1b–d), and, importantly, neo-Nazi symbols. For example, the organization SVL's logo (Figure 1b),²⁵ based on a Nordic rune 'tiwaz' or 'Thor's rune', is clearly seen in the video. In the background, Brad Fiedel's theme for the *Terminator* films (1984, 1991) is heard, played with a lo-fi synth sound rather than the more hi-fi sequencer sounds of the original. Considering the existing research on propaganda videos,²⁶ the SoO recruitment video works according to slightly different premises by omitting a voice-over narrator and relying instead on sound, music, and still images. It is also noteworthy that the choice of music is not WPM but recognizable film music, which could be an additional reason why the video was removed so soon as the makers presumably would not have wished to be sued for copyright infringement. The musical codes are interrupted by ominous sound effects, quiet yet echoic booming pulses that are designed to

tells of the position of women, as they would be more of a spectacle than serious political agents. See Ugo Corte and Bob Edwards, 'White Power Music and Mobilization of Racist Social Movements', *Music and Arts in Action*, 1.1 (2008), 4–20 (p. 15); Dauber, 'Not all Nazis Are Men', 184, 187.

²¹ Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North*, 17, 27, 121.

²² Corte and Edwards, 'White Power Music'; Love, *Trendy Fascism*, 11–14, 31–32. See also Kimmel, 'Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage', 210–11; Futrell and Simi, 'Free Spaces', 33–34; Robert Futrell, Pete Simi, and Simon Gottschalk, 'Understanding Music in Movements: The White Power Music Scene', *Sociological Quarterly*, 47 (2006), 275–304.

²³ Ekman, 'Dark Side of Online Activism', 80; Futrell and others, 'Understanding Music', 285; Corte and Edwards, 'White Power Music', 7.

²⁴ See Toni-Matti Karjalainen, 'And So, Finland Became a Heavy Metal Nation', in *Made in Finland: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Toni-Matti Karjalainen and Kimi Kärki (Routledge, 2021), 45–66.

²⁵ Suomen vastarintaliike, the Finnish resistance movement, established in 2008.

²⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *Propaganda and the Nazi War Film* (The Museum of Modern Art, Film Library 1942), v. <<https://archive.org/stream/PropagandaAndTheNaziWarFilm#page/n7/mode/2up>> [accessed 16 May 2020].



Figure 1. Still shots from the SoO recruitment video: a) establishing shot of the haunted house; b) the SVL symbol; c) a hate message towards immigrants; and d) a flashlight lighting them focusing on an image.

give emphasis to the images on the screen, or perhaps, to paint a picture of a looming threat without spelling it out too much with voice-over narration.

Tina Askanius discerns three key approaches to the distribution of radical activist videos: alternative news, empowerment, and documentation.²⁷ The first SoO video can be understood not only as a powerful way of reinforcing the group's threatening presence, but also as documenting their symbols and the group's aspirations. The video is a short introduction to far-right extremist symbols as well as a call for action by the newly founded group itself: 'video clips are also produced and disseminated on YouTube in order to *recruit* new activists [...] and to *empower* those already involved.'²⁸ The videos function, moreover, as an important way for geographically scattered and politically marginalized members of the group to achieve cohesion.²⁹

The musical cue from the *Terminator* series is chosen as the first musical symbol of the group, which is conspicuously not a choice that promotes Finnish music. Regarding the propaganda music of Paris during the First World War, Rachel Moore has observed that it was more common to use international musical codes that were popular, new, and bore vaguely nationalistic connotations rather than specifically

²⁷ Tina Askanius, *Radical Online Video: YouTube, Video Activism and Social Movement Media Practices*, Lund Studies in Media and Communication 17 (Lunds Universitet, 2012), 64–67. See also Ekman, 'The Dark Side of Online Activism', 81–83.

²⁸ Ekman, 'The Dark Side of Online Activism', 82.

²⁹ Ibid.

traditional, French musical codes.³⁰ An important factor in propaganda films, then, is popular culture of its time, or at least, old enough to bear meaning for listeners.³¹ The SoO propaganda similarly appropriates prevailing, international musical codes rather than ones specifically portraying Finnish nationalism (such as Sibelius, the kantele national instrument, or Finnish metal music). While I could critique at length how Finnishness is perceived as being under threat from immigrants while, ironically, SoO draw on codes from global popular culture, it is valuable instead to examine popular culture's and Hollywood's role in creating codes of empowered masculinity.³²

Musically, the *Terminator* theme is based on a complex 13/8 rhythm that, because of its 'extra' quaver, creates an uneven rhythmic pattern consisting of a syncopated beginning followed by an even division of three crotchet beats. This is evocative of Holst's use of the snare drum in 'Mars, Bringer of War' from *The Planets Suite*, which pulsates in 5/4 time: a triplet of quavers and two strong crotchets, two quavers and a crotchet.³³ It is frequently heard also in *Terminator*, and functions as a sonic representation of tension and action. It also connotes unsettling fear of the terminating android due to its off-beat time signature. Brad Fiedel's way of constructing the theme seems to be semi-accidental, as Seth Stevenson³⁴ claims that the 13/8 time signature was the result of a fortunate accident with the timing of the looper programming. By the time *Terminator 2* was released, however, Fiedel's time signature had been rounded off to a more regular 12/8, perhaps symbolically, as the Terminator's character has now shifted positions from antagonist to hero.³⁵ The main theme's synthesizer-led melody is changed to sampled violins. This is the version used by SoO. The cue accentuates the

³⁰ Rachel Moore, *Performing Propaganda: Musical Life and Culture in Paris During the First World War* (Boydell Press, 2018).

³¹ This observation holds true in today's ISIS propaganda videos, which 'are littered with memes, images, and even ripped footage from popular culture materials marketed to what could be called the global youth demographic, because this, more than any specific nationality or ethnic group, is the target audience'. Cori E. Dauber and others, 'Call of Duty: How the Video Game Motif Has Migrated Downstream from Islamic State Propaganda Videos', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 13.3 (2019), 17–31 (p. 18).

