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## **Representations of Muslims and Islam in *Perussuomalainen*, the Newsletter of the (True) Finns Party**

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## Abstract

In 2015, the European Union experienced the arrival of more than 1.25 million refugees at its borders, many of whom were looking for international protection from war, violence, and persecution. The number of asylum seekers in Finland rose almost tenfold in 2015 compared to years prior to 2015. While a vast majority of asylum seekers came from Muslim dominant countries from the wider MENA region, the influx of refugees became to be associated with the increasing occurrence of terrorist attacks in Europe, especially by the populist radical right (PRR). This study inquires how Muslims and Islam are being represented by the Finns Party, defined as a PRR party, through the asylum seeker discourse. While existing literature related to the topic states that the Finns Party has a long history of individual MPs and party members making Islamophobic statements, the party leadership has declined to take responsibility for these statements, denying that these attitudes are representative of the party. Thus, this thesis aims to analyse how Islam and Muslims are represented by a unified voice of the party. Through an analysis of the dynamics and construction of in-groups and out-groups, this thesis pursues to illustrate that the Finns Party constructs an “us” vs. “them” dichotomy, where the categories Islam, Muslims, and asylum seeker is constructed as representing a “meta-discourse” of the other.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2015, the European Union experienced the arrival of more than 1.25 million refugees at its borders, many of whom were looking for international protection from war, violence, and persecution (UNHCR, 2016). This dramatic increase in refugee inflow was soon to be represented as a migration crisis with critical implications on domestic politics in EU member states, evoking debate on how to find durable solutions to the issue (Heisbourg, 2015). The number of asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> in Finland rose almost tenfold in 2015 compared to years prior to 2015, climbing from a yearly number of 1 000-4 000 in the 1990s and 2000s to 32 000 in 2015 (Finnish Ministry of the Interior, 2017). While a vast majority of asylum seekers came from Muslim dominant countries from the wider MENA region,<sup>2</sup> the influx of refugees became to be associated with the increasing occurrence of terrorist attacks in Europe, especially by the populist radical right. This part of the debate became even more accentuated in Finland after it experienced a terrorist attack in Turku, August 2017, which was carried out by a Moroccan native who was seeking asylum.

Historically, radical right-wing populism has not received as much support in Finland as it has in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. However, this has changed significantly in the last decade, as anti-immigration and anti-multicultural arguments have become more normalized through the media, while political factions supporting and propagating these arguments have become more organized. This became manifest as the popularity of the (True) Finns Party<sup>3</sup> rose in spectacular fashion after the parliamentary elections in 2011 (Saukkonen, 2013, 270-294). While the party diverges from the European right-wing populism trend in the sense that the perceived threat of Islam and Muslims has never been central to the party's campaigns, aspects of anti-Islamic rhetoric have been present. Mistrust towards Muslims – as well as towards multiculturalism, refugees and immigrants – has been more often expressed through channels of individual politicians, while the official stance of the party has on the surface remained neutral towards minorities and religions (Wahlbeck, 2013, 298). It is notable that the Finns Party split into two groups in July 2017. Following a change in party leadership, 23 out of 38 MPs exited from the True Finns to form a new party, 'Uusi Vaihtoehdo' ('New

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<sup>1</sup> The term used in the Finnish context has been "asylum seeker" ("turvapaikanhakija").

<sup>2</sup> Statistics provided by the migration office of Finland show that a vast majority of asylum seekers were from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. <http://tilastot.migri.fi/#applications?start=548>

<sup>3</sup> The official name of the party in Finnish is "Perussuomlaiset", which literally translates in English to "Basic Finns" or "Typical Finns". The official English translation used by the party was "True Finns" until August 2011, after which the name was shortened to "The Finns".

[https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/true\\_finns\\_name\\_their\\_party\\_the\\_finns/5410148](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/true_finns_name_their_party_the_finns/5410148)

Alternative’) (Thynell, 2017). According to analysts interviewed by the media, the remaining 15 MPs represent the ‘right-wing’ section of the party, and features many of the politicians who have been most vocally – and explicitly – exhibiting anti-Muslim stances. National newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* and state-owned broadcasting company *Yle* reported that the True Finns party experienced a clear shift in political orientation with the remaining MPs representing more right-wing leanings, especially towards issues of immigration and refugees.

### 1.1. Disposition

This study inquires how Muslims and Islam are being represented by the Finns Party through the asylum seeker discourse. I also inquire how these negative views are justified through the construction of in-groups and out-groups and the juxtaposition of positive self-representation and negative representations of the other. In this thesis I illustrate how, in relation to the political environment in Finland, the Finns Party attempts to avoid overt and explicit forms of prejudice towards specific minorities, while still constructing negative images of Islam and Muslims.

I begin with a literature review that is divided into three parts. First, I discuss the general environment in regards to how Muslims and Islam have been depicted in European political discourse. Second, I engage with literature that discuss European radical right populist parties in relation to how they construct Muslims as an out-group, and how they construct images of Islam. Thirdly, I present the case of the Finns Party, engaging with literature related to how the party has discussed Muslims and Islam in the past. I point out that there exists some literature related to the study of how individual MPs have represented Muslim minorities and Islam negatively. However, I show that there is a gap in literature pertaining to what the party as a whole think about the issue, as party leadership has historically denied that the views of individual MPs represent the attitudes of the party, while maintaining its position of being against discriminating against any specific minority.

The theoretical framework chapter begins with a definition of populist radical right parties, and moves on to discuss central concepts related to how these parties construct in-groups and out groups. I present the social identity model for the development of collective hate, which hypothesises how the dynamics between constructions of in-groups and out-groups forms the basis of justifying oppression.

In the methodology chapter, I present how I employ qualitative methods and an intrinsic case study research design. I go through the coding process, which was done by conducting a thematic analysis as a way of categorising, coding, analysing and thematising my data. I assert that my research

method is discourse analysis, which maintains that realities are produced discursively through language. I then move on to give background information about the materials, and maintain that I chose the materials for the fact that it provides material that is representative of the whole party in order to fill a gap in research as discussed in earlier in this chapter. Lastly, I discuss how I position myself as a researcher in relation to my study.

The findings chapter showcases the overarching themes I derived from the data. I show that the materials actually discuss Islam and Muslims quite seldomly, while there are plenty of articles discussing asylum seekers and presentations of the parties' views towards asylum seeking and refugees. Asylum seekers are represented as exploiting the welfare state and the goodwill of the Finnish people, threatening the erosion of Finnish society, threatening state security (terrorism), and as fundamentally different to Finnish people.

In the analysis section I begin by arguing that discourses on three main social categories, asylum seekers, Islam and Muslims, that were discussed in the findings chapter are discursively interrelated and form a meta-discourse of a negatively represented "other". I suggest that the preference of othering the category of asylum seekers is strategic in order to evade accusations of racism, which I relate to the historical context and political environment in which the party operates. Then, I move on to discuss how the Finns party attempts to justify these negative representations through the dichotomy of negative representation of the out-group (asylum seekers, Islam, Muslims) and positive representation of the in-group. Finally, I discuss my findings and analysis in relation to existing literature.

Finally, in the conclusions chapter I reiterate the main arguments presented in the analysis section, and discuss how this thesis could be continued with further research.

The research question of this thesis reads as following:

*How are Muslims and Islam represented textually in discourse on asylum seekers by the (True) Finns?*

## 2. Literature review

There exists a gap in literature pertaining to the Finnish context on how Muslims and Islam are being represented by political parties, and especially by the Finns Party. This being said, studies on representations of Muslims and Islam have been conducted on similar right-wing populist parties elsewhere in Europe including other Nordic countries. Therefore, the goal of this thesis will be to help fill this void on the topic. Many researchers, such as Keskinen, Wahlbeck, and Stavrakis et. al. agree that anti-Islamic political rhetoric in Europe has been linked to a broader phenomenon of emerging radical right-wing populist parties and anti-multiculturalism since the late 1990s (Wahlbeck, 2016, 429). This exploration relates to the thesis research question, which aims to look at *How are Muslims and Islam represented textually in discourse on asylum seekers by the (True) Finns*. In this chapter I discuss literature related broadly to representations of Muslims in political discourses in Europe. I begin the discussion on Muslims and Islam with the representation of both concepts in Western Europe, then I move on to the populist radical right context, and finally I illustrate the case of the True Finns.

