

## The dark side of online activism: Swedish right-wing extremist video activism on YouTube

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*In recent years, an emerging body of work, centred on specific communicative forms used in facilitating collective and connective action, have contributed to greater understanding of how digital communication relates to social mobilisation. Plenty of these studies highlight the progressive potentiality of digital communication. However, undemocratic actors also utilise the rapid advancement in digital technology. This article explores the online video activism of extreme right-wing groups in Sweden. It analyses more than 200 clips on YouTube, produced by five right-wing extremist organisations. The study shows that the extreme right deploy video activism as a strategy of visibility to mobilise and strengthen activists. Moreover, the groups attempt to alter the perception of (historically-rooted) socio-political identities of the extreme right. Furthermore, YouTube becomes a political arena in which action repertoires and street politics are adapted to the specific characteristics of online video activism. Finally, video activism could be understood as an aestheticisation of politics.*

### Introduction

Social media have undoubtedly contributed to new and revitalised forms of civic engagement. However, the technological development of media and communication also tends to nourish an uncritical celebration of new participatory possibilities and notions of

increased political deliberation and engagement. The advancement of new means of producing and distributing media content and new methods of mass communication also empower actors with explicit undemocratic and anti-inclusive agendas. This is evident in what Caiani and Parenti (2009) call “the dark side of the Web” – the emergence of dynamic far right-wing activities on Internet. The extreme right’s early adaptation of digital communication technology has gained plenty of scholarly attention. Research has focused on the political discourse (Ferber, 2000), extreme rhetoric (Thiesmeyer, 1999; Barnett, 2007), community-building, and the networking of extreme right organisations in relation to new media (Caiani, della Porta & Wagemann, 2012). However, little or no attention has been paid to extremist right-wing video production and distribution.

In Sweden, extreme right-wing groups have a long history of media production, and the production and online distribution of video clips have become a key strategy in their communicative repertoire. Organisations operating within a well-developed online infrastructure are well-established actors on commercial platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The development of digital communication and information technology has played an important role in facilitating the production and dissemination of political propaganda of extreme right-wing movements for a long time (Lööv, 2000). For example, extreme right-wing organisations were quick to adopt digital communication practices. In the beginning of the 1990s, there were at least 15 to 20 active Swedish neo-Nazi bulletin board systems (BBS’s) (Back, Keith & Solomos, 1996, p. 10). The communication structures facilitated by the early Internet were well-suited for smaller, semi-open or closed communities within the milieu. With the progression of online communication, right-wing movements and the white-power music scene benefited greatly as the Internet provided new distribution channels and facilitated new environments in which activists and supporters could consume racist propaganda and popular culture but also meet and communicate with each other (Futrell, Simi & Gottschalk, 2006, p. 296). Moreover, new communication technologies and new distribution channels for propaganda also played an important role in shaping extreme right-wing political identities (Statzel, 2008).

The Swedish extreme right-wing milieu is particularly interesting since it was the hub of the global white power music scene in the mid-1990s (Wåg, 2010, p. 99f), and Swedish actors (alongside their US counterparts) have been at the forefront in appropriating digital information technology since the late 1980s. One of the main factors contributing to a lively extreme right-wing online community is the possibility of communicating anonymously with political peers. Previously, individuals were required to subscribe to newspapers and newsletters or physically to attend political meetings to get in contact with far-right groups. Browsing far-right websites, watching videos on You Tube, or communicating with extreme-right activists have eliminated several of these barriers.

This article explores the online video activism of right-wing extremist groups in Sweden. Since there are few scholarly contributions on the video production and distribution of the extreme right, the primary aim of the article is to provide a comprehensive overview of the

223 video clips disseminated on YouTube. Furthermore, the article discusses how the video content relates to the political sociology of the extreme right and to the social mobilisation and recruitment (possibilities) of far-right activists. So, to fuel this discussion, the article identifies the various modes, political discourses, aesthetic elements and ideological functions of the video content. In order to relate the online video material to the politics and the sociology of the extreme right, the article focuses on the relationship between mediated communication and the socio-cultural context of extreme right-wing politics (cf. Fairclough, 2010). This implies that the video material must be understood in relation to a broader framework of contemporary extreme right-wing ideology and political action. Furthermore, through an understanding of video communication on online platforms such as YouTube as a way of performing and articulating “different modes of audience address” (van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010, p. 249), the article explores the relationship between mediated representation and political mobilisation/engagement.

### **Online video activism as alternative media**

The article approaches the online video material as a form of alternative media (e.g., Atton, 2006; Askanius, 2012). Furthermore, the article discusses how online video content could be understood as “articulations” and “performances” of political and social identities and, thus, as constructing relations to specific audiences (van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010). In order to understand how this connection is manifested, the paper will also address some of the key social and political characteristics of the (Swedish) far right.

Theories on alternative media tend to stress the progressive, open and participatory character of media production, distribution and content (Atton, 2001; Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001); and, since extreme right-wing media do not fulfil these criteria (Atton, 2004, 2006), the ‘alternative media’ approach is problematised in order to capture the specific character of right-wing extremist video activism. However, since the extreme right use similar discursive strategies as progressive alternative media – for example, by emphasising marginalisation or opposition to mainstream media, there are also similarities between the two (Atton, 2004, p. 89). Askanius (2012, p. 64f) distinguishes between three general scholarly approaches to video activism – video as “alternative news”, as “empowerment” and as “documentation”. Despite the differences among these perspectives, they all tend to highlight the progressive character of alternative media - the potential of participation, deliberation facilitated by alternative public spheres, the radical social or/and political possibilities of small media production, and the empowerment of the disenfranchised. Within these definitions, there is little room for a video activism that embodies neo-fascist, racist, nationalist, violent, chauvinist, and reactionary politics and social practices. Nevertheless, there are general elements within these theoretical approaches that are fruitful to highlight when addressing extreme right-wing video activism. Thus, I will now outline an analytic

definition that captures the production, distribution, and the specific forms of representation of right-wing extremist online video activism.