³² Here a valid point is that the *Terminator* franchise has a variety of different audiences who glean their own pleasures from it. David Greven analyses the *Terminator* films through the lens of queer studies, predominantly Edelman's 'antisocial' queer theory. I will leave it to other scholars to argue for a link between far-right ultramascularity and its gay fetishization. See David Greven, *Queering the Terminator: Sexuality and Cyborg Cinema* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

³³ The first part of this can be traced to Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* and its 'fate motive', a triplet quaver and an emphatic crotchet (duh-duh-duh-duuuuh!), which has circulated throughout Western classical and film music.

³⁴ Stephen Stevenson, 'What Is the Time Signature of the Ominous Electronic Score of *The Terminator*?' *Slate.com* (2014) <<https://slate.com/culture/2014/02/the-time-signature-of-the-terminator-score-is-a-mystery-for-the-ages.html>> [accessed 16 May 2020].

³⁵ In the first film (dir. by James Cameron [USA, 1984]), a time-travelling killing machine (Arnold Schwarzenegger) tries to eliminate a woman due to give birth to a hero, who will later put a stop to a robot uprising in the future. The second *Terminator* film (dir. by James Cameron [USA, 1991]) features Schwarzenegger's robotic character as a reprogrammed saviour of the child he was trying to stop from being born in the first film. See, for example, Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, 2nd edn (Rutgers University Press, 2004), 140–77.

end of each bar with a percussive rhythm on the penultimate and last beats. The lo-fi snare drum sounds were perhaps designed to sound like a rifle's safety catch but manages instead to sound more like an old typewriter. This is accidentally appropriate, as the main priority of SoO today has little to do with actual weapons but rather with symbolic weapons: internet discussion threads. An online presence is essential for modern-day extremists.³⁶ Hence, the typewriter paints a surprisingly apt sonic picture, despite its connotations of female manual labour.³⁷

The video conveys constant dual messages, often contradictory ones. There is the figure of the Terminator (and his music) as the ultimate symbol of male empowerment. As the theme is used in the first and the second film of the franchise, we have two different Terminators that are relevant to this reading. No images of Schwarzenegger are seen in the SoO video, but his character's sonic presence is central. For the audioviewer who is looking for a code of masculinity which would assist him in his battle against undesirable influences, the second film's Terminator is the more apt symbol. This Terminator protects while he destroys: violence has a function and is therefore justified. Douglas Holt and Craigh Thompson would call this the male figure who finds balance in a triad of depictions of masculinities: the breadwinner, rebel, and man-of-action. These three together constitute a 'heroic' masculinity for normatively straight male audiences.³⁸ For the audioviewer who does not agree with this, SoO's violence connects to the first film's Terminator: a mindless killing machine, whose violence is random and serves a nihilistic purpose. His will is a mixture of 'narcissistic authority on the one hand and an image of social authority on the other',³⁹ according to Steve Neale's theorizations. His power is unquestioned, he is viewed with fear, and his violence 'stops the narrative in order to recognize the pleasure of display'.⁴⁰ He is the ultimate, misanthropic Über-Man that is designed to cause fear in SoO's enemies.

The video depicts a perceived societal crisis that calls out for Finnish men to solve it. The word 'crisis' is appropriate if we understand it as a performative act, which is constructed through declarations: 'we declare a state of crisis.'⁴¹ The first SoO recruitment video functions as a declaration of crisis and a call to arms. The crisis is a linear one: the threat is 'them'; those who are threatened are 'us'. As the target group

³⁶ Cottee and Cunliffe, 'Watching ISIS', 184; Dauber and others, 'How the Video Game Motif'.

³⁷ See Anna-Elena Pääkkölä, 'Sound Kinks: Sadomasochistic Erotica in Audiovisual Music Performances' (PhD dissertation, University of Turku, 2016), 59–61.

³⁸ Douglas B. Holt and Craigh J. Thompson, 'Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (2004), 425–40 (p. 425). See also Rebecca Fülöp, 'Heros, Dames, and Damsels in Distress: Constructing Gender Types in Classical Hollywood Film Music' (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012), 21; Gary Cross, *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Inmaturity* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 155.

³⁹ Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema', in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (Routledge, 1993), 9–20 (p. 14). See also Cross, *Men to Boys*, 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴¹ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003); Gregory Bateson, 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy', *Psychiatric Research Reports*, 2 (1955), 39–51.

of this video is mostly men, we can call it a crisis of men and masculinity, and only secondarily a crisis of Finnishness. Sally Robinson writes about the crisis of masculinity:

A crisis is 'real' when its rhetorical strategies can be discerned and its effects charted; the reality of a particular crisis depends less on hard evidence of actual social trauma or do-or-die decision-making than on the power of language, of metaphors and images, to convincingly represent that sense of trauma and turning point.⁴²

Trauma, and turning point; we could interpret them as immigrants and intersectional society versus brotherhood, traditional masculinity, whiteness, violence, and physical/mental strength. The harmonic cycle of the theme (vi–I–V) represents this event musically, as it keeps repeating itself. Each repeat of the cycle, surrounded by the sonic markers of war, is a constant harmonic movement which establishes a reversed cadence and repeats it ad nauseam, with only the heroic strings moving towards the goal in the melody. The theme describes perseverance, Schwarzenegger's rippling muscles that are always ready for combat, and the demand for new SoO recruits to accept that every moment is a battle against outside forces.

The video is littered with threatening messages of perceived danger, symbolized by the Halloween horror mansion and written messages, such as 'multiculturalism is dangerous for your children and children's children' and 'where is a refuge for our daughters?'. This emphasizes that this is a video mostly for men, even though some women are visible in the margins of the pictures. Lynne Fallwell has written about gender binaries in Nazi films thus: 'The binary of gender assignment is based on constructing two finite categories and describing where and how each category is to behave: male/public/active versus female/private/passive.'⁴³ All in all, traditional Finnish masculinity relies on very similar attributes; the historical, cultural trauma of Second World War in Finland has been worked into a narrative where brave, humble Finnish men defend the country against an enemy that seems invincible, and protect the Finnish state and culture, symbolized in the image of 'the Finnish *maiden*', the feminine symbol of the homeland.⁴⁴ The same discourse is applicable in the context of today's far-right discourses, where immigrants stand in for the perceived threat against idealized, traditional Finnishness. Of course, the mention of 'daughters' needing a refuge from the prevailing multiculturalism also portrays women, especially girls, as passive, vulnerable, and in need of protection.