### 2.1. Representations of Muslims in a European Context

This section discusses the social and political environment in regards to Muslims and Islam in contemporary Europe. There exists a large body of literature discussing how attitudes towards Islam have been increasingly negative, some authors even alluding that 21<sup>st</sup> century anti-Muslim sentiments have assumed the role of 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-Semitism (Traverso and Fernbach, 2016). Sofos and Tsagarousianou have argue that in the last decade, European public debates on Islam increasingly been associated with and depicted as cultural and religious fundamentalism, as well as political extremism and terrorism, while being “systematically posited as the antipode of Western culture and of the values of Liberal Democracy” (Sofos and Tsagarousianou, 2013, 1–10). Helly and Dubé (2014) argue that in modern Western history, some mentalities in Western societies have represented Muslims as populations whose behaviour and customs are abnormal, deplorable and even vicious. The background to this, as Helly and Dubé suggest, lies on the one hand, on the growing demographic importance of Muslim populations in Europe, as well as their “low capacity for organization and community mobilization, given their recent installation in Western societies” as well as “the absence of centralized, hierarchical religious organization, the multiple ethnic, linguistic, religious, national and political rifts that divide them, just as they divide the Muslim world.”. Furthermore, Helly and



Dubé argue that the fear of political Islamism – which has been on a rise in the Western world since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 – has influenced these mentalities.

Depictions of the Muslim world, its populations, and therefore, people migrating from these areas as culturally, ideologically, and morally inferior, has a long history in Western literary tradition. These attitudes and mentalities in Western scholarly tradition were famously highlighted by intellectual and literary critic Edward Said in his seminal book *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. It is a comprehensive critique of Western (mostly English, French, and American) literature, historical research and social sciences ranging from the eighteenth century to the (then) present day (Halliday, 1993, 148). Most relevant to my study, Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’ (Said, 1978, 2–4). According to the orientalist argument, Western societies are morally, intellectually and spiritually superior over its Eastern counterparts: while Western societies are based on the universalist values of the Enlightenment, Oriental societies are based on tradition. Thus, Occidental superiority and Oriental subjugation manifests in the construction of a set of binaries and juxtapositions that ultimately reflect an “us” vs. “them” dichotomy: West vs. East, enlightened vs. traditional, modern vs. backward, dominant vs. submissive (Ibid, 1–30). As central to the concept of orientalism, Said defines as the “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (Ibid, 42). The concept of orientalism is rooted in a Foucauldian notion of discourse and power: as Fred Halliday (1993, 149) argues, orientalism is a “discourse of domination, both a product of European subjugation of the Middle East, and an instrument in this process”. Understanding the Orientalist tradition is important for this thesis for the reason that it forms the context through which populations of the Middle East have been depicted in Western tradition, and because it operates through a socially constructed dichotomy of the “East” and “West”, and essentially of “us” and “them”, which are defining elements to radical right populist discourse.

According to the orientalist line of thinking, as Gardell argues, it is possible to produce essentialist narratives about “how Muslims (inherently) are”, e.g. Muslims are violent, oppressive towards women, and resistant to liberal values. Gardell argues that the “how Muslims are” narrative has been normalized to such an extent that its racist premise is forgotten. Furthermore, the “how Muslims are” narrative is based on and bestowed by a similar narrative of “what Islam is like”. “Islam”, according to this narrative, is treated as a physical entity, that has agency: ‘In Islamophobic literature, we encounter an “Islam” that walks, talks, commands, oppresses, hates, deceives, conspires, wages war, expands, and retracts.’ This “Islam”, therefore, produces a similarly monolithic

state of being of “Muslimness”, which is an opposing force to Western values (Gardell, 2014, 129–155).

The orientalist tradition has inspired narrators of a “clash of civilisations” discourse, such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, which are often propagated by right-wing populist voices (Samman, 2012; Halliday 1993). Huntington prophesied in his thesis ‘clash of civilisations’ that as the Cold War had ended, the world would be divided into civilizational blocks”, where new division lines would not be based on ideology, but cultural and religious identities. Importantly, he argues that “the Islamic World” and the “Western World”, both understood as “civilizations” are essentially opposed and non-compatible, and imminently heading towards a bloody clash (Huntington, 1992).

## 2.2. Representations of Muslims in Populist Radical Right Discourse

The past decade has experienced the emergence of an anti-Islamic social movement ranging from North America to Australia and through Western Europe, most clearly manifested in the rise of radical right populist politics.<sup>4</sup> A remarkable opposition to immigration has been a defining and ubiquitous feature of radical right populism (Pupcenoks and McCabe, 2013, 172). Pupcenoks and McCabe argue that in the last decade, opposition towards immigration has intensified and become focused on Muslim immigrants, where the “Muslim” question has placed Islam in the center of debate in anti-immigration platforms. Issues of integration and multiculturalism have been raised to the forefront, as a perceived lack of successful integration of Muslim immigrants have been argued as proof of the failure of multiculturalist policies. Populist radical right actors in Western Europe are argued to exercise a selective form of “exclusionary populism” aimed at discrediting Muslim communities by asserting the incompatibility of Islam and Western civilization, which enables them to promote themselves as defenders of liberal democratic values (Ibid).

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing number of European political parties (e.g. Jörg Haider’s Freedom Party in Austria, the Flemish Interest Party in Belgium, the Swiss People’s Party, as well as Marine Le Pen’s National Front Party in France) that have been successful in gaining substantial increases in popularity and representation by basing their election campaigns on anti-

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that populism manifests in many forms, and not all populism is of a right-wing, parliamentary variety.<sup>4</sup> I follow the definition by Jungar & Jupskås (2014) of Populist Radical Right (PRR) parties, which alludes to a cluster, or party family, within Nordic party politics, mainly between the Danish People’s party, the Finns Party, and Sweden Democrats. These PRR parties have similarities in ideology, have strong transnational linkages, and, to a degree, have similar names that refer to ethnic-nationalist leanings. For more on PRR parties, see: Jungar, A. and Jupskås, A. (2014). “Populist radical right parties”, 215–216.

immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes and advocacies (Özyürek, 2010, 172). As Stavrakakis et al. (2017, 428) note, Geert Wilders of the Dutch right-wing populist party PPV has established much of his campaigns on fighting the “Islamization of Europe”, and in his speeches often juxtaposes notions of the “West” and “Islam” as being in a war-like state. A similar framing strategy has been used by a number of other European politicians in connection to how Islam and Muslims have been represented. Most research agrees that radical right wing populist parties in Europe often adhere to an essentialist view of “religion” and “culture”, where both religion and culture are seen as monolithic entities with certain unchanging and specific characteristics that define those associated with a religion or culture (Gardell, 2014, 133; Rooyackers and Verkuyten, 2012; Sakki and Pettersson, 2015).

Brubaker notes that the wave of radical right populism in Northern and Western Europe “form a distinctive cluster”, which are all in part “driven by the notion of a civilizational threat from Islam”. This, he argues, can be viewed as part of a wider phenomenon of Atlantic and pan-European right-wing populism. According to Brubaker, what defines and connects this “cluster” is how populist radical right parties construct the opposition between not only a national “self” and “other”, but also in broader, civilizational terms, reconstructing and reproducing the “clash of civilizations” discourse, which I briefly discussed earlier in this literature review. Therefore, what is common to these European national populist parties in the “cluster” is identifying the “self” not only in national terms, but as defending “a civilization, ostensibly defending liberal values *vis à vis* the perceived threat of Islam (Brubaker, 2017, 1193–4).

This dichotomy or “self” and “other” (or “us” and “them”) is central to radical right populism, also often referred to as “othering”, which entails the construction of in-groups and out-groups, a discursive juxtaposition of “us” and “them” (Wodak et. al., 2013, 51). This dichotomy is a very important one for this thesis, and is a central concept that will be discussed in later analysis. Sakki and Pettersson argue that two types of “other”, or out-groups, are most commonly being identified. On the one hand, “they” are discursively constructed as outsiders, ethnic or religious minorities (usually Muslims). On the other, “they” are constructed as insiders, groups among the original population, e.g. “elites”, political opponents, leftists, liberals or feminists (Sakki and Pettersson, 2015). An example of this construction of two enemies can be found in the study by Wood and Finlay in an analysis on the discourses of minorities by the British National Party (BNP). On the one hand, the BNP’s animosity is directed at liberals and those who argue for multiculturalism, portraying them as being as great a threat as ‘terrorists themselves’. On the other hand, Muslims are portrayed as being ‘Fascists’ and ‘anti-White racists, where white people were the ‘true’ victims, positioning themselves as targets of racism rather than as racial aggressors themselves (Wood and Finley, 2008, 709–710).

This particular construction of the “outside” enemy is discussed in some literature as a strategy of “reversal”, where an oppressed minority is presented as the true oppressor, and the majority as the victim (Atton, 2006; Goodman and Johnson, 2014).