In terms of production and distribution practices, extreme right-wing video activism deploys many of the features of alternative media (cf. Atton, 2001, 2006). Video production is an inexpensive and effective way of disseminating political messages for marginalised actors. It is not resource-demanding; it basically requires digital recording equipment, a software program for digital editing, and a basic knowledge of political communication. Video production is often centred on the activities of organisations – for example, through *documenting* street action and social gatherings (Askanius, 2012, p. 66f). Furthermore, YouTube provides a simple and dynamic platform that is ideal for groups on the political margin. Actors in the extreme right environment usually have limited access to conventional distribution channels – for obvious reasons (Löow, 2000; Wåg, 2010). Publishing and distributing videos on YouTube mean that extreme right-wing movements can reach and communicate with new audiences (Askanius & Uldam, 2011, p. 81). Since public protests and political dissent need to attract media attention in order to influence public opinions (cf. Gitlin, 1980; Rucht, 2004), video activism becomes a strategy for mediated visibility (e.g., Cammaerts, 2012). The appropriation of a commercial platform also discloses the ability to make strategic choices when it comes to the distribution of clips. Usually, mainstream media actors are viewed as agents of the political establishment or as marionettes for a salient ‘Jewish power’. Consequently, using YouTube for disseminating extreme right-wing discourse reveals new practices for alternative media content – and, hence, a blurred line between the alternative and the commercial realm of media production and distribution.

Online video clips promoting extreme right-wing politics could also be understood as performances and articulations that generate relations between the producer (the extreme right-wing organisations) and particular audiences (e.g., van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010). The videos potentially reach new sympathisers and utilise several modes and discourses to attract attention. So, video clips are also produced and disseminated on YouTube in order to *recruit* new activists (e.g., Back, 2002) and to *empower* those already involved. Documenting political activities provides “dimensions of collective identity, a sense of belonging, community and sustained commitment” (Askanius, 2012:78). These aspects of group cohesion are particularly important for extreme right-wing groups that tend to be socially and politically marginalised and fragmented (Wåg, 2010). Consequently, by deploying online communication strategies in relation to ‘real’ political practices, the actors also connect the “YouTube performances” to concrete opportunities of participation (e.g., van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010, p. 259f).

Furthermore, archived and published documentation of political activities prolong the presence of the actual events and expand them in space. The mediation of political action on YouTube implicates that the representation of spatially-situated events becomes compressed in time when circulated on a social media platform with a potentially large audience. This “appropriation and use of space” (Harvey, 1989, p. 220) enables specific forms of

representational modes in which the video producers can control and, indeed, manufacture the visual politics of street action or social meetings. Consequently, disseminating clips on an online platform produces various forms of a political space of action. Another factor of *documentation* is connected to collective memory (Askanius, 2012, p. 78). Archived video clips of events constitute a place of collective memory that enables activists and sympathisers to participate (indirect) with the activities, identify with activists, and connect with the political realm of street politics. The video clips become 'evidence' of collective action, built into the organisation's own historiography. Historically, the right-wing milieu has also been prolific in the use of aesthetic symbols and messages. The dimension of aesthetic politics, or the *aestheticisation of politics*, deployed by German fascism and originally analysed by Walter Benjamin (1979 [1930]) is a useful concept in order to understand the aesthetic features of extremist right-wing video activism (e.g., Back, 2002). Aesthetic politics is foremost affective; and, in order to build cohesion among activists and potential sympathisers, video activism is also about producing affective solidarity (cf. Ahmed, 2011). Therefore, mediating collective experiences of (external) violence or hate and of (internal) cohesion and friendship are key elements in far right-wing online communication (Ekman, 2013).

### **Context: the political sociology of the Swedish extreme right**

In order to contextualise the video content, a short introduction to the political sociology of the extreme right-wing milieu will be outlined. The (Swedish) extreme right harbours various ideological positions, such as *ethno-nationalists*, *ethno-pluralists*, *identitarians*, *national socialists* and *nationalists*. These definitions signify a rather heterogeneous landscape of far-right politics; but, in fact, the similarities are far greater than the differences. In this article, the label *extreme right* distinguishes five actors pertaining to the far end of the political right – *Svenska Motståndsrörelsen (SMR)*, *Nordiska Nationalsocialister (NNS)*, *Svenskarnas Parti (SvP)*, *Förbundet Nationell Ungdom (FNU)* and *Nordisk Ungdom (NU)*. The organisations are generally small and situated outside mainstream politics.<sup>1</sup>

The five organisations advocate some form of subordination and/or separation of people based on race, ethnicity or culture. There are differences between, for example *ethno-pluralists* and *national socialists*, the latter relying on theories of racial biology and the former on contemporary (albeit, racist) theories of ethnicity and culture.<sup>2</sup> In short, new forms of racism are different from racial biology since they rely on the concept of distinctive and distinguishable homogeneous cultures. Cultural signifiers are used to manifest versions of essentially fixed characteristics among different groups in society, and these differences are perceived as essentially "insurmountable" (Balibar, 1992, p. 21). By using cultural elements to distinguish groups from each other, *new racism* also denies the very notion of race and racism. But, as Balibar (1992, p. 23) points out, "racism without race" is not particularly new – actually, its prototype is anti-Semitism. Furthermore, ethnicity is

also linked to geographic territory, so there are, in fact, small differences among the various positions (Lundquist, 2010).