What is depicted in this video, however, is not a frantic battle disguised as an action film, or a video game, like many ISIS recruitment videos where the ultimate task is to redeem lost male privilege.⁴⁵ It is rather a horror film, where an unsuspecting wanderer

⁴² Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (Columbia University Press, 2000), 10.

⁴³ Lynne Fallwell, 'Through the Looking Glass Darkly: Considering Theories of Nazi Film and Concepts of Transgression', in *Cinema Inferno: Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins*, ed. Robert G. Weiner and John Cline (Scarecrow Press, 2008), 269–90 (p. 273).

⁴⁴ See Jokinen, *Panssaroitu maskuliinisuus*; Pääkkölä, 'Reappropriations'. For the Finnish Maiden and her symbolism, see especially Anu Koivunen, *Performative Histories, Foundational Fictions: Gender and Sexuality in Niskavuori Films*, 2nd edn (Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2016).

⁴⁵ Miron Lakomy, 'Let's Play a Video Game: *Jihadi* Propaganda in the World of Electronic Entertainment', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 42.4 (2017), 383–406; Dauber and others, *Call of Duty*.

comes across these images with the help of a flashlight. SoO seem to be gathering troops whose emotional status resonates with images of stillness and brooding, bound up with a very specific brand of male anger that stems from ‘a certain ideal of masculinity [...] their sense of themselves *as men*’.⁴⁶ Men in the video are united, coupled with symbols of the far-right movements active in Finland and other Nordic countries. The appeal is made clear: to the estranged teenager, the small delinquent youngster or the lonely elder, traditional masculinity might offer a more enticing option than a challenging multicultural society where their privilege has been called into question.

The Hunt: The Acousmatic Voice, Avatars ... and Comic Book Vengeance

The second video was also quickly deleted from YouTube, as it incited violence against minorities, particularly new immigrants. Its headline stated: ‘The hunt for rapists and paedophiles has begun.’ The video is a one-shot, one-camera, steady-shot video that comes close to home-video aesthetics. There is a sense of slapdash aesthetics in the video, which implores the audioviewer to react as quickly as possible to something that is happening in society. The video begins with a brief metal interlude from Bensound’s (royalty-free) song ‘High Octane’, and a title frame (Figure 2a). Then a group of people walk towards the camera in the dark, wintery environment (Figure 2b). Five masked people, wearing Guy Fawkes masks from the film *V for Vendetta* (dir. by James McTeigue [Germany/USA, 2005]) and carrying baseball bats and hockey sticks

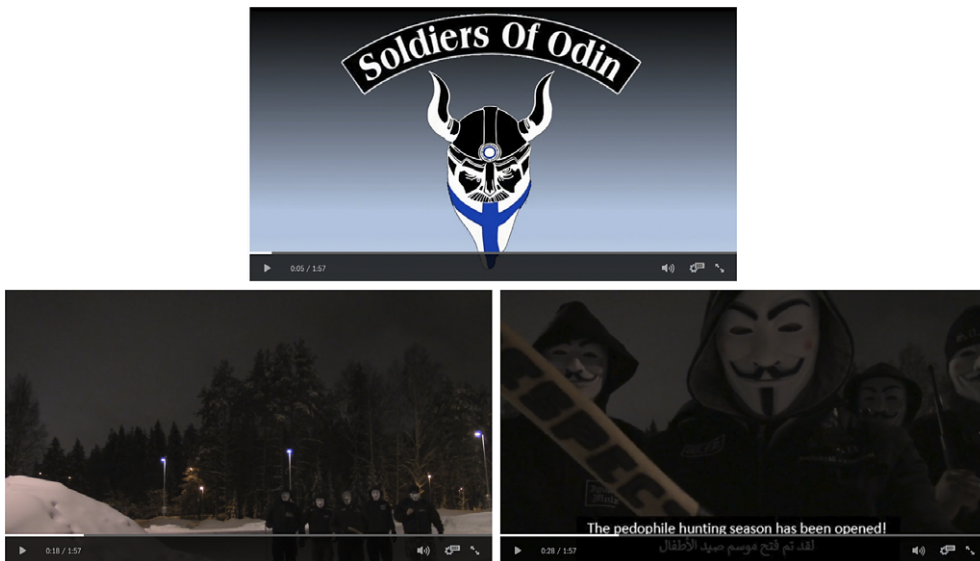


Figure 2. Still images from The Hunt video: a) establishing shot with the group’s logo; b) a masked group of five approaches the camera, while c) one of them addresses it brandishing a hockey stick.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Kindle location 491.

(Figure 2c), assume positions facing the camera, which is tilted slightly upwards, making the figures appear more imposing. Three masks are pointed towards the camera, one coming very close, their holes-for-eyes working as the surrogate straight gaze directed at the audience. A single voice is heard, its pitch altered by the mask so that the original voice is somewhat distorted, but the voice belongs to a man. The voice speaks of threats towards non-Finnish ‘child rapists’ who, we are told, should stay away. Subtitles translate the Finnish speech into English and Arabic, and they follow the speech in crude, hastily executed synchronization. The video comes close to Askanius’s category of ‘empowerment’: publishing the video and enacting the threat of violence might have been perceived as empowering enough for members to gain cohesion and feel as though ‘something’ was being done to resolve the problem. Consider the figure of a pompous bouncer at the door of a bar, threatening customers not to misbehave and assuming this will resolve all future conflicts.

Let us first consider the voice. The voice seems at first to have no source, especially as we see no moving lips, only the smirking masks. It is only the proximity of one of the men which suggests that he is the source of the voice. We understand this more than see it, and technically, the voice is still only implied as coming from behind the closest mask. This is a clear case of the ‘added value’ of an audiovisual work:⁴⁷ the visuals and the auditive here enhance each other and make the other more legible. When one of these elements is lacking, it automatically becomes either less real (a visual prompt without an accompanying sound) or other-worldly (a sound without a visual source). Michel Chion calls this other-worldliness the *acousmètre*.⁴⁸ Acousmatic sound creates a sense of space beyond what is shown within the field of vision; the acousmatic voice, spoken or otherwise, creates the unsettling sense that there is another being present beyond what we see in the image. Often, this sense of unease is resolved by revealing the visual source of the voice: de-acousmatizing it. In this SoO video, the voice remains in the strange liminal state of being both acousmatic and also, partially, de-acousmatized, as the masked person is presumably the one producing the sound, but at no point can we actually *see* the voice being produced. The effect is made even more pronounced by the lack of accompanying music, as it does not explain the emotional context. The violent words linger in the empty space, accruing even more weight.