Another example of “othering” in two dimensions is expressed in the research by Rooyakers and Verkuyten (2012), studying the political discourse of Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch radical right populist PVV. On the one hand, they found that blame was put on politicians for not taking the “danger of Islam” seriously, and asking them to “open their eyes”. On the other hand, Wilders very explicitly expressed views constructing Islam being incompatible with the West, while representations of peace and freedom-loving Dutch people were juxtaposed to Muslim minorities “ruled by Shari’a law”. Moreover, Rooyakers and Verkuyten (2012) describe Wilders’ rhetoric as confidently explicit, while using different forms of discursive strategies to evade accusations of racism. Wood and Finlay (2008), as well as Rooyakers and Verkuyten (2012) found that citing passages from the Qur’an was used as a strategy to express the incompatibility of Islam with Western values, while using it as an authoritative source for their claims. Here, a distinction between out-group ideology – characterisations of Islam – and out-group psychology – characterisations of Muslims – is made in order to be seen as criticizing an ideology, Islam, rather than a minority group, Muslims (Verkuyten, 2013, 357).

Van der Valk (2003), as well as Mols and Jetten (2014) agree that in the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties, immigration and asylum seeking has become problematized with negative categories, such as criminality, threats to public security, religious extremism, decline of the nation, as well as increased social costs. These parties commonly adopt alarmist narratives, where the “nation” is seen as “on the brink of collapse”, requiring immediate and decisive action. Furthermore, they express a concern to preserve “Western national culture and identity”, and to “curb the influence of non-Western influence”, which is usually presented as a Muslim threat (Mols and Jetten 2014, 75).

Many researchers agree that anti-Islamic political rhetoric in the Nordic countries has been linked to a broader phenomenon of anti-multiculturalism since the late 1990s (Wahlbeck, 2013, 314–5). Furthermore, some studies suggest that – especially in a Nordic welfare-state frame of reference – the rise of populism in the new millennium is at least in part affected by a perceived crisis of the welfare state, a discourse according to which states, in the era of globalized economies, can no longer sustain the redistributive welfare state. Thus, according to this argument, this discourse has set the stage for political actors asking the question, “who are the resources to be shared among?” and to argue for an increasing juxtaposition between national in-group and a varied set of groups of the “other” (Pyrhönen, 2015, 7). Keskinen (2012, 262) argues that debates related to free speech, the

‘crisis of multiculturalism’ and gender-based violence are used as tools to construct exclusionary national identities in the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland). According to Keskinen, these countries construct themselves as “progressive, gender equal and sexually liberated nations, while simultaneously viewing themselves as outsiders to the colonial project”. These discourses are used to argue ‘for nationalist policies and to construct racial hierarchies’. National identities are defined by an opposition to the “outsiders”, the non-Western and Muslim “other” (Ibid).

### 2.3. The case of the True Finns

Some literature asserts that the Finns Party belongs to the same “family” of populist radical right parties in the Nordic countries, where, despite having different historical paths, these populist, anti-establishment parties have converged ideologically and adopted similar agendas (Jungar and Jupskås, 2014, 215–217; Wahlbeck, 2016). The Finns Party has risen to prominence in recent years, receiving close to one-fifth of the vote in parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2015, confirming its position as one of the major parties in Finland. Importantly, the party became, for the first time, a part of the coalition government in 2015 (Wahlbeck, 2016, 579). Jungar and Jupskås (2014, 217–218) have defined The Finns Party as a populist radical right party, arguing that the party to be socioculturally authoritarian, value-conservative and economically centrist. Sakki and Pettersson (2015) as well as Wahlbeck (2016) agree that the main focal points of the agenda of the Finns Party lie in defending Finnish identity, enhancing Finnish national culture, and resisting multiculturalism and immigration. However, it has been argued that The Finns Party differs from its Nordic populist counterparts in the sense that instead of targeting specific minorities, statements related to immigration are most often related to defending the majority and its rights, portraying itself as “The defender of a (real or imagined) majority.” Thus, multiculturalist policies are argued to violate the rights of the Finnish majority (Wahlbeck, 2016).

According to Wahlbeck, the Finns present themselves as the “true and original” Finns, who represent the majority of the population and promote what they argue is the “public will”. Political rhetoric reflects a concern for the future of Finnish culture and identity, as well as its existence as an

independent country. While this kind of aforementioned rhetoric is arguably similar to most populist parties in Europe, the party has been associated with a noticeably more extreme wing within the party. Wahlbeck presents two cases of MPs – Teuvo Hakkarainen and Jussi Halla-aho, who have given vehement comments on minority politics, many of which present Muslims as a “danger to Western civilization”, Islam as inherently at odds with democratic values, and picture “Islamification” (or “Islamisation”) and a “Muslim invasion” as an inevitable impending consequence of lax immigration and refugee policies. Furthermore, the immigration of Muslims is presented to create a danger for the survival of Western cultures (Wahlbeck, 2016, 581).

Two studies have been conducted that relate to presentations of Muslims by the Finns Party, however from the perspective of individual MPs. Sakki and Pettersson (2015, 159) conducted a discourse analysis on political blogs of individual MPs from the FP and the Swedish Democrats (SD, *Sverige Demokraterna* in Swedish), on how these blogs discursively construct “otherness”.<sup>5</sup> The themes discussed in this study relate to how these four MPs – Jussi Halla-aho, Juho Eerola, James Hirvisaari, and Olli Immonen – construct Muslims as a “deviant group of people” with a “threatening ideology”. Furthermore, explicit, precise, and specific negative information such as crime and rape statistics were used to as justification for these views (Ibid, 162–163). Both Finnish and Swedish bloggers were found to express Islam as an “oppressive culture that is violating pivotal social norms” (Ibid). Interestingly, echoing the findings of Wahlbeck, both cases were found to present inner enemies, as a very distinct and crucial representation of “otherness”. In the Finnish case, these inner enemies were often expressed to be the “the tolerant ones” or the “Green left”. However, the bloggers of the SD were found to construct images of a conspiracy between Muslims and the left. Sakki and Pettersson argue that common to other cases of Nordic radical right populism, but differing from most other European radical right populisms<sup>6</sup> the representations by MPs of the FP and SD rely in part on a rhetorical juxtaposition between the welfare state system and immigration (Sakki and Pettersson, 160–162). Thus, a resistance towards immigration is not only argued by a perceived threat on security and cultural cohesiveness, but also by emphasizing the economic burden of immigration to the nation.

A gender perspective was present in the research of Keskinen. In an analysis of media debates related to radical right blogging about Islam and Muslims in Finland and Denmark, she argues that discourses of gender equality and freedom of speech were used to argue for nationalist politics and to construct racial hierarchies. Keskinen analyses the debates related to the 2009 blasphemy

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<sup>5</sup> The timeframe of the blogs was 2008-2013, which precedes and follows electoral breakthroughs of the Finns Party (2011) and Swedish Democrats (2010).

<sup>6</sup> See: Wahlbeck, (2016). “True Finns and Non-True Finns”

conviction of Jussi Halla-aho, a Finns' Party MP, as well as the original blog post by Halla-aho, in which he called Islam a pedophile religion and argued that multiculturalism and immigration led to an increase of rapes and other crimes (Keskinen, 2012, 261–274). In this post, Keskinen argues that Muslims are homogenised as a group and sexual violence is treated as a characteristic of this group, to whom pedophilia is regarded as justified and not an object of discussion (Ibid, 269). Keskinen argues that Halla-aho's writings construct a dichotomy between a patriarchal Islam that legitimises the oppression of women and children (including rape and pedophilia) and the gender equal Finnish society characterised by women's and children's rights (Ibid). As Keskinen mentions, Halla-aho later responded to his conviction by stating that he was trying to provoke a critical discussion about freedom of speech and equality. He claimed that "the people" are not treated equally, but migrants are being protected better than the native population (Ibid). Keskinen argues that Halla-aho is using the freedom of speech discourse to argue that racialising Muslims on the basis gender equality is justified. Also, according to Keskinen, Halla-aho argues that criticizing Islam is hindered by anti-racism and "multicultural tolerance", while majority of the people can be abused freely. While the gender equality discourse is regarded as constructed by liberal, feminist, left-wing and anti-racist rhetoric, Halla-aho uses this discourse to justify a racial and exclusionary agenda. Keskinen argues that this is only a more nuanced way to justify and to "blur the racism embedded in these political strategies". Keskinen describes this strategy "The Politics of Reversal", similar to the strategy of reversal discussed in earlier paragraphs (Ibid, 270).