The groups advocate an elitist society, and their societal ideals are fundamentally anti-democratic. However, the representative democratic system is accepted for strategic reasons (Swedish Resistance Movement excluded). They support a society based on *Volksgemeinschaft*, defined by race, ethnicity or culture – an “ethnocratic” position (Rydgren, 2010, p. 18; Betz, 2005). Citizens who are not perceived to be Swedes or Nordic (and, in some cases, European) can never become part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Consequently, the movements advocate a total ban on non-Nordic (or non-European) immigration and the repatriation of those who are defined as foreigners. The groups also rely on the concept of ‘class collaboration’ or ‘class peace’ – they reject any notion of a conflict between labour and capital. Instead, they presuppose a hierarchical social structure in which social and economic inequality is believed to be “natural” to society. Hence, the idea of a natural social order also implies that labour movements and the political parties of the working class are the historical antagonist of the extreme right (Ekman, 2013). Or, as one far-right activist bluntly puts it, “equality means death”<sup>3</sup>.

The Swedish extreme right also embodies elements of the three mythical components that, according to Griffin (1991), are essential to fascist ideology – a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism, the decadence of society, and the rebirth of society. The idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* rising from the ashes of multiculturalism is an example of palingenetic ultra-nationalism. The idea that contemporary society is in decline is widespread among the extreme right. And the notion that, one day, society will rise and return to its glorious past is reflected in various representations of a mythical history (Löow, 2000). This implicates that the extreme right’s struggle for social change also resides in a narrative of an idealised past (Rydgren, 2010, p. 17). There is a rivalry between the organisations regarding who is best fit to lead the ‘national struggle’. Since the movements are elite-oriented and promote an authoritative leadership (e.g., Eatwell, 2004), their organisational structure is also anti-democratic (to various extents).

Political discourses emanating from the extreme right are often characterised by conspiratorial thinking. The idea of a Jewish conspiracy is frequent, but there are also conspiracy theories in which established political parties and the mass media are perceived to be in cahoots to deceive the ‘common man’ (Löow, 2011; Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Corte & Edwards, 2008).

Feminism (like multiculturalism) is understood as an example of ‘state-ideology’ forced on the ‘natural order’ of society. Feminism is viewed as an institutionalised practice that threatens the ‘national community’. Within far right-wing discourses, the body and sexuality of the white woman constitute an ideological battleground. White females are ‘threatened’ or ‘under attack’ by non-white immigrants and must be protected by (male) white nationalists. Violence against women is a frequent topic within far right-wing propaganda (Fekete, 2006). Anti-feminism is also connected to specific expressions of masculine ideals

(e.g., Ferber, 2000). In Kimmel's (2007) research on former (Swedish) neo-Nazis, he concludes that masculine identities and practices are far more important factors than political ideology for recruiting new activists to far-right movements. Masculinity is performed in violent practices and reflected in narratives of historicised ideals (in myths of great warriors, etc.). The extreme right milieu is predominantly homo-social and embodies hyper-masculinity – an exaggerated, violent, male identity embedded in fascism's "mythical worship of 'hardness' for its own sake" (Moore, 2004 [1966], p. 266).

## Methodology and material

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of all the video clips uploaded on YouTube by five organisations in the Swedish far right milieu. The analysis includes a total of 223 clips from the YT channels belonging to *Svenska Motståndsrörelsen (SMR)*, *Nordiska National-socialister (NNS)*, *Svenskarnas Parti (SvP)*, *Förbundet Nationell Ungdom (FNU)* and *Nordisk Ungdom (NU)*. The channel belonging to the most violent far right-wing group, SMR, is also the most active with 128 distributed clips, 1041 subscribers and almost 850,000 views in total.<sup>4</sup> The second-largest channel belongs to *Nordisk Ungdom (NU)*, an *ethno-pluralist/identitarian* youth organisation with 52 clips and almost 300,000 views in total.<sup>5</sup> The other three channels are less active compared to SMR's and NU's. The total number of clips has generated just under 1.5 million views, and the five channels have around 2000 subscribers in total.<sup>6</sup> The clips are generally between 2 and 10 minutes long, with a few exceptions.

The methodological approach is inspired by Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1995; 2010). The analysis focuses on the relation between mediated representation and social and political practices and conditions. All the videos have been examined, and the analysis is structured in two steps. First, eight different thematic categories are identified in the total corpus of 223 clips. These categories are constructed from the main features within the manifest content of the clips (i.e., in the visual, textual and aural elements of the content). The eight categories also build on a distinction between clips depicting external versus internal activities of the five organisations. The clips pertaining to external activities are thematically categorised as the *manifestation* clip, the *confrontation* clip, and the *direct action* clip. The clips representing internal practices are classified as the *outdoor* clip and the *physical exercise* clip. In addition to the clips that represent explicit external and internal practices, there are also the thematic categories of *interview*, *humour* and *news* clips. A couple of the videos (often, featuring collage) are multi-thematic, but clips usually represent one distinct category. Furthermore, a few clips fall outside the classification; among them is one with only music and no images. If we look at the viewing statistics for the eight categories, the *manifestation* clip generates most views, followed by the *direct action* clip and the *confrontational* clip. Less popular categories are *interview* and *news*. The *humour* clips are few in number but generate comparatively high viewing rates.