In Chion’s reading of acousmatic voices, particularly the classic Hitchcock film *Psycho* (dir. by Alfred Hitchcock [USA, 1960]), the notion of the omnipotent disembodied voice becomes clear. As the voice of the mother scolds Norman Bates, this becomes omni-present, god(dess)-like, a sonic manifestation of Bates’s superego. Once it has been revealed that the mother is no longer alive, the horrific quality of the voice becomes accentuated. The de-acousmatization of the source does not provide resolution but is a symptom of the psychological pathology of Bates. This reveals the

⁴⁷ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 5. See also Michel Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, 2nd edn (Columbia University Press, 2009), 466–67.

⁴⁸ A compound noun comprising the connotations of ‘acousmatic’ and ‘spectre’. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 72; see also Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (Columbia University Press, 1999), 21–29, 169.

potency of the acousmatic voice. It can indeed come from anywhere, from any layer of reality in the film. The *acousmètre* has the potential to thwart our expectations, catching us off-guard and frightening us. That is why the SoO video's voice concealed behind a mask becomes uncanny: a sound is there, but the moving face is missing.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the voice is filtered through the plastic of the mask.⁵⁰ Therefore, the mask itself functions as a physical filter for the sonic material, further anonymizing its wearer, adding a tinge of inhumanity to the voice because of the resonance of the material, and accentuating the feeling of dread and danger that is otherwise produced in the video.

Of my examples, this video is the only one featuring the voices of SoO members. In propaganda videos and films, especially those made by the Nazi Third Reich, the spoken voice occupies a central role. It functions as narrator, reinforcing Nazi propaganda words that would become commonplace and facilitating what Hannah Arendt calls 'the banality of evil'.⁵¹ One of the most striking voices of the period, echoing in our collective memory, is that of Hitler himself. Richard Taylor's analysis of the audiovisual depiction of Hitler, mainly in the film *Triumph of the Will* (dir. by Leni Riefenstahl [Germany, 1935]), reveals how audiovisual techniques make Hitler's speeches compelling: first, they single out Hitler's figure alone on a podium, usually filmed from a low angle in the context of a medium shot frame, making him appear larger. Only he is assigned subjectivity; the rest of the people, depicted in countershots, are far away or filmed from a high camera angle, visually signifying the unity of the people. Hitler's image is established as representing a father figure who looks over his citizens.⁵² There is a clear division between 'the leader and the led'.⁵³ At the end of a speech, Hitler 'concludes by calling on the assembled multitude to swear an oath and consummate the ideal of national unity',⁵⁴ and a chorus of the Nazi salutation, 'Sieg Heil', arises from the crowd. Arendt's totalitarianism becomes reality,⁵⁵ where a person has no opinions or subjectivity of their own, as they are also the opinions and subjectivity of everyone else, especially the leaders of the state. According to Susan Sontag, this is a central feature in all fascist art:

The fascist dramaturgy centers on the orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets. Its choreography alternates between ceaseless motion and a congealed, static, 'virile' posing. Fascist art glorifies surrender; it exalts mindlessness; it glamorizes death.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', trans. David McLintock, in *The Uncanny* (Penguin Books, 2003 [1919]), 123–62.

⁵⁰ I have difficulty believing that the voice was manipulated in any more sophisticated a way, by applying a filter or some other form of auditory processing, as the video was so quickly shot and published.

⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Books, 2006 [1963]). Kindle edition.

⁵² Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1979), 173.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 179. See also *Lions of the North*, 7.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Film Propaganda*, 185.

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism/Totalitarismin synty*, Finnish trans. Matti Kinnunen (Vastapaino, 2013 [1948]).

⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', *The New York Review of Books* (2014, 1975), 1–20 (p. 12). <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/02/06/fascinating-fascism/>> [accessed 16 May 2020].

While the SoO video is not as elaborate as the feature-length, cinematic propaganda film of Leni Riefenstahl similar effects are sought. It is significant that there are more members onscreen than just one. Their silent presence reinforces the idea that the impersonal individual voice speaks on behalf of the collective. This erasure of the self becomes even more uncanny by the fact that the speaker has the same face as the ‘henchmen’ do; in fact, due to the nature of the acousmatic voice, it could be any of the figures onscreen producing the speech. This creates a feeling of uncertainty: not only in this video, but also beyond it in society, any person might hold the same opinions about immigrants as these masked people.

The Guy Fawkes mask bears special meaning as well. First popularized by the film *V for Vendetta*, the mask was adopted as a symbol for the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, and it has since been worn by a plethora of protestors representing just as many different political alignments. The plotline of the original comic book and film adaptation was based on the historical story of Guy Fawkes and his plot to bomb the House of Commons in the early seventeenth century, but in the film version, the bombing works as an act of rebellion against a totalitarian system that is governing a fictive version of the UK. The plot conveys problematic messages about terrorism being a justified means of action when the establishment is seen as somehow ‘evil’, but to Occupy Wall Street, and indeed, to SoO, this symbolism resonates enough that the incorporation of a popular culture artefact into real life becomes a powerful symbol for acting against the stagnant status quo. At the same time, anonymity and political dissent are coded into the mask. Hence the wearing of the mask becomes a means for explaining the motivation of SoO’s terrorist speech: their terrorism becomes justified through their dedication to their country.⁵⁷ What escapes their attention is the fact that the use of globally recognized imagery in some ways contradicts an otherwise exaggerated allegiance to Finnish culture: the relevance of *V for Vendetta*, let alone Guy Fawkes, will probably escape some Finns entirely.