Something to take into consideration while discussing the attitudes of the Finns Party towards minority groups (and in my case Muslim populations) is, as Wahlbeck mentions, that after the parliamentary elections in 2011, all MPs of the FP signed a proclamation "Against Discrimination, Racism and Violence" (Wahlbeck, 2016, 582).<sup>7</sup> Sakki and Pettersson as well as Wahlbeck argue that the FP has a long history of individual MPs and party members making racist statements, while the party leadership has declined to take responsibility for these statements, denying that these attitudes are representative of the party (Sakki and Pettersson, 2015; Wahlbeck, 2016). Thus, the party leaderships have been, as Sakki and Pettersson (2015, 158) put it, "constantly striking a balance between preserving a moderate image, on the one hand, and the radical, xenophobic voices that persist in the parties, on the other." The conviction of Halla-aho, as well as the proclamation signed by the Finns Party, are relevant contextual information in understanding the environment in which the Finns

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<sup>7</sup> For the original proclamation, in Finnish, see: Yle, (2011), "Perussuomalaisten eduskuntaryhmän julkilausuma syrjintää, rasismia ja väkivaltaa vastaan" ("The True Finns Parliamentary Group Statement Against Discrimination, Racism and Violence") Press Release 25 May. Available From: [Http://www.yle.fi/tv uutiset/uutiset/upics/liitetiedostot/julkilausuma.pdf](http://www.yle.fi/tv uutiset/uutiset/upics/liitetiedostot/julkilausuma.pdf)

Party operates. As Wahlbeck argues, these events have in part shaped how the Finns Party can maneuver in how it discusses specific minorities, as it has, to a degree, been tied to keeping its rhetoric somewhat less aggressive than some other populist radical right parties in Europe.

Very relevant to my study, Wahlbeck (2016, 584) poses the question, as to what extent it is possible to judge whether the often radical attitudes in statements by individual MPs and party members would be shared by the whole party. Wahlbeck does attempt to answer this by noting, that the FP has allowed the more radical wing of the party to express its views by allowing them a platform and position within the party to express their views, suggesting (even strategic) acceptance of these views (Ibid, 584). However, the link between the attitudes of these individual MPs and the attitudes of the whole party still remains only suggestive. This question is important for this study as my objective is to help answer this exact question. I chose the materials specifically in order to analyse how Islam and Muslims are represented by the party as a whole, instead of by individual MPs, which the party leadership can distance itself from.

#### 2.4. Discussion

There exists a large body of literature related to anti-Islam views of parties in other European countries, however, there is a gap in literature pertaining to the Finnish context. The literature that I have reviewed in this chapter shows that there is evidence to suggest anti-Muslim leanings of the Finns Party (Keskinen, 2012; Sakki and Pettersson, 2015; Wahlbeck, 2016), however the “link” between what individual MPs think and how this reflects the attitudes of the party as a whole is not entirely clear (Wahlbeck, 2016). My viewpoint is slightly different to a large portion of the literature discussed here, as many of them look at how populist parties construct “out groups”, out of which Islamophobic discourses are one of the most common findings. However, I am interested on specifically in discourses on Islam and Muslims, as the construction of Muslims as an “out-group” by the Finns Party has already been shown by previous research, but only in the rhetoric of individual MPs while being denied by party leadership.



### 3. Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and explain the theoretical framework this thesis will utilize for later analysis. The theories and concepts discussed in this chapter provide a framework which, together with the thesis research question will guide the analysis of the data chosen for this research. The research question for this thesis asks *How are Muslims and Islam represented textually in discourse on asylum seekers by the (True) Finns?*

Similar to most literature related to how radical right populist actors construct social groups and minorities, this chapter discusses concepts from the fields of social psychology (e.g. Maykel Verkuyten) as well as discourse studies (e.g. Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk), which will be used in for discussion in the analysis chapter. There exists a multitude of discursive strategies that have been analysed in relation to populist radical right discourses. Thus, the concepts were chosen by how they would help me analyse True Finns' texts in order to identify how they frame Muslim immigrants. As was discussed earlier in chapter 2, there is evidence that the True Finns' rhetoric towards specific ethnicities, groups and religions has historically been inexplicit, where politicians have shied away from making public statements which target specific populations. Therefore, anti-Muslim opinions are framed behind the disguise of anti-multiculturalist and anti-immigration stances, or by defending Finnish identity, and by emphasizing the security risk brought by immigration and asylum seekers. The concepts discussed in this chapter relate to the construction and representation of, and dynamics between, in-groups (in this case e.g. the Finnish people) and out-groups (e.g. Muslim asylum seekers). Furthermore, as I am mostly interested in representations of out-groups (especially Muslim asylum seekers), theoretical concepts will be used to analyse in-groups only in the sense that it might say something about the out-groups. Therefore, I am more concerned with the *juxtaposition* of these groups in their representations, rather than how the True Finns define themselves (which would be more about identity construction. This is not what my thesis is concerned with).

#### 3.1 Construction of Common Enemies

Wodak et. al. assert that the construction of enemies, or “othering” is a central concept to populist radical right discourse. Commonly, two types of “other” are identified: insider and outsider enemies (Wodak et al., 2013, 51). This entails a juxtaposition of “us” and “them” in two dimensions. On the one hand, in the first dimension “us” is defined as an opposition to the elite: the hard-working, struggling “ordinary people”, while the “elite” are propagated as corrupt and unconcerned of the

troubles of ordinary people. On the other, in the second dimension, “us” is defined as juxtaposed against an external “other”, where “people like us”, who share our culture and values are threatened by those from the outside (Taguieff, 1995). This thesis, however, is mainly concerned with the concept of “othering” in the outsider dimension, as I am studying the representation of an outside “other”.

These dimensions of “othering” are essential in strategies for representations of “positive self- and negative other” by the construction of in-groups and out-groups. Ways in which these strategies are used are membership categorization, stereotypical and evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (expressed either implicitly or explicitly) as well as themes or arguments used to justify inclusion or exclusion to a group (Wodak, 2009, 577–594). Reicher et. al. (2008, 1327) state that for a political group to define a given people an out-group, defining and stereotyping the in-group is crucial, and that “the very notion of ‘them’ is shown to be contingent upon how we determine the criteria that define ‘us’”. However, as this thesis is mainly concerned with how the external out-group is constructed (Islam and Muslims), positive self-representations are discussed only insofar as they help me discuss the construction of the out-group of Muslims and two other main categories, Islam and asylum seekers.

Important to constructing out-groups, Verkuyten (2003) argues that making *category distinctions* and *categorical generalizations* which signify a set of generalizations, attributes and characteristics to certain social categories, are common strategies in populist radical right discourse. These categorizations are used to present out-groups as different, as deviants from the culture and values of the in-group, and threatening to society. According to Verkuyten, taking a social psychology viewpoint, typical to different forms of prejudiced thinking and racism, different social categories (e.g. race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and many others) are presented as “natural, inevitable and therefore unchangeable”. These categories are expressed to represent “an essence” within “human types”, defining an individual belonging to a certain group as fundamentally a certain sort of person (Ibid, 371). Taking a discourse analytical point of view, essentialist group beliefs can be studied as social acts performed in discourse (Ibid, 372). He argues that, constructing category distinctions and generalizations requires constructing *essentialist rationalisations*. Central to these essentialist rationalisations are that they assume a “naturalness” of a group (as opposed to viewing them as socially constructed), that is unchanging. Furthermore, it assumes immutability of group membership, meaning that once an individual belongs to a social group, it will do so forever (Ibid, 371–393).

### 3.2 Discursive Strategies of Justification

Discussing strategies of how social actors might justify, or at least mitigate their oppressive views provides a slightly more nuanced analytical tool to inquire how Islam and Muslims are being represented by the Finns Party. Considering how the Finns Party has a history of wanting to retain a non-discriminatory image toward minority groups (while still having MPs make islamophobic statements in individual forums such as blogs) I apply theoretical concepts that help me understand how the party might defend against accusations of expressing discriminatory views towards Islam and Muslims. There exists a large body of literature that discusses the use of discursive and rhetorical strategies to justify stereotyping and negative representations of minority group members (Every and Augoustinos, 2007; Reicher et. al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2013). Much of this research agrees that justifying negative views is a rhetorically delicate accomplishment that involves representations of the in-group as much as the out-group, and requires constructing these views in a way that seems legitimate and rational (Every and Augoustinos, 2007, 411; Verkuyten, 2013, 358). Sakki and Pettersson (2015, 157–158) state that “multiple studies have shown how increasing social taboos against openly expressing racist sentiments has led to the development of discursive strategies that present negative views of ‘outsiders’ as acceptable whilst protecting the speaker from charges of racism and prejudice.”