Thematic category	Features
Manifestation clip	Public demonstrations and meetings
Confrontation clip	Verbal confrontation (phone calls, public confrontation with adversaries), physical confrontation (with security guards, police, opponents)
Direct action clip	Thematic and staged direct action in public spaces
Outdoor clip	Forest hiking, wilderness activities, farm work
Physical exercise clip	Martial arts training, sports activities
Humour clip	Ridiculing political opponents and police. Slapstick from activities
Interview clip	Interviews with activists, oral announcements
News clip	News items (of amateurish character)

Table 1: Thematic categories and main features of video clips

Second, the analysis moves on to scrutinise the qualitative aspects of the clips. This step includes depictions of the various modes/styles, aesthetic features, political discourses and the ideological function of the clips in each thematic category (Fairclough, 1995). *Mode/style* refers to the particular way the clips construct a relationship between the producer and the audience (Fairclough, 1995, p. 77). For example, by emphasising the experiences of camaraderie, physical exercise or violence, the clips address a certain collective identity (or experience) within the audience.

The study also examines the *aesthetic features* of the clips – for example, the specific use of music, the editing techniques and the specific choice of visuals in the clips.

The *political discourse* of the clips refers to the primary political message disseminated in the material. The political discourse could be articulated by a narrator or by the textual and visual messages of demonstrations (for example, by recording a public demonstration against immigration).

The *ideological function* refers to the specific ideological potential of the clips. When addressing the ideological potential, the analysis highlights the societal (power) dimension of the video content (Fairclough, 1995, p. 45ff). However, by deploying the term *ideological function*, the article does not view the audience as passive; rather, it emphasises the socio-political potentiality of the video material (ibid.). The disclosing of ideological functions is made possible by analysing the specific combinations of mode/style, aesthetic features and political discourse in relation to the political sociology (i.e., the socio-cultural and political context) of the (Swedish) extreme right (c.f. Poole, 2012; Fairclough, 1995, 2010). Since the analysis is centred on the thematic categories of clips and the general patterns in its extensive visual material, nuances and details are not primarily in focus. This also implies that a more in-depth, sign-centred approach is abandoned in favour of a broader and more contextual one.



## Video clips on YouTube

In this section of the paper, the qualitative aspects of the clips will be presented thematically. The analysis will follow the qualitative properties of the clips pertaining to the eight different categories with a focus on the modes/styles, aesthetic features, political discourses and the ideological function of the clips. The categories are ordered according to the volume of clips, beginning with the most common category.

Category	Mode/style	Aesthetic feature	Political discourse	Ideological function
Manifestation clip	Drama, unity, intensity, victimisation, masculinity, aggressiveness	Music (dramatic), multi-semiotic editing, dramatic visuals, close-ups	Anti-immigration, nationalism, 'race politics', violence against women	Consolidating belief, showcasing mobilising capability
Confrontation clip	Realism, drama, victimisation, fearlessness, latent violence	Visual realism, documentary style editing, dramatic music	Victims of unjust (state) power actors	Showcasing fearlessness, group cohesion, producing sympathy
Direct action clip	Spectacularity, masculinity, creativity, playfulness	Theatrical visual shots, music (popular and/or dramatic)	Far right-wing politics targeting societal institutions and processes	Mobilising capability, showcasing street politics
Outdoor clip	Pseudo-militarism, physical health, camaraderie, masculinity	Dramatic visuals and music, realism, nature (naturalism)	Racial biopolitics, soundness, cultural-history, everyday life	Showcasing strength, endurance and collective force
Physical exercise clip	Hyper-masculinity, camaraderie, violence	Visuals of physical challenges, dramatic music	Racial biopolitics, historicised physical ideals, everyday life	Group cohesion, loyalty, capability to use force, normalising social practices
Humour clip	Politics as play, ridiculing opponents, humour	Music (humorous), collage style editing, slapsticks	Anti-immigration, anti-fascism	Popularising extreme right-wing politics
Interview clip	Rationales for extreme right-wing activism	Visual realism, talking heads, close-ups of activists	Internal discourses of loyalty, collective identities, etc.	Recruitment of new activists, empowerment of members
News clip	Realism, alternative news	Reportage style, editing, voice-over, public images	Anti-immigration	Alternative to mainstream media

Table 2: Summary of thematic qualities in the extreme right-wing videos

## The manifestation clip

All five organisations have published clips recording demonstrations and/or public meetings. A common aesthetic element within the clips is added dramatic music (particularly, in the SMR clips) and nationalist rock/pop (particularly, in the NU clips). The combination of music and images creates an intense dramatic mode. One recurrent technique is to combine edited series of images, a soundtrack with suggestive music, and an audio file with speeches from the movement's activists. The combination of these three elements creates an impression of a greater number of participants (than in reality), a mode of intensity, and a political rationale for the event. The three elements are sometimes complimented with a series of explanatory (rolling) captions with political messages or a textual framing. This form of *hypermediacy* (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 189) shows that the extreme right have deployed rather professional practices of video production. The political messages of the demonstrations are downplayed in favour of emotional modes representing strength, unity and force; and, even if political content is present, a more dramaturgical setting consisting of a series of images, music and arbitrary speech constitutes an affective visual politics.