Let us return to the brief metal interlude at the beginning of the video. Among the many metal bands active in Finland, there are some that openly promote far-right and neo-Nazi politics. Extremist black metal has its own acronym, National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM).⁵⁸ In Finland, NSBM bands perform at black metal festivals, especially Steelfest and Apocalyptic rights, sometimes alongside musicians who do not subscribe to their political convictions. The anti-Fascist group Varisverkosto claims that this is

⁵⁷ See Euclines Montes, ‘The V for Vendetta Mask: A Political Sign of the Times’, *The Guardian*, 10 September 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/10/v-for-vendetta-mask>> [accessed 21 May 2020]; Oliver Kohns, ‘Guy Fawkes in the 21st Century: A Contribution to the Political Iconography of Revolt’, *Image and Narrative*, 14 (2013), 89–103.

⁵⁸ Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 194; Ryan Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links in Post-War British Fascism: The Transformation of Extremism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 74–75; Koivulaakso and others, *Äärioikeisto*, 81, 215, 246; Robin Maria Valeri and Kevin Borgeson, ‘Sticks and Stones: When the Words of Hatred Become Weapons – A Social Psychological Perspective’, in *Violence and Society: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (IGI Global, 2017), 868–99 (p. 887); Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 2.

because Finland is not as strict in censoring music as other countries.⁵⁹ However, the riff that opens the video has musically very little to do with Finnish black metal but instead resembles a mainstream metal riff. The tempo is much slower than in black metal songs, it involves no shrieking vocals (or any, for that matter), and the guitar riff is not played with tremolo picking, which is the most common way of performing black metal. The riff functions as a prelude, a victorious fanfare for the approaching gang, but it does not call out to fans of NSBM but rather of mainstream metal music. The choice might be as simple as finding a(ny) metal riff that was free to use for the opening of the video. But there is a compelling point to be made: using the more extreme black metal genre might function as *too* extreme for those who are searching for people who agree with their anti-immigrant views, but not too dramatically. On the other hand, the metal riff is metal *enough* for non-metal fans to make the connection between extremist thinking and metal, thereby creating a threatening atmosphere for the ensuing statement. Be that as it may, no Finnish music was chosen for this clip. Again, what is considered as ‘nationalist’ is dependent on international codes with loose connections to Finnishness, this time to metal music.

Soldiers: Nordic Finnishness, Militant Masculinity, and Glorified Death

Of the three examples, ‘The Hunt’ is the most affectively powerful. Sara Ahmed has written about the affect of hate in far-right groups and analyses their narratives as ‘generating a subject that is threatened by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject [...] but to take the place of the subject. The presence of this other is imagined as a threat to the object of love.’⁶⁰ The video confuses hatred of immigrants with love for children and the will to protect them. This makes the choice of *V for Vendetta*, as well as the *Terminator 2* allusion, apt. According to this principle, it is justifiable to use terrorist means in order to protect what you love. Hate and violence are then justified by the nobility of ‘the cause’, which keeps SoO members on the side of the ‘good’, while ‘evil’ invariably takes place outside of their organization. This masculinist understanding of justified violence perpetuates not only far-right politics, but also global, and Finnish, popular culture more generally. My next example will make this tension between affective motivation and violence more concrete, by showing how anyone who becomes a member of SoO is valorized through audiovisual techniques.

The third video clip is the only one of the three that is still visible on SoO’s YouTube platform.⁶¹ It exhibits a set of photographs taken from SoO events where a group of men and women are donning their official SoO jackets and occupying public spaces, either marching on the streets or posing in a formation that exhibits their unity

⁵⁹ [Varisverkosto.com](https://varisverkosto.com), ‘Mikä ihmeen NSBM?’ (2019) <<https://varisverkosto.com/2019/04/mika-ihmeen-nsbm/>> [accessed 20 March 2020]. ‘Varisverkosto’ translates to ‘crow network’.

⁶⁰ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 43.

⁶¹ The video was accessible on SoO’s YouTube channel during the writing of this article, and is not likely to be removed, as it technically does not include anything violent or any direct hate speech in it.

(Figure 3). The music of the video is ‘Soldiers’ from the US hard rock band Otherwise (2012).⁶² Sixty-seven photos of varying technical quality flash up during the video, not in any way synced to the music. All of the photos are taken from afar, making it difficult to see the faces of the people in them. Usually, we only see the backs or sides of their heads; the only image of a person fully facing the camera seems to be a member of SoO who has died (Figure 3c), with the text RIP over his smiling face, and a promise that they will meet again in Valhalla. There is little to no synchronization between the music and the images. The still images and the music impose their own temporality on the video,⁶³ and together they resonate with both Finnish and global far-right imagery and engender a sense of unease among those who disagree with the symbolism.

The video is the clearest example of a video that is best analysed as ‘documenting’ the group’s actions through the still images,⁶⁴ which make it possible to view its symbols as



Figure 3. Still images from the ‘Soldiers’ video: a) establishing shot with the group’s logos; b) a group of SoO members in front of a church; c) the RIP image of a dead group member; and d) SoO symbols on jackets.

⁶² ‘OTHERWISE - Soldiers (OFFICIAL VIDEO)’ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p733z6aKwMA>> [accessed 16 May 2020]

⁶³ In Michel Chion’s terms, the ‘temporalization’ of the video is stricter when it relates to only the photos that change at a regular pace, but more lax when compared to the music, as the pacing of the images does not relate to the music. However, the pace of the music impacts the pace we perceive to be that of the changing images: without the music being there, the images may seem to change even quicker. Therefore, the music ‘explains’ and creates more room for the eye to see the still images. This becomes even more pronounced as the image of the dead SoO member lingers onscreen for a while longer than any other image. See Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 13–15. Another layer of temporality is created when we consider Barthes’s writings on still images as portraying nostalgia, a past time, or even death. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill & Wang, 1981).

⁶⁴ Askanius, *Radical Online Video*, 78; Ekman, ‘The Dark Side of Online Activism’, 83.

functioning audiovisually in terms of ‘performative communication’.⁶⁵ The first is the symbol of ‘the crowd’, or people gathered in a joint succession. While we live in a highly individualistic society, neo-Fascist logic mixes the individual and the collective together in a surprisingly harmonic alliance. The video becomes meaningful to the group’s members, as ‘mediating collective experiences of (external) violence or hate and of (internal) cohesion and friendship are key elements in far-right-wing online communication’.⁶⁶ Collectivity and even friendship, then, become equally vital messages as those of hatred and violence. The cohesive, communal symbol is seen frequently: the SoO jacket features a white-on-black image of the Viking god Odin, his beard fashioned into a Finnish flag, and the name of the city or municipality that the soldier in question is from (Figure 3d). This practice of posting one’s origins on the jacket is designed not only to create a communal national feeling, but also to exhibit how widely the SoO movement has spread in Finland.