Central to strategies of positive self-representation, the denial of racism also sheds light to representations of out-groups (such as Muslims, immigrants, or refugees). Commonly, accepted values and social norms prohibit blatant forms of prejudice and discrimination, and commonly most political groups are well aware of these social constraints (Van Dijk, 1992, 89–90). While the denial of racism, as van Dijk describes it, is a “form of positive self-representation”, and thus, in the light of my thesis, using these concepts relate to how the Finns Party represent *themselves*, it can also shed on light how they represent the *other* (Ibid). As discussed in the literature review, the Finns Party has shown a willingness to not, as a *whole*, explicitly discuss specific ethnic or religious groups in order to deny accusations of racism (Sakki and Pettersson, 2015; Wahlbeck, 2016). Furthermore, if they are discussing Muslims specifically, or other group entities such as ethnicities or nationalities, analysing how they might *mitigate* these discussions should provide fruitful in understanding the nuances of their representations of other groups.

Differentiating individuals of minority groups between the deserving and undeserving, e.g. “good and bad Muslims”, “‘Genuine’ vs. ‘bogus’ asylum seekers” is a strategy that according to some

research was found to be utilised by populist radical right actors. Accusations of racism can be diverted and defended against by conceding that there are good Muslims among the extremist ones, or that *some* asylum seekers are in true need of asylum (Every and Augoustinos, 2007, 413; Lynn and Lea, 2003). Lynn and Lea (2003, 432) call this strategy “differentiating the other”, and that such strategies have been common in othering of minority groups in a variety of contexts. For example, differentiating the other can be (and has been) used as a rhetorical strategy by governments wishing to justify the enactment of strict immigration laws. Instead of arguing that “bogus asylum seekers” are a threat to “us”, they are constructed as a threat to the interests of “genuine” asylum seekers. The ones advocating anti-asylum policies need to somehow counter the argument that their views are unreasonable or prejudiced. Thus, draconian immigration and asylum policies can be enacted while shifting the responsibility to asylum seekers themselves (van Dijk, 1997, 32–65). In the case of the so-called European refugee crisis, it is considered common knowledge that people are coming from war-zones and have faced hardships of war. Thus, the “bogusness” of some asylum seekers can be used as a strategy to justify anti-asylum seeker policies as a whole, whereas attempting to justify that asylum seekers as a whole are undeserving of help may be seen by the public as a more problematic view to uphold (Lynn and Lea, 2003, 433).

The strategy of differentiating between the “good” and “bad” among a minority that is being oppressed often contains a “show concession” (Antaki and Wetherell, 1999). For example, while painting a picture of Islam as violent and oppressive ideology threatening the existence of Western civilization, Geert Wilders of the Dutch PVV makes a show concession by stating that “Not all Muslims are extremists” and that “The Party for Freedom has no problem with Muslims who obey the law”. This not only makes a differentiation between Muslims as people and Islam as an ideology, but also between “good” and “bad” Muslims. Thus, Wilders is able to distance himself from accusations of being discriminatory and racist, by conceding that not all Muslims are the same (Verkuyten, 2013, 354). A similar strategy was used by the British BNP in how they describe and differentiate the Qur’an: “While there are some tolerant verses in the Qur’an... it institutionalizes hate against all who will not bow to Allah”. A similar show concession is given to argue that not all of the Qur’an is bad, the book as a whole institutionalizes hate. Thus, the speaker is able to soften the rhetoric in order not to seem prejudiced, while still giving a constructing the Qur’an as promoting violence as a whole (Wood and Finlay, 2008, 717).

Continuing from what was hinted in the previous paragraph, constructing an essentialist view of religion, it becomes possible to represent religions in ideological terms, where Islam as an ideology and Muslims as a people becomes differentiated (Verkuyten, 2013, 348). Therefore, “a distinction

between out-group ideology (e.g. Islam as an ideology) and out-group psychology (Muslims as a religious group)” can be used to avoid accusations of discrimination, by stating that “I have nothing against Muslims, but Islam is a violent religion” (Ibid). Sakki and Pettersson (2013, 157–158) assert that “this cultural essentialism is based on ideas of incompatible cultural differences that constitute a threat to one’s group identity. Research has demonstrated that this is characteristic of the new Islamophobia, with members of Islamic culture portrayed as culturally and ideologically incompatible with Christianity. Here, criticism is directed at an abstract construct, Islamic ideology, and not at individual Muslims”.

### 3.3 Integrative Social Identity Model for the Development of Collective Hate

As I have discussed, in order to express discriminatory views of minorities, certain discursive strategies are required to justify these views. Verkuyten (2013, 346) sees the justification of discrimination as a “rhetorically delicate accomplishment that involves various category constructions”. He illustrates these strategies of justification in an “integrative social identity model of the development of collective hate”, based on the research of Reicher, Haslam and Rath (2008), which he uses in an analysis of how populist radical right figurehead Geert Wilders in the Netherlands constructed representations of “us” and “them” in justifying discriminatory proposals (Verkuyten, 2013, 357). The five-step model explains how discriminatory acts can become seen as acceptable and right. This model states that for a negative act against other groups to be justified, the identity of the in-group must be defined while juxtaposed to essentialist notions of the out-group. The five-step model presents a framework through which representations of “us” and “them” legitimises inequality and makes discriminatory views understandable, acceptable, and even morally necessary (Ibid). Thus, it brings together many of the topics discussed in this chapter providing a step-by-step tool for further analysis on how the Finns party might justify their views on Islam and Muslims.

First, the in-group needs to be constructed as a distinct category with its specific norms, beliefs, and practices, including who does and does not belong in this group. According to social identity theorists, the psychological basis of group action is category membership (Reicher et al., 2008, 1327). Secondly, the out-group needs to be defined as a social category. Category distinctions are made for different reasons and are not necessarily discriminatory (Verkuyten, 2013, 347). However, how distinctions are made affects the nature of the categories and who is included in the moral community. For example, if we define national belonging strictly by ethnic ancestry, it tends to have more exclusionary consequences that if it were based on a civic notion of belonging (Ibid).

Thirdly, a social category being constructed as excluded from the community does in itself justify discriminative measures. This, however, becomes more likely when an out-group is seen as threatening the values and the way of life of the in-group. Perceived threat can function to legitimize discrimination against immigrants and Muslim minorities. When people feel threatened by these groups, they tend to find it more acceptable to reject and exclude such group members, especially when the threat is thought to stem from inherent characteristics of these groups, such as their aggressiveness, deviousness or backwardness (Reicher et al., 2008, 1331).

Fourth, the way of life of the in-group must be heralded as virtuous and justified. The more virtuous “we” are considered to be, the more threatening “the other” becomes, and the more justified it becomes to mistreat them. Similar to what some research has discussed as “reversal” (as discussed previously), members of a majority often emphasize the self-defining meaning of in-group tolerance, which enables minority groups to be criticized for their intolerance and their lack of willingness to adapt (Verkuyten, 2013, 347). Lastly, when ‘they’ are constructed as threatening ‘our’ virtues, it becomes “not only justified to defend ourselves but also morally imperative.” Verkuyten states that radical-right politicians can thus present themselves as the “courageous defenders of ‘our’ virtuous national identity.” (Ibid)

This model helps me identify how Islam and Muslims are being represented as an out-group that is juxtaposed to the Finnish, or Western in-group. This model is operationalised in this study in order to examine how the Finns party might justify oppressive acts toward Muslim asylum seekers by juxtaposing positive representations of the in-group with negative representations of the out-group. It helps me understand how the Finns party is representing its views towards Islam and Muslims in light of the Finnish context, where, as I have mentioned in the literature review, it has been the stance of the party to refrain from openly oppressing specific minorities. Therefore, I am interested in how the party wants to justify its position, as well as mitigate against accusations of oppression. As I have explained throughout this thesis, the objective of this thesis is to answer *how* Islam and Muslims are represented by the Finns Party, not *why*. While the social identity model by Reicher et. al. could also be used to understand the psychology behind the othering of Islam and Muslims, I am using this model only insofar as it helps me answer the *how*.

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter discussed how political prejudice is manifested in an “us” vs. “them” binary. In political discourse, the juxtaposition of “us” and “them” is seen as a dynamic between positive

representations of the self, and negative representations of the other. In addition, the rhetorical and discursive strategies discussed in this chapter, the social identity model provides an analytical tool, through which to not only discuss the research question, but also how the Finns Party justifies its negative views towards Islam and Muslims. It allows me to analyse the dynamics between representations of in-groups and out-groups, bringing together the central tenet to othering which is the dichotomy of “us” and “them”. Furthermore, it allows for intertextual and interdiscursive analysis of the materials to understand the dynamics of how the Finns Party constructs their views of Islam and Muslims vis à vis how they represent themselves.