When political discourses come to fore, they tend to centre on "mass immigration", the "celebration of nationalist heroes", "the violence of the left", and "violence against women". The discursive dimensions of the demonstration clips depicting "violence against women" are interesting. First, a couple of clips show demonstrations that exploit media attention on an rape and then frame it as a political question about mass immigration – thus, attributing violence against women to immigration and immigrants. Second, clips connect the issue of violence to a highly prolific political debate regarding the juridical dimensions of violence against women in society – a debate that entails a potentially widespread public pathos. By connecting violence against women to immigration, the clips utilise a classical colonial trope that upholds white women's sexuality as a symbol in the struggle for European values (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2010, p. 71). In the clips from SMR, the violence is framed as an on-going attack against the white race.<sup>7</sup> The clips also emphasise that the organisations reflect a strong public opinion in society.

One frequent mode in the demonstration clip is *collective victimisation* (e.g., McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). The visual framing depicts the movement as an innocent victim of both left-wing attacks and mainstream political society. This comes to the fore in sequences that frame far right-wing movements as victims of police force and in images that show physical confrontation with security guards in public spaces – often, with visual close-ups. Within these clips, there is an underlying aggressive mode that surfaces in images of aggressive activists and confrontational behaviour. The SMR clips reveal a particularly resilient mode of male aggression. In several clips, male violence comes to the fore in confrontational situations. A couple of clips contain images of what looks like attacks from counter-demonstrators but also various fights with the police. One important ideological function of the demonstration clip is to showcase the capacity for mobilising activists and to emphasise social cohesion within the group. The latter come to the fore in representa-

tions of camaraderie, loyalty and bravery. So, these clips fulfil both external and internal socio-political purposes. They highlight internal social unity, and they simultaneously articulate the capability of using violence, if necessary.

The manifestation clip also includes representations of public meetings. Both SMR and NU publish series of clips that depict activities in public spaces. SMR publishes clips called 'struggle reports', which include images of public speeches, musical events and activists distributing flyers, etc. In some of the clips, aggressiveness prevails; and, in one clip, activists parade with black shields depicting white spray-painted hanging ropes. In the clip, an activist hands out flyers to people in the streets; and, in a conversation with a passing citizen, one of the activists declares, "I personally think that we should drag out the local politicians who are responsible for this and hang them from a tree". Violent threats made by identifiable activists are quite rare, but SMR activists appear to be highly aggressive in the public meetings.

### **The confrontation clip**

The confrontation clip involves verbal attacks on political opponents, media representatives, police, government officials and private individuals but also physical confrontation with political antagonists. The confrontation clips are mainly on SMR's channel. Some include recorded phone calls in which different individuals are verbally confronted by one of SMR's leading figures. In total, the organisation has published several clips in which a police officer, a school teacher, an editor at Swedish Radio, an asylum accommodation owner, an officer at Swedish Crime Intelligence, and an employee of the Secret Service are provoked by a series of questions. The visuals include photographs of the subject confronted and photos of the activist. These clips fulfil two distinct functions. They represent SMR as the victim of various injustices, and they show that SMR is a fearless and confrontational organisation. Since SMR uses political violence, the clips harbour a latent threat. They articulate a form of latent violence in which SMR make it clear that it monitors certain political opponents.

One aspect of confrontation appears in filmed sequences in which SMR activists engage in verbal and physical confrontation with police and security guards. These clips often end with activists being arrested by police. Police confrontation is provoked in order to produce a form of political victimisation; simultaneously, the video producers appropriate the logic of mass media (in this case, conflict and violence) in order to gain attention (cf. Gitlin, 1980).

The clips often contain explanatory captions that define the movement as a victim of political repression and state brutality. By constructing visual and textual modes of "repression", elements of collective victimisation surface (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). The physical confrontation with police and security guards emphasises the visual elements that reflect internal discipline, collective action and the physical ability of activists. Physical confrontations tend to romanticise the movement's strength and determination in relation to an unjust and powerful state enemy. Some clips contain scenes from confrontations with political opponents, such as anti-racist demonstrators. However, the quantity and intensity

of recorded violence is limited; the clips include images of minor scuffles and commotion rather than outright physical violence. The quality of the clips suggests that it is more about showcasing the movement's ability to defend itself, both in terms of motivation and physical ability, rather than showcasing direct violence. There is also a juridical aspect to reflect upon here – the footage can be used as evidence against the movement's activists.

The confrontation clips represent activists as if they are under attack by the established society. Within the corpus of manifestation and confrontation clips, it is primarily the state apparatus that is portrayed as the most important political enemy, which also reflects a more modern racist discourse (Mudde, 2004, p. 196). Immigration and immigrants are viewed as a symptom of a malicious political system and the by-product of an "anti-white" or "anti-Swedish" state apparatus rather than the root of the problem. This tactical shift must be understood in light of the political developments of the extreme right (Mammone, Godin & Jenkins, 2012). Rather than attacking refugee centres or beating up immigrants (which was common in the 1990s), the representatives of the state apparatus (or the mass media) are the main targets. By constructing an image of the organisation as victim rather than violent attacker, the extreme right groups aim to evoke sympathy in the viewer. Simultaneously, they come to the fore as politically relevant. The clips portray activities conducted within a constitutionally-protected framework – for example, by questioning specific practices of decision-making or legislation. The political victimisation is constructed with simple dramatic effects – for example, through the use of dramatic music and explanatory captions. The ideological function of the confrontation clips is to evoke sympathy for the activists and to showcase the unity and fearlessness of the organisations.