The jacket itself works as a uniform for the like-minded. Cynthia Miller-Idriss has studied far-right fashion and the meanings of unified clothing, claiming that the clothes portray codes that ‘rely on – and market to – consumers’ knowledge of far-right ideology but also play on adolescent (masculine) desires related to rebellion, resistance, aggression, violence, male camaraderie, belonging, and identity’.⁶⁷ Images such as these can be factors in radically inclined individuals accessing hate groups, as they function to dilute the meanings of far-right ideology into twisted identity politics where immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities are dehumanized and seen as threats to white identity, and the history of past persecutions such as the Holocaust is either rewritten or made light of. An essential difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is therefore implied just by wearing these jackets: those on the inside of the radicalistic movement, and those outside of it.⁶⁸ The presence of this division becomes the affective basis for circulating hate towards the Othered: ‘hate does not *reside* in a given subject or object. Hate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement.’⁶⁹ I will expand on this next.

The divisive power of clothes is extended to how ‘we’ and ‘they’ are described, not only in far-right extremism but also in many structures that work according to the principles of nationality or hegemonic masculinity. Arto Jokinen has studied Finnish military parlance and found that military slang easily creates differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘us’ meaning soldiers and ‘them’ meaning ‘hippies, queers, non-military service men, gypsies, Swedes, or members of another military group’.⁷⁰ The similarity to far-right extremist attitudes is striking. As the gendered parlance goes, ‘they’ always occupy the position of ‘non-men’ or effeminized men, women, or dangerous Others. Indeed, Jokinen argues that as nationalistic discourses of proper Finnishness are at the core of ‘we’, the concept of Finnishness becomes a masculine discourse if ‘they’, or the

⁶⁵ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 52.

⁶⁶ Ekman, ‘The Dark Side of Online Activism’, 83.

⁶⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 44.

⁷⁰ Jokinen, *Panssaroitu maskuliinisuus*, 147.

enemy, are always/already effeminized.⁷¹ We always return to images of Finnish masculinity that valorize physical strength and militarist ideals, which resonates with SoO as well.

Markers of Finnish neo-Nazi identity resemble those of other European far-right movements insofar as they draw on pagan Norse religious imagery, asserting that spirituality is biological, coursing through their Aryan veins, their DNA, and heritage.⁷² The SoO symbol for Odin functions as exoticizing masculine codes, ascribing to them a quality of veneration: the heroic and the epic. Images of Nordic gods and/or Vikings ‘idealize male strength and physicality, drawing on muscular, tattooed Viking warriors with inflated biceps and hypermasculine models that may appeal to adolescent males who feel pressured to conform to scripted ideals about appropriate masculine behavior and physique’.⁷³ Hence, the image of Odin becomes a symbol of the masculinist ‘Finnish spirit’, although it is a Nordic feeling rather than a specifically Finnish one. Before Christianity became the primary religion, Finnish cultures worshipped a benign and relatively simple set of domestic spirits and deities.⁷⁴ Only a small number of major deities were recognized, among them Ukko, the sky god.⁷⁵ By contrast, there is an unsavory history of appropriation when it comes to Norse deities, among the most significant being the Nazi ideology of Aryan superiority. Miller-Idriss argues that the Nordic symbols ‘evoke a sense of loss, a sense of a particular way of life “slipping away”, or a sense of urgency around a need for preservation, survival, resurrection, or rebirth of a particular kind of nation’. The centrality in Nordic mythology of death and Valhalla, the soldiers’ paradise, is highly salient here.⁷⁶ Not only was Odin a god who frequently conquered death, his image is printed white on a black background, a modern *Totenkopf* of sorts.⁷⁷ In this way, the skull-like image of Odin becomes a symbol of the soldiers’ willingness to die for the SoO cause.

The presence of death is conspicuous in the video. While other images change at the same tempo, one image is given more screen time, which gives it greater significance: the image of the dead SoO member (Figure 3c). This emphasizes his importance and signals that the makers of the video want to pay their respects to their dead friend. More pertinently, it identifies him as a martyr to the cause, which in turn can easily serve as motivation for extremist actions. The theme of martyrdom resonates with far-right ideology. Miller-Idriss has noted that soldier’s heaven Valhalla has specific meanings in the context of modern far-right thinking. Death is an emotional phenomenon, evoking grief, nostalgia and regret, but

⁷¹ Ibid., 194–95.

⁷² Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Duke University Press, 2003), 1, 17. See also Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 5; Futrell and Simi, ‘Free Spaces’.

⁷³ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 22.

⁷⁴ Uno Harva, *Suomalaisten muinaisusko* (Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2019 [1948]).

⁷⁵ Ukko translates as ‘old man’, which might explain why it was not a satisfactory choice for SoO. In the Icelandic sagas, there are mentions of ‘Vinland’ that Vikings tried to colonize, but most scholars agree that this term refers to shores of North America, not Finland. See Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, 147.

⁷⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

⁷⁷ The *Totenkopf*, or skull and bones, was frequently used as a symbol for the Nazi officials and guards who were operating in the concentration camps. Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 110.

when deployed by extremists and integrated into broader ideology of violence [...], symbols of death do not only evoke grief or sadness among observers but also elicit feelings of revulsion, distress, anger, anxiety, and fear. Death is the penultimate celebration and valorization of violence that is so central to far-right identity and ideology.⁷⁸

Death and its glorification are in many cases closer to men's culture and the masculine culture of the military. In the Finnish cultural context, the valorization of death for a greater cause resonates with the symbolism and stories of the Second World War, which in Finland was fought mainly against Russia in two periods, first during the 'Winter War' of 1939–40 and then the 'Continuation War' of 1941–44.⁷⁹ What is striking about the discourses surrounding Finnish soldiers is that they should progress from basic military men to 'deep forest warriors' (*korpisoturi*) during the course of their training. This becomes an initiation of sorts, where the soldier of peace-time who does not valorize war or violence is conflated with the war-time warrior who will do their duty.⁸⁰ During this training, soldiers become tough, decisive, disciplined, muscular, punctual, and strong; they function in the military hierarchy as parts of a well-oiled machine, and most importantly, they are willing to use violence.⁸¹ If they are to die, they die for the motherland, saturated in valour and sacrifice. This, of course, resonates with far-right militant masculinity. The image of the dead SoO member is celebrated in a completely Barthesian way: the still image of the fallen member gains more weight when it is not only a subject who is becoming an object (during the moment of taking the photo), but also one who has finished the journey from subject to object in every meaningful way.⁸² Therefore he becomes the object of respect and admiration and stands for glory in the afterlife.