## 4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research paradigm to which the paper adheres to, after which it discusses the methodological approach and research design used conducting the research. A discourse analysis was conducted of chosen articles from the True Finns' official party newsletter, *Perussuomalainen* ('The True Finn'), in order to answer the thesis research question, which goes as follows: *How are Muslims and Islam represented textually in discourse on asylum seekers by the (True) Finns?*

### 4.1. Research paradigm

This study ascribes to a constructivist worldview, in which realities are constructed by societies and the individuals in them. An important aspect of understanding a constructivist worldview is that not only is knowledge of phenomena produced through social interaction, but it is also constantly being revised. Furthermore, constructivism has also come to mean that researchers themselves are presenting a version of social reality, making the research itself a part of reality construction (Bryman, 2012, 33). Therefore, the result of constructivist research is not definitive, but rather, over time, constructions become more informed and sophisticated, being more aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, 113). The concept of reality and knowledge as a social construction, as discussed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) in *The Social Construction of Reality*, is very central to this study. Berger and Luckmann argue that realities are constructed by individuals interacting socially. Berger and Luckmann assert that knowledge, values, and belief systems are all created through several phases of social interaction, all of which acquire different meanings (Ibid). Related to this thesis, therefore, I approach the views expressed by the Finns Party as discursive practices that construct a certain reality.

### 4.2. Research design

The research design of this thesis is an intrinsic case study. A case study allows in-depth descriptions of complex social phenomena, allowing investigators to focus on a "case" and retain a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin, 2015, 59). Tobin (2010, 289) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident".



A case study design often favours qualitative methods, which are helpful in generating intensive, detailed examination of a case (Bryman, 2008, 66).

While many descriptions of case studies state that it allows the advancement of theory by applying a given theoretical framework to a case, a specific form of a case study research design that relates very well with my research is an intrinsic case study. The purpose of an intrinsic case study is to highlight a specific case because the case itself is of primary interest. In this sense, the main purpose of an intrinsic case study is not to further a theoretical concept or to understand an abstract construct or phenomenon through a case, nor is it to primarily to represent other cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008, 12). This description fares well to describe the aims of my study, as I am not as concerned with advancing theories related to discursive practices used in radical right populist discourse, I am using them instrumentally illustrate my case of how Muslims are represented in Finland, by the Finns Party. As the main utility of this research is to fill a fundamental gap in research in the *case of Finland*, which I have clearly illustrated previously, using an intrinsic case study design of research is relevant.

### 4.3. Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from a series of monthly newsletters published by the Finns Party between August 2017 to February 2018 (seven monthly publications in total). The newspaper ‘Perussuomalainen’ was accessed through the party’s news platform found on their official website.<sup>8</sup> Each edition consists of news articles discussing current events in Finnish society, as well as editorials, opinion pieces and columns, usually written by prominent figures within the party, communicating their views and attitudes towards topics seen as important and pressing.

Seven complete publications of the newsletter in total were selected for analysis. The articles within the newsletters articles were chosen on the basis of containing at least one of the following search words: “Muslim”, “Islam”, “Asylum”, “Refugee”, “Immigration”.<sup>9</sup> I used the search words ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum’ as the refugee and asylum question has been a focal point of policies advocated by the True Finns since the break of the so-called refugee crisis – the term used by the Finnish government (Wahlbeck, 2016, 574–588). Considering that refugees seeking asylum in Finland are almost exclusively people from Muslim-dominated areas, articles mentioning refugees include references to Muslims as well. The articles represent official party discourse as they are written and published by the True Finn party. The monthly newspapers are published entirely in Finnish. Being

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.suomenuutiset.fi/lehtiarkisto/>

<sup>9</sup> Search words were used in Finnish. Due to the fact that the Finnish language has many case endings, only the root of the word was used in order not to miss different usages of the same word.

a native Finnish speaker, I analysed the chosen articles in Finnish and then translated all of the excerpts I present in the findings chapter myself.<sup>10</sup> The amount of text was quite substantial, as roughly half of the articles in the materials contained some of my search words, and many of them were very condense with discourses relevant to my research. Each of the publications is 25-28 pages in length.

The main justification for the party newsletter to be studied is that it shows a more accepted view of the party, through a forum in which it expresses its policies, attitudes, and worldview, and, more importantly, has the chance to discuss issues explicitly related to specific minorities, through a publically unified voice. Thus, this study can potentially help to uncover this “link” discussed by Wahlbeck (2016) in the literature review. The content of the newsletter should, therefore, be seen as representative of the views of the party leadership, and while not necessarily everyone associated with the party agrees with everything that is said, it can be asserted that the newsletter is speaking with the “common voice” of the party. Furthermore, newsletters allow a lot of leeway for actors to express their views in a variety of contexts, which also allows for me as the researcher to conduct detailed and quite immersive analysis, especially to uncover possible hidden agendas, and to analyse implicit attitudes.

As mentioned above, the articles were chosen from newspapers that were published within a seven-month period. The reason for choosing this seven-month period, from August 2017 to February 2018, is two-fold: Firstly, there exists little to no scholarly work related to the True Finn political party after the ideological division within the party that led to the anti-immigration wing of the party, led by Laura Huhtasaari and Jussi Halla-aho, to assume a leadership position. I wanted to choose a time which represents a more contemporary state of affairs of the party, one which is most relevant at present. The timeframe chosen represents a beginning of a new era for the party. The True Finns party split into two groups in July 2017. Following a change in party leadership, 23 out of 38 MPs exited from the True Finns to form a new party, ‘Uusi Vaihtoehto’ (‘New Alternative’) (Thynell, *YLE*, Thynell, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017). According to analysts interviewed by the media, the remaining 15 MPs represent the ‘right-wing’ section of the party, and features many of the politicians who have been most vocally – and explicitly – exhibiting anti-Muslim stances. As a result, It was most prudent to choose a timeframe that represents a more contemporary state of affairs. Secondly, the timeframe begins directly after a terrorist attack that happened in Turku, Finland on August 18<sup>th</sup> 2017. This attack was carried out by an asylum seeker from Morocco who claimed an affiliation with ISIS. In

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<sup>10</sup> The newsletters are archived and free to access through the party website. See: <https://www.suomenuutiset.fi/lehtiarkisto/>

the aftermath of the attack a great deal of attention and public discussion revolved around the issue of asylum seekers in Finland. Within the national political realm, the attack provoked a lot of discussion among politicians across the party spectrum. Therefore, I expected a lot of discussion in the materials that would be closely related to my topic. Lastly, Finnish presidential elections were held in February 2018, which was expected to stir up more discussion on the communication of topics and values central to the Finns Party leadership.

#### 4.4 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) is a very loosely defined concept. According to Stephanie Taylor (2001, 9–10), one of the aims of discourse analysis is to “identify patterns of language and related practices to show how these constitute aspects of society and the people within it.” Furthermore, Taylor asserts that DA in itself cannot be characterized as being a part of any particular discipline of research, nor can it be defined as being a method strictly for qualitative research (Ibid, 10). There are several approaches that are considered as discourse analysis. Bryman argues, that on an epistemological and ontological level, discourse analysis has two distinct features. The first of them is that it is ‘anti-realist’, in that discourse analytical work denies the existence of an external reality that can be uncovered. In this sense discourse analysis differs essentially from a positivist epistemology, in which the role of scientific research would be to find absolute truths that may be tested and re-tested for confirmation. The second feature of DA is that it is constructionist, where the “emphasis is placed on the versions of reality propounded by members of the social setting being investigated and on the fashioning of that reality through their renditions of it” (Bryman, 2008, 528). In other words, constructionism implies that discourse consists of a selection of many possible interpretations of a given topic or an idea being expressed, and that in the process, a particular version of reality is being produced or reproduced (Ibid, 529).

The concept of discourse is a very central one to this thesis. While discourse has become to signify a wide range of ideas, in my study I follow Norman Fairclough’s definition. As Fairclough argues, discourses are a way of representing aspects of the world, combining the processes, relations, and structures of the material world, the mental world of feelings, beliefs and values, as well as the social world. When analysing public discussion, understanding the *intertextualities* of the writings becomes very relevant. Intertextuality is according to Norman Fairclough the presence of actual elements of other texts within a text (Fairclough, 2003, 39). Statements within text should be regarded as being linked to other statements, which together form the context and background through which

these statements should be analysed (Bryman, 2008, 555). Furthermore, the relationship between discourses or their *interdiscursivity*, is an important concept for this thesis. Interdiscursivity alludes to the idea that a discourse has a relationship to another discourse, and are constantly shaping each other. In the analysis chapter I show how discourses on asylum seekers, Islam, and Muslims relate to each other. Thus, I am analyzing the interdiscursive relationship between these discourses (Fairclough, 2003, 124).