### **The direct action clip**

Recording spectacular actions in public spaces is another way to disseminate images of mobilisation capacity. The *direct action clip* documents and preserves small and, sometimes, very short, public events. And by editing together a series of images, speeches and captions, the actions become detached from physical space. By publishing and circulating videos, the direct action receives a new audience. The youth organisation *Nordisk Ungdom* has staged several unconventional direct actions in public spaces. These actions are primarily arranged for video production purposes (in most of the clips, there is no visible audience). The clips are playful and showcase creativity. In one NU clip, images depict activists distributing flyers in a confetti-like manner, all accompanied by a techno music track. The NU clips focus on spectacular and playful visual effects rather than aggressive behaviour and hyper-masculinity. The political discourses articulated in the clips target institutions in society such as the public unemployment service, Goldman Sachs and private employment agencies. But political discourses also target global warfare and sexual assaults against women. The political discourses are interesting since they tend to be concerned with socio-economic issues such as unemployment, economic injustice, or geo-political power struc-

tures. These topics usually attract attention from the political left rather than right-wing extremists. The NU clips depicting direct actions are clearly inspired by the tactics of the new social right, who often reframe and embed overt racism and xenophobia into discourses of social inequality. The strategy of recontextualising left-wing discourse has been adopted, with some success, by extremist groups in Italy and Germany (Fekete, 2012; Peunova, 2012).

The direct action clips from SMR are far from playful and connect more with the confrontation theme. Even if political aspects come to the fore in the beginning of clips, confrontation with police and security guards is the main focus. In the clips, there is noticeable aggressiveness – sometimes, explicit and physical, sometimes, latent and discursive. Violence and overt expressions of masculinity are key components in the formation of fascist political identity (e.g., Eco, 2004).

## Outdoor and physical exercise clips

Clips depicting internal activities of the organisations include various practices in outdoor locations. These clips contain images of forest trekking and other exercises in the wilderness. The modes in the *outdoor clips* emphasise physical challenges and camaraderie – for example, by portraying activists trekking together with heavy equipment in difficult terrain or taking baths in icy lakes. In the SMR clip “Hiking in Dalarna”, four young men are carrying timber in a snow-covered forest. The clip is described in the following way:

Last weekend, activists from the Resistance Movement’s fifth nest, once again, went on a wilderness adventure into the deepest forest of Dalarna. This time, the activists dared to go on a tougher adventure than ever before.<sup>8</sup>

In the clip, one of the activists is acting as a military officer who commands the others to head out into the winter night. After the explanatory introduction, a series of images depicting night-time forest hiking are accompanied with dramatic music. The clip also contains rolling captions that explain “Activity, Borlänge 021812, 1 hour of sleep [in] the last 48 hours, marching for 45 kilometres. No food, barely any water. Constant challenges”.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes, the recorded hikes are centred within a cultural-historic discourse – for example, in the clip “Ancient Relic Hike outside Stockholm”, published on FNU’s channel.<sup>10</sup> To combine an interest in Swedish history with physical activities may seem harmless, but the practices must be understood in a wider political context. The outdoor activities and the pseudo-military practices are rooted in a racial ideology of physical health and reflect a larger discourse of racial biopolitics. The emphasis on physical health and purity resemble pre-modern forms of masculinity (Kimmel, 2007). This emphasis on physical purity also reveals the attempt of actors in the far right-wing milieu to distance themselves from the white power music scene of the 1980s-1990s (e.g., Löow, 2000). The mode of physical health and soundness is especially evident in the clips from FNU and in some clips from SMR.

Images of outdoor activities and physical challenges are intended to normalise the social practices of extreme right-wing movements. By providing counter-images to prevailing perceptions of violent and vicious young males, the clips challenge the dominant framing of the right-wing extremist (e.g., Back, 2002). Social practices become embedded with camaraderie and high spirits, and the activists come to the fore as a kind of nationalist Boy Scouts.

Another category of outdoor clips includes farm activities. SMR has published clips depicting activists in the countryside. For example, the clip “Swedish Resistance Movement: Farmers Day” is described in the following way: “On the weekend of 12-13 September, activists from the SMR – mainly, living in cities – visited rural Skåne to help a farmer with his work”.<sup>11</sup> There are several clips on SMR’s channel with a similar content. In the clips, images of activists participating in various farm activities are combined with harmonious music. Some of the farmer clips contain the caption “blood & soil”, which connects the practices to a larger idea of the white race and territorial heritage. They filter traditional aesthetics of a Romantic idealisation of nature through a fascist anti-modernism. In one clip, a group of activists with families are walking across a green field to a grove, where one of the leaders gives a speech. Wearing a dark suit, the activist reads from a notebook: “Children, parents. It is the blood of our race that gives you life”.<sup>12</sup> Clips displaying neo-fascist discourse in pretty countryside scenery constitute a kind of propaganda film that echoes older newsreels rather than modern far right-wing activism.

Several clips depict various practices of *physical exercise* – often, including martial arts. The physical exercise clips have thematic similarities with the outdoor clip they highlight physical challenges and camaraderie, and they emphasise the movement’s ability to use force. The images of physical combat are combined with text captions. In one SMR clip, activists are practicing wrestling and archery with a historic reference to the Viking Age. The title of the clip includes the term “Viking combat”.<sup>13</sup> In two other clips, activists are running on a military obstacle course. In a clip from the FNU, activists are practicing martial arts and, in another, activists from both SvP and FNU are taking part in an “airsoft” battle in the woods. The clip starts with a rolling caption that highlights the camaraderie of the activity, and the clip is accompanied by the music track “There Is Only War” performed by industrial metal band *Raubtier*. The physical exercise clip highlights physical strength and salubrity, which have been promoted by extremist movements over the past decade. Modes of camaraderie, physical challenges and the use of violence characterise the visual propaganda of the internal activities. Even if violence comes to the fore as self-defence, it must be understood in relation to the actual violence performed by organisations of the extreme right. Physical education and self-defence are potentially part of an armed racial struggle (e.g., Lööv, 2000).