The song 'Soldiers', chosen for the video's accompaniment, is a hard rock ballad by the Las Vegas group Otherwise. The song was born at the moment of trying to succeed in the music business while almost giving up on that dream. It eventually found its way to music industry producers and radio DJs who helped it to achieve some level of success,⁸³ but the song itself was originally intended as an affirmation of the band members' faith and resolution regarding their musical career. At the same time, the song started to resonate with listeners who had careers in the military or similar forms of public service. Says Andrew Patrick, the band's lead singer:

Those lyrics were written because we were considering quitting at the time. It was 2011. Summer was winding down. Gosh, my brother and I felt like we were banging our heads against the wall. We thought about quitting and getting day jobs. Those lyrics came out

⁷⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁹ The third part is sometimes called 'Lappish War' from 1944 to 1945, but this was fought against German forces and mostly situated in the northern regions of Finland.

⁸⁰ See Jokinen, *Panssaroitu maskuliinisuus*, 172–75, 199.

⁸¹ Ibid., 175–76, 185.

⁸² See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 14.

⁸³ The song release gained 50,000 single sales and made it to the Top 20 of Active Rock Radio by June 2012. See *Centurymedia.com* <<https://www.centurymedia.com/newsdetailed.aspx?IdNews=11624&IdCompany=2>> [accessed 1 September 2020]. To date, the YouTube link to their music video from 2012 has over 11 million hits.

as motivation for us as our own personal anthem to not give up. To keep fighting the good fight. It came across and people got behind it. [...] The actual soldiers will come back and tell us stories that they go on patrol and blast that song out of the Humvees in Afghanistan or Kabul or wherever. It's a crazy energy that that song captured.⁸⁴

There is no obvious connection to far-right extremism in the song. Indeed, the official music video features people of all races, ages, and genders as essential workers in society: 'soldiers'. It is, however, evident in the song's lyrics and the preceding statement that they are portraying a close affinity to masculine military duty towards family and society. The most obvious sonic reference to this is the relentless bass drum of the song, which strikes each beat of the 4/4 time signature throughout the song, and the snare drum which follows the beating bass drum in the chorus of the song, both forming a sonic mirror of military bands. The second masculine sonic symbol is the electric guitar, distorted and loud, which accentuates the first beats of phrases in the verses, then increasing in frequency and erupting in the chorus.⁸⁵ Resilience and willingness to fight are at the core of the song's portrayal of 'soldiers' preparing for their duty:

Verse

It's time to strap our boots on
This is the perfect day to die
Wipe the blood out of our eyes

Verse 2

In this life, there's no surrender
There's nothing left for us to do
Find the strength to see this through

Chorus

We are the ones who will never be broken
With our final breath
We'll fight to the death
We are soldiers, we are soldiers⁸⁶

It is easy to see how these sentiments, expressed through the song's lyrics, the singer's growling overdrive voice, and the assertive metal music sounds, might resonate with far-right extremist understandings of masculinity. This undoubtedly was a factor in why the song was chosen for the SoO video. The presence of death and readiness to die for the cause is not only found in the lyrics, but also the song's *raison d'être*. While

⁸⁴ Quoted in Christina Fuoco Karasinski, "Soldiers" Heals an Otherwise Broken Heart; Las Vegas Band Plays The Machine Shop in Flint', *mlive.com* (2013) <https://www.mlive.com/entertainment/flint/2013/07/soldiers_heals_an_otherwise_br.html> [accessed 16 May 2020].

⁸⁵ The presence of an acoustic guitar, by comparison, softens the musical space of the first verses, but it disappears by the choruses, leaving more space for the electric guitar. Obviously both instruments are commonly associated with masculinity, but the acoustic guitar can be argued to represent a less assertive form of masculinity in the song, while the electric stands for the kind of values in masculinity that SoO members would find appealing.

⁸⁶ 'Soldiers', lyrics from first verse and chorus. Otherwise, 2012.

'death' may be understood as referring to the symbolic 'death' of band members while trying to 'make it' in the music industry, in the context of SoO it becomes a gruesome testimony, a readiness to die for one's cause, comparable to the martyred SoO member who is portrayed in the video. A one-way trip to Valhalla is the reward.

For young people today, it is not unusual to find that extremist attitudes go paradoxically hand in hand with close camaraderie with members of minority groups, if they are familiar to the youth, say, a classmate.⁸⁷ Therefore the connection to far-right identity is formed more through emotion and affect rather than being a carefully articulated political position. These affects are portrayed in the still images as well as the Outsiders' song: the congenial 'we' translates from the original song's band camaraderie and first responders' pride in their work into being a stagnant, masculinist, homosocial and toxic 'we' in SoO's video, where 'they' stands for everyone they oppose. The camaraderie markets the SoO ideology directly to young men. Miller-Idriss recognizes two emotional anchors in far-right symbols and products: 'the desire for male comradeship and belonging, and the urge to express resistance, frustration, and anger at mainstream society'.⁸⁸ Counterintuitively, joining SoO based on these emotional anchors might ultimately be beneficial to the young men. Michael Kimmel points out that angry communal rebellion actually makes these boys more docile:

Instead of worrying for example, that an excessive diet of violent video games would make a young guy more likely to commit an act of violence, the Frankfurt School would have been more worried that he'd be more docile, that he'd never rebel socially, collectively, because he got all that rebellion out of his system on a machine created by one of the world's largest corporations.⁸⁹

Simultaneously, Kimmel points out that online communities build false communities that simultaneously keep the experienced rage alive better than in actual communities, and they are hence isolating communities. But it might be possible that this rebellion dilutes itself from the inside. After a brief spike in popularity, SoO has dwindled to non-existence. As Kimmel puts it, 'Populism is not a theory, an ideology; it's an emotion.'⁹⁰ Perhaps the actualization of this emotion, anger, lessened when SoO took to the streets rather than the internet. Perhaps the male camaraderie indeed was the only thing the recruited men needed, not the anger that goes with it.