#### 4.5. Coding

The method for the analysis of the data is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a loosely defined yet common approach to qualitative data analysis, which entails coding data by identifying, analyzing and reporting recurring themes and patterns within data (Bryman, 2008, 578). While the decision as to what should be considered a code is ultimately up to the researcher, codes are patterns that contain a certain meaning, which can be categorized to derive further meaning of the dataset at hand (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 77–101). I used a quasi-open coding strategy for coding my data. This means that while I had a theoretical framework that influenced the way I view my data by focusing my attention on certain framing dynamics, my over-arching themes were derived inductively from emergent codes. I conducted the coding process in two stages. The first stage was *open coding*, where initial codes were found manually by going through the whole dataset, and identifying topics and concepts that relate to my research question (Bryman, 2008, 569). The second stage of coding, *axial coding*, had me group all the initial codes into broader categories, by analysing and making connections between initial codes. These categories were then mapped out to derive over-arching themes which represent my findings. An illustration of the coding process can be found in the appendix.

#### 4.6. Reflexivity

It is important for me as the researcher to understand my own position as a Finnish citizen, and someone who has lived most of his life in Finland. This presents both advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, as a Finn, I am to an extent knowledgeable of Finnish culture and of social trends. An obvious advantage of being a Finn is the nuanced understanding of the language, which is quite vital in close analysis of discourse. There would be some benefits if the research were to be done by a non-native, by a researcher who is not a part of Finnish society. As already mentioned, all the articles analysed were in Finnish, which required me to translate from Finnish to English. I view language as being

interpretive, and as a researcher interpreting and translating the language, I am inevitably, to some extent, also shaping the meaning of the content. I am aware of my position as a socially liberal, politically left-leaning young researcher, and studying materials that quite strongly opposes my personal views has to an extent affected me during the process of writing this thesis. However, I have attempted to the best of my ability to approach the analysis from an objective position by being aware of my subjectivities and biases and adhering to an analysis process of coding. This ensures that my themes can be supported with direct evidence from my data sources. It has been important for me to resist the urge to approach my analysis with the agenda of proving that the Finns Party are islamophobic. My job as a discourse analytical researcher is not to prove anything or make pejorative claims about the Finns Party, but to let the discourse speak for itself.

#### 4.7. Ethical considerations

The topic is quite politicised and in some cases highly sensitive. This is especially the case when the use of language and argumentation of certain individuals is analysed and put under critical examination in ways the individual may not agree with. However, the analysis is dealing with published material, meaning that I as a researcher do not need to be concerned with protecting the privacy of individuals whose text I am analysing.

#### 4.8. Limitations and De-limitations

The findings and analysis I wrote could be used to say more about the Finns Party itself, and how they are negotiating their views of Finnish identity. Instead, I chose to look at representations specifically, as this addresses a clear gap in research. A study of a similar topic could be conducted as a comparative case study in order to highlight differences in cases and to have a more precise point of reference. However, I am not conducting a comparative study, partly due to my own limitations in language skills (most sources of comparison would be in a language other than English or Finnish), but also because making a comparative study would go beyond the scope of a Master's thesis.

Thus, how the Finns Party differs from other cases are drawn upon from comparing them to secondary sources. It is notable that my dataset is, due to a qualitative research approach, to a degree limited. Thus, my findings cannot be generalized to the extent that a larger quantitative inquiry could have. However, my relatively small dataset allows me to analyse discursive practices in more detail, and in the proper social and political context.

## 5. Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings that I have collected through analysing the True Finns party newsletter. The material is presented through explaining the four over-arching themes, each of which relate to the thesis research question. A common theme to my findings is that in regards to topics that I deemed central to the thesis, most of the materials discuss asylum seeking, with less materials discussing Islam or Muslims specifically. As has been iterated before in this thesis, a vast majority of asylum seekers in Finland, especially those who came during the refugee crisis, are of Muslim dominant countries from the MENA greater region. This is common knowledge to anyone, including to the contributors of the newsletters I have analysed. One of the most evident things I found was that while the topics of asylum seeking and asylum seekers dominate the discussion, there is surprisingly little discussion of Islam (and even less of) Muslims explicitly. Furthermore, debates on the use of hijabs and niqabs, and of the Qur'an, that have been central to discussions in many other countries are almost non-present in the materials. As to why this may be, will be discussed at more length in the analysis section.

Some key figures in the party are given a lot of room to voice their opinions. Laura Huhtasaari, then presidential nominee, discusses main points in True Finns' policies and attitudes. Presidential elections were held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 2018. Therefore, until the January issue of the newsletter, many articles discuss her values and opinions on policies as part of her presidential campaign. Therefore, many of these articles discuss her themes around which she built her campaign around, many of them relating to immigration and the refugee "crisis", as well depictions of Islam. Jussi Halla-aho, a key Finns Party MP and one of the staunchest critics of asylum and immigration policies in Finland is also given a strong voice. Halla-aho is considered the ideological leader of the Finnish radical right and is quoted on the web pages of international counter-jihadists. Furthermore, he has been convicted of hate speech in 2012, partly due to his oppressive views on minorities expressed in his personal blog (Sakki and Pettersson, 2015, 160). In many cases, however, the author of a piece is not a key figure within the party. In these instances, the name of author will not be stated. If, on the other hand, the piece is by a prominent figure, it is mentioned in order to tie the article to its context.

## 5.1. Asylum Seekers Exploiting Finnish Welfare and Goodwill

One of the major themes that was evident in the analysed texts was that the Finnish nation is being exploited by asylum seekers, or ‘outsiders’ who are coming to Finland and who do not share Finnish values. The texts often discuss how the asylum seekers in Finland exploit the Finnish state to gain undeserved benefits, and that a vast majority of comers are not truly in need of assistance, implying that a higher quality of living does not constitute a “true” need. Asylum seekers are argued to be abusing the welfare state, while not having the potential or the willingness to integrate and be productive members of society.

Asylum seekers are expressed to often appear and behave in ways that disproves the need for asylum, often being reported to not “seem traumatized”, to be demanding of service and easy money, while lacking the effort and enthusiasm to “prove” that they are worthy of asylum and staying in the country. Furthermore, they are presented as being cunning and manipulative, using every opportunity to gain the maximum benefits. Simultaneously, the theme highlights the strong criticism the True Finns launch against the Finnish state, and its officials for having a system that allows and even encourages exploitation. The Finnish state and the “asylum system” is criticised as being overly generous, pampering to every whim and need of asylum seekers, which encourages exploitation.

An example of the text that clearly highlights this general attitude described in the previous paragraph can be found in the following quote by Vesa Salminen, the True Finns chairman of the municipality of Lahti, who states that

*The so called asylum process in Finland is the greatest sham by which the Finnish nation are being conned, even on the eve of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Finnish independence. (Männistö, November 2017, 17.)*

Salminen is not only calling the “asylum process” a sham, but implying that the people of the nation are being scammed, and, by referring to Finnish independence, tarnishing the honour of the Finnish nation. Furthermore, it expresses taking part in the “asylum system” as manipulative, conniving, and against the Finnish people.

The claim that many asylum seekers are undeserving of asylum is often argued on how they appear or behave, or conversely, how asylum seekers *should* appear or behave in order to be justified

for refugee status. In a 9/2017 article titled: “Asylum system is based on a lie”, “Pekka”, describes his experiences as a teacher at a reception center<sup>11</sup>:

*When most asylum seekers are merely searching for a higher quality of living, but are treated with the same measures as those who truly are in need of asylum, troubles will arise ... only few of them seem severely traumatized (Asunta, September 2017, 13).*

These quotes illustrate the argument that most asylum seekers are coming to exploit the generosity of the welfare state, while backing his argument with a claim that asylum seekers are perceivably not in distress, and therefore undeserving of refugee status. Therefore “Pekka” is simultaneously criticising the state for being too generous and those exploiting this generosity. However, this example does illustrate that not every asylum seeker is shown as undeserving, but juxtaposes those “truly in need” and those who are merely there to exploit. This underscores an interesting implication: These “welfare abusers” are also exploiting the hardships of the ones “truly in need” – the ones who are visibly traumatized. This adds another layer to how “undeserving” asylum seekers are exploiting the “system”: they are also exploiting each other.

Often in conjunction with descriptions of asylum seekers being undeserving of asylum, are demands that asylum seekers are to be returned to their homelands. In an article reporting unrest in reception centers, Vesa Salminen (from the previous example) states that “These well-dressed young men wearing earphones need to be returned to their countries to defend their homes and rebuild their lands.” (Männistö, 2017, 18–19). This example also builds on the previously mentioned idea that asylum seekers should seem visibly traumatized by war and/or oppression, and for them to be wearing neat clothes and using smartphones is an indication that they are financially secure and not needing to be taken care of by the Finnish state. Another article voiced an opinion that for some young men, coming to the country and seeking asylum is an opportunity to go out on a “boys trip” (Asunta, October 2017, 19).