The main ideological function of both the outdoor and the physical exercise clips is the formation of collective (socio-political) identities. Friendship, loyalty, and physical challenges are identity markers that connect extreme right-wing practices to other popular

movements in society (such as sports). Neo-fascist actors are basically feeding common social needs that attract people to collective milieus. In the extreme-right environment, these identity markers become saturated with a discourse of racial biopolitics. The cohesion is emphasised through the physical and social activities performed by a determined and collegial movement.

### The humour clip

One category that stands out in the total corpus is the *humour clip*. Humour is mainly used to mock anti-racist counter-demonstrators to achieve entertaining effects. One way to create a humorous effect is to repeat short sequences of footage of political opponents and add music to make the opponent look foolish. There are also examples of police officers getting ridiculed. One clip depicts activists placing a large banner over a city tunnel (located in a rather inaccessible position). When the police show up, the speed increases and music from the British “Benny Hill” television show is added to the footage. The sequence resembles classic slapstick and ends with the activists climbing down from the top of the tunnel. The clip also depicts activists in verbal confrontation with several uniformed police officers, and one threatens the activist holding the camera. In the clip, you can hear the officer threaten the activist with physical violence if he do not stop recording. The threat is repeated several times during the sequence and, later in the clip, the identity of the police officer is revealed. Hence, SMR portrays itself as consisting of political activists with a sense of humour but also as victims of police harassment and intimidations. The clip combines the generic elements from the direct action, confrontation and humour clips, and it is one of the most viewed clips on SMR’s channel.

Besides ridiculing anti-racists opponents, NU also publishes clips in which the humorous effect originates from the action of NU activists. One clip features an activist ‘dancing’ with the caption ‘OK, we can’t dance. But we know politics.’<sup>14</sup> NU has also published a blooper clip entitled ‘Best of Nordic Youth’ in which they combine a series of images of activists falling and throwing snowballs and confetti. The clip also contains images of activists throwing snowballs at the windows of a refuge centre for children. So, by framing attacks (even if they are merely symbolic) against a refuge centre in a humorous mode, the violence appears implicit. In another clip from the same event, the leader of NU tries to hand out teddy bears to the manager of the centre. After being refused, the activists ridicule one of the refugees standing outside the centre smoking a cigarette. These clips are clearly aimed at a younger audience. With a simple message, ‘refugee children are not really children’; and, with these strategic visual elements, they seem to appeal to younger supporters. Humour becomes a (populist) tool in the struggle for media attention; and, by ridiculing political opponents, refugees and other subjects, the clips constitute a form of negative campaigning.

## Interview and news clips

In 2011, *Nordisk Ungdom* launched a campaign called 'Get Involved' and published a series of recorded *interviews* with activists. In the clips, activists explain why they became members and why they are committed to the organisation. One of the activists emphasises the importance of the Internet, and he explains that one of the contributing factors for joining was the on-going discussion he had with other activists on an online forum. On SMR's channel, there are clips with recorded 'communiqués'. With regard to setting and function, these resemble the interviews on NU's channel with one exception – these are prewritten speeches recited by a leading activist in SMR. In the 'communiqués', the activist is talking about the social and political obligations that activists need to fulfil. These clips seem to have an explicit internal function since they highlight the demands of commitment and loyalty to the organisation.

SvP produces some interesting clips of an (amateurish) journalistic character. The clips are connected to the online newspaper *Realisten* and involve current events with immigrant-related topics. In one clip, the owner of a guesthouse used as an asylum accommodation is interviewed. In another clip, some students are interviewed about the anxiety they experience in the community after the arrival of refugee children. In the clip, several youngsters (some identifiable and some not) explain that they feel "threatened, disgusted" and that they are "scared" of the refugee children. In the clip, the reporter claims that several "young girls have been harassed by refugee children".<sup>15</sup> In one clip, the names of some juveniles accused of an aggravated assault on an older man are revealed. News clips are not very prominent compared to other categories, but they are noteworthy because they exemplify an attempt to produce alternative online news television. The news clips also resemble news television items published on more established online newspapers platforms. Selecting events and framing them from a racist point of view and publishing them as alternative news items is an approach utilised by extreme right-wing online news sites (Ekman, 2013).

## Conclusion

The video clips on five YT channels belonging to the extreme right-wing milieu reveal a multifaceted content that serves both internal and external political purposes. I argue that the "articulations" of political identities and practices in the video clips (cf. van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010), disclose a complex relationship between video production/distribution and socio-political organisation and mobilisation. I will now emphasise five concluding points in order elucidate this relation.

First, extreme right-wing video activism on YouTube is about achieving and increasing public visibility (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Cammaerts, 2012). The audience for the publication and distribution of clips on a commercial social media platform is potentially infinite (Askanius & Ullman, 2011) even though the actual audience is limited. The published clips are also circulated on other platforms; they are embedded or linked in blogs, websites, etc., facili-



tating a relationship between the extreme right web and the commercial Internet (Ekman, 2013). This enables extreme right-wing actors to connect with new audiences outside their usual channels of communication. Consequently, participation on commercial platforms discloses new dynamics of alternative media distribution (e.g., Atton, 2001). Despite their opposition to mainstream media outlets and media companies, extreme right-wing actors appropriate commercial platforms such as YouTube for their own purposes.