⁸⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 18. Juvenile perception of masculinity is also bound in figures of hypermasculinity. As Gary Cross writes of these figures: 'It is hard to see these characters as much more than comic-book figures appealing to the teenage boy and the men who haven't given up teen fantasies of displaying superpowers, repressed emotion, and explosive power.' In this way, we could argue that juvenile fantasies are motivating also the adult section of the far-right extremists. At the same time, thinking of them as juvenile is also to trivialize them, which can overlook their more dangerous and threatening political convictions. Cross, *Men to Boys*, 187.

⁸⁸ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 22.

⁸⁹ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, Kindle location 1030.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Kindle location 83.

Final Thoughts

SoO's propaganda videos are hastily made, and rely not on technological or audiovisual prowess, but rather on affective impact. The imagery resonates in several ways: they create unity within the grouping while their messages to outsiders are affective messages of fear, mystery, and threat. It can also be argued that the slapdash, lo-fi aesthetics of the videos encourage action from the audioviewer. No special skills are needed to produce these videos; therefore anyone can produce and post them. YouTube's golden rule, according to which all members are also producers of content, is here skewed to sinister purposes.

SoO's use of global popular culture is in line with other extremist groups' propaganda videos, but it contradicts their logic of an exclusively 'national' Finnish culture, as every reference has global reach. This shows that SoO's nationalism is not about Finnishness, but about a hegemonic, global, Euro-Western, white masculinist culture.⁹¹ The images of masculinity are based on militant ideals where strength and resolve are closely bound up with violence and extreme attitudes. These ideals are expressed in an unlikely cavalcade of images, including the Terminator, Guy Fawkes, and the Viking god Odin.⁹² Some traits of militarist Finnish masculinity resonate with these global symbols, but ultimately, SoO's version of Finnishness seems to lack, well, Finnishness. As far-right politics of any kind are closely connected to affect, Finnishness resonates with them, even though they do not resonate with Finnishness. The vacillation between the specific touchpoints of anger and exultation, frustration and glory, battle and death is what makes SoO's messages fascinating to Finnish ethnonationalists. Omitting all Finnish music from the videos, SoO manage to turn the concept of Finnishness into affect rather than appreciation of actual Finnish culture and art.

Michael Kimmel's term 'aggrieved entitlement' explains the affective messages of masculinity found in SoO's videos.⁹³ Aggrieved entitlement is a gendered emotion, 'a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and the moral obligation and entitlement to get it back'.⁹⁴ They portray disillusionment as they feel entitled to the same privileges they have been assigned just because they are white men: after all, these narratives are enforced by history and popular imagination. More importantly, they feel as though these privileges are being taken away from them and given to others. In the American context, Kimmel compares this to the American Dream being snatched away. In the Finnish context, it is the idea of traditional, war-time masculinity that is perceived to be under threat through the rise of immigration, feminism and queer rights. Racism is an

⁹¹ The globality of SoO's aesthetics is easily explained by the digitally connected nature of our current society: 'Today increased online access to popular music has led to more hybrid sounds, made place-based traditions less significant, and created new questions about cultural appropriation.' Love, *Trendy Fascism*, 12.

⁹² This idealized strong masculine position can be appealing also to women who accept the binary understanding of gender, either because they accept the need for strong men to counterbalance their own position, or because they identify with it across genders (and, technically, by default then question the binaries of gender, but alas, few are aware of this process). This aspect is not, however, very visible or audible in my examples.

⁹³ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, Kindle location 83.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Kindle location 1535.

integral factor, as the illusion of hegemonic whiteness in Finland has only recently been questioned in scholarly discussions.

The affective messages conveyed in the videos are also dependent on their receivers: a SoO member will perceive such messages differently than a non-member. As Kolamo and Vuolteenaho point out, the strategy of 'combined propaganda' works to mould the audioviewers' experiences both inside the group producing the propaganda and outside it.⁹⁵ For SoO members, the three videos function to reinforce their beliefs about society at large, but the messages sent to the outside are more complex. In the first instance, depicting the birth of the group, the video presented a direct conflict between their official communication to people outside the organization, where they claimed not to have any political agenda. The video, however, clearly exhibited far-right radicalist symbols. In the second, where the masked men address the supposed enemies of the group, the message for the SoO group members states that it is acceptable to use violence against immigrants. To the outside, the main message is for the immigrants, and the motivation is to spread fear; to the general Finnish audience, the message is that of conflict, as the group still claims to be non-violent and to shun their more violent members. The third video signals to the inside that solidarity and endeavour are starting to bring about the results they strive for. To the outside, the same message becomes an ominous indication that SoO's political action is gaining in popularity; it is becoming naturalized, a normal way of interacting with your neighbours and citizens.

Despite the aspirations documented here, during the past years of its operations, SoO has not gained in popularity. On the contrary, their subsections have since closed or disappeared into passivity. A handful of members occasionally congregate in public spaces, only to be shooed away by the police if they cause trouble. Cottee and Cunliffe mention that one factor in extremist online propaganda reinforcing extreme opinions is the need for sustained effort in recruiting more members and keeping their organization operational.⁹⁶ Extremist online propaganda has been proven to be successful in normalizing exposure to extreme material, which can cause radicalization in individuals who are open to extremist thinking. But this is not something SoO have been successful in maintaining: online videos have been published only sporadically. A further concern is whether the rise of SoO's online visibility has, or will in the future, normalize neo-fascist symbols and, thereby, extremist far-right politics in Finland. So far, this has not been the case, perhaps due to the lack of actual Finnish culture in the videos. After all, as Kimmel has already suggested,⁹⁷ if manhood and masculinity are more important than nationalistic thoughts, not many Finns will find resonance in far-right thinking. In this way, current society might not be under a high degree of threat; at least not from this particular group.

⁹⁵ Kolamo and Vuolteenaho, 'Natsit', 24.

⁹⁶ Cottee and Cunliffe, 'Watching ISIS', 186.

⁹⁷ Kimmel, 'Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage', 207, 213.