To support the views presented in the previous paragraphs, many articles characterise asylum seekers as violent, lazy, unintelligent, uninterested, unmotivated, and demanding towards the workers at reception centers. These characterizations of asylum seekers are reported in several articles (Asunta A; B) with “first hand witnesses”, who have been working in asylum centers in close contact with asylum seekers. These articles also describe the struggles of asylum seekers to learn the Finnish language, either due to the lack of intellect, or due to reluctance. Some accounts also mention the lack

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<sup>11</sup> The articles use the Finnish term “vastaanottokeskus” to mean where asylum seekers are placed for the duration of the application period for refugee status, including while waiting for an appeal. The official term in English used by the Finnish immigration service (migri) is “reception center”.



of perceived interest towards adopting the customs and rules of Finnish society as something that makes asylum seekers less deserving of being granted asylum. These characterizations are then in some cases combined with expressing views of national hierarchies, with implicit suggestions that refugees from certain ethnic or national should be prioritized instead of others (Asunta, September 2017, 13). In another interview with a worker at an asylum center, “Pekka’s” experiences as a teacher at a reception center are described as following:

*If asylum were granted on the basis of motivation, a willingness to learn, and enthusiasm for Finnish culture, Pekka would grant it to only ten of his students: mainly for Afghans, diligent Somalis and people from elsewhere in Africa (Ibid)*

This statement was preceded by “Pekka” stating that “Only the rare Iraqi knew the Finnish alphabet after months of language training. Many had great difficulties in getting out of bed before noon.” This example expresses the view that in order to be considered deserving, asylum seekers should be hard working, eager to learn, and “enthusiastic of Finnish culture”. Also this quote establishes national and ethnic hierarchies. Especially Iraqi’s are targeted by presenting them as the laziest, most reluctant and dim-witted out of all nationalities. When combined with statements such as

*It is a taboo to talk about nations that are decades behind us in terms of human rights and equality (Ibid).*

It becomes clear that asylum seekers coming from the MENA region, as well as Afghanistan and Somalia, are framed as inherently different and inferior compared to the Finnish population.

Another recurring representation, that relates to the over-arching theme of exploitation, is that asylum seekers are presented as being pampered by the Finnish people. While asylum seekers are presented as being lazy, reluctant, of lesser intellect, selfish, reluctant to abide with rules, and in need of constant supervision, the Finnish state and Finnish people are criticised for being too lenient and allowing the lies and exploitation (Männistö). In a 10/2017 article titled “I have been threatened, spit on and verbally abused”, where “Mikko”, a worker at an asylum center expresses his experiences, states the following:

*I have run out of patience. Asylum seekers are being pampered and this shows in their behaviour... They are taught that you can get money by lying and without exerting effort, and there is always someone there to teach the newcomers on how to act in a foreign country in order to gain asylum as well as maximum social benefits ... They [asylum seekers] should have been made accustomed to the idea that in the real world,*

*they would not be looked after to wake up on time and driven around for meetings*  
(Asunta, October 2017, 18–19).

The title in itself represents asylum seekers as potentially violent, impulsive, and disrespectful. Furthermore, the article implicitly expresses that the brunt of the responsibility falls upon the organising apparatus of the reception center, for allowing and even teaching asylum seekers the ways of exploitation. By emphasizing the role of asylum centers as being responsible, it is almost as if asylum seekers are expected to exploit and misuse the generosity of the “asylum system” when given the chance. Interestingly, articles containing descriptions of “how asylum seekers are” rarely mention specific ethnic or religious groups to which asylum seekers belong to. However, there are constant mentions of terrorism in conjunction with, but unrelated to, these descriptions.

## 5.2. Fear of Erosion of Finnish Society

The third theme that I derived from the materials relates to how the refugee crisis is framed to result in a growing fear of erosion of Finnish society – or the loss of homogeneity of Finnish culture and values – due to the perceived threat posed by a greater number of refugees. The fear of erosion is exemplified by two types of arguments. Firstly, many of the articles argue that assimilation of immigrant populations is not possible and has failed despite strong efforts by the state and large investments by the Finnish taxpayer. These arguments are supported by expressing fears of islamisation of Finnish society and seclusion of immigrant populations, which provide a base for radicalisation. Secondly, many articles contain arguments that imply that immigrants themselves do not have the wish or are not determined enough to be assimilated. This implies that cultures, mostly from Muslim countries are incompatible with Finnish culture and values. These topics give insight on what the Finns Party view having a great number of asylum seekers, especially from Arab-Muslim backgrounds, will have on Finnish society.

While this theme relates more generally to immigration and integration<sup>12</sup> in Finland, it provides an additional argument for the True Finns as to why they view a large population of asylum seekers as a threat: If assimilation has indeed failed as they argue, it is consistent with the view that the state should not accept more foreigners to be assimilated. Furthermore, it gives us further insight into how the True Finns view non-Western cultures, especially Muslim ones. To further exemplify their view

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<sup>12</sup>The terms “integration” (Fin. Integraatio) and “assimilation” (Fin. “assimilaatio”) are often used interchangeably in the materials. Therefore, using either of the two words is determined by which one is used in the materials at a given time.

of problems associated with having large immigrant populations, the case of Sweden is often brought up as a cautionary example. Similarly, other examples of countries with immigration policies more closely mirroring the views of the Finns Party – such as Austria and Denmark – are brought up to support their claims.<sup>13</sup>

A number of articles expressed fears that the growing number of refugees will create excluded immigrant societies, which will lead to unrest, violence, and radicalisation. In an 8/2017 article criticising the comments of the Mayor of Helsinki who according to the article had stated that Finland needs more work based immigration, True Finns MP Jussi Halla-aho comments the following:

*It is common knowledge what kinds of severe consequences that immigrants coming from developing countries has had on the security and economy of Stockholm and many other major European cities. Even though numbers [of immigrants] have historically remained low in Finland, the social exclusion and ghettoization of immigrant populations, as well as the division of schools and residential areas have for years been one of the biggest issues faced by Helsinki (Suomen Uutiset, August 2017a, 4–5).*

Not only is Halla-aho presenting immigrants coming from developing countries as threats to security and as an economic burden to society, but also states that “it is common knowledge”, implying that his view – that implications of immigration as having a severely negative effect on the economy and security – is obvious and should be shared by everyone. He is also presenting a perceived division and polarization between the original population and immigrants by talking about social exclusion and ghettoization. This quote exemplifies how polarization is argued to contribute to the “Erosion of Finnish society”. Furthermore, it mentions Sweden as a cautionary example of loose immigration laws. This is a common recurring topic in many contexts in the articles.

In a column MP Jussi Halla-aho discusses Denmark as an example where he claims that in the late 1990s and early 2000s Muslim immigrants had formed “ghettos” in the cities of Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense, which caused a rise in crime, such as beatings and sexual violence. However, these issues had then allegedly been remedied by tightened immigration policies, which are reminded to be one of the tightest in Europe (Halla-aho, September 2017, 5).

*Sexual as well as other kinds of violence flourished. Danish newspapers that had criticised Islamic violence were attacked by petrol bombs. Along with mass immigration, Danes were awoken to the reality that for however much they tolerated*

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<sup>13</sup> Sweden has historically had larger refugee quotas than Finland.

*otherness, this otherness did not necessarily have any intention of tolerating Danes. Lax attitudes towards immigration and integration had led to the situation where a lot of not so lax folk lived in the country... Danes are still a jovial nation, but they have taken their heads out of the sand. Bad things should not be tolerated. (Ibid)*

This excerpt not only builds a direct relationship between a high number of immigrants and issues such as “ghettoization”, the rise of violence, but also presents it as an inevitable outcome. Furthermore, it presents Danes as peaceful, jovial, and “tolerant of otherness”, while Muslims are shown as barbaric, violent, predatory, and intolerant. Therefore, Danes (as representing Western values) and Muslims (representing non-Western values) are argued to be essentially incompatible.

Further examples of how the sources problematize the issue of assimilation, which combines previously discussed topics such as ghettoization, lax border control and the lack of will to integrate among refugees, can be found. Laura Huhtasaari states the following in a September 2017 article:

*Pressure on European borders, due to the massive influx of refugees, is great. Refugees are coming mostly from Islamic countries. Even though among the newcomers there are Muslims who truly have a wish to integrate into the West, there are also those who do not wish to