Second, video activism is deployed in order to mobilise and strengthen activists and sympathisers. By consolidating belief and showcasing fearlessness and mobilisation capability (among other things), the video clips articulate collective identity and social cohesion. The video content's relation to 'real' political and social practices provides a rationale and opportunity of participation (e.g., van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010).

Third, by publishing video clips on YouTube, the organisations are able to showcase a diversity of practices and identities, seeking to modify the common historical perception of extreme right-wing politics. Seemingly moving away from underground activities, the dominating *modus operandi* of the 1980s-1990s (e.g., Löw, 2000), public visibility and everydayness come to the fore as key strategies in the video clips. The movements represent a diverse range of political and social activities. In the clips, we meet fairly ordinary young men who indulge in outdoor activities, participate in public meetings, speaking directly and publicly to the viewer, and so forth. Even though the clips on the SMR channel highlight confrontation, homo-social aggressiveness, and latent violence, there is also a great deal of material with socially accepted content in their clips. A substantial amount of the clips portraying outdoor life and socialisation in seemingly depoliticised forms are key components to what could be described as a visual sanitation process. The modes of camaraderie and soundness reflect a regenerated neo-fascist culture. Physical exercise appears in apolitical settings but is essentially an extension of the paramilitary culture that has prevailed in the far right milieu throughout the postwar period. The big difference is the more neutral discursive framing in the video material. For example, in the physical exercise clips, explicit political discourses do not come to the fore; instead, the meaning is embedded in the historical context. Innocent forest hikes reflect the preparations for a (potentially) violent, political struggle. The visibility and normalisation are elements of an on-going socio-political (collective) identity process within the various groups. The clips enhance certain identity markers, such as physical health, masculine homo-sociality and companionship, and reject other identity markers (e.g., Back, 2002). The clips reproduce a framework of socio-political morality by detaching possible elements that have signified the practices of far right-wing groups during the past.

Fourth, extreme right video activism is a particular form of political action repertoire with specific (media) qualities. By representing different activities and political actions in a short visual format, the various practices are distributed for propaganda purposes. The specific techniques of producing video clips mean that certain activities (such as the direct action) are adapted for dissemination on YouTube. This is particularly evident in the NU

videos. NU's spectacular actions in which activists (wearing costumes, etc.) stage performance-like protests are primarily performed for the purpose of online dissemination. The recorded events are extended in time and space, and constitute a form of 'timeless' visual activism. When the time-space realm of political action becomes extended, the recorded demonstration or direct action also becomes independent of and detached from the actual event. The vast possibilities for circulation of YouTube clips also show that one of the key objectives of visual activism is the extension of political action in space.

The final aspect of video activism on YouTube relates the aesthetic dimension of the media format, short visual clips, to the specific characteristics of extreme right-wing politics. By producing clips with an 'affective' intention, far right-wing actors utilise aesthetic elements to access experiences and emotions within the audience. Simple and highly affective symbols and messages are combined with visual and audio elements – producing a politics of affection (e.g., Ahmed, 2011). The aesthetic dimension of neo-fascist ideology (e.g., Back, 2002) is an important feature in the political communication of far right-wing actors. By mainly addressing the viewer's emotions, video activism becomes an orchestrator of affective politics. Visual tropes of friendship, resistance, motivation, collective action, political decisiveness and masculinity (Kimmel, 2007) are combined with dramatic music and discursive (moving) captions in order to construct an aesthetically-coded propaganda. The video clips could, therefore, be described as affective mediations of extreme right-wing ideology and reflect political idealism and a *politics of the will*. There is also a recurrent discourse that frames the politics of the extreme right as a reflection of a *vox populi* - that the organisations are expressing a muted and suppressed will of the people (e.g., Eatwell 2004).

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**You Tube channels**

*Svenska Motståndsrörelsen* – <http://www.youtube.com/user/MotstandsMedia/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)

*Svenskarnas Parti* – <http://www.youtube.com/user/Realistenfilm/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)

*Förbundet Nationell Ungdom* – <http://www.youtube.com/user/Forbundetmedia/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)

*Nordisk Ungdom* – <http://www.youtube.com/user/Etnopluralist/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)

*Nordiska Nationalsocialister* – <http://www.youtube.com/user/NNS/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)

## Notes

- 1 The smallest organisation, NNS, dissolved in 2013 and called on its members to join SMR (Ekman, 2013).
- 2 Ethno-pluralist positions are often claimed to be “post-racists” (e.g., Betz, 2003, p. 84), but they are essentially “culturally racist” (Peunova, 2012, p. 308).
- 3 All quotes from the data are translated by the author. <http://www.nordfront.se/jamlikhet-utveckling-radikal-dialektik-och-skapandet-av-overmanniskan.smr> (retrieved March 16, 2013).
- 4 <http://www.youtube.com/user/MotstandsMedia/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 5 <http://www.youtube.com/user/Etnopluralist/> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 6 The numbers are based on YouTube statistics from March 9, 2013.
- 7 The female body becomes an issue for the “white nation”. In racist myths of motherhood, the biological reproductive process is considered a duty towards the white race (Löw, 2000, p. 350).
- 8 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAOMYO9q6wQ> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 9 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAOMYO9q6wQ> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 10 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exYXi1Q6IKs> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 11 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3\\_QcVQbRSg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3_QcVQbRSg) (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 12 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-esoiVPACdg> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 13 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiYZeajAM8s&bpctr=1369481354> (retrieved May 21, 2013).
- 14 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiCmOhJ610U> (retrieved March 9, 2013)
- 15 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nht1Q0o9ol> (retrieved March 9, 2013)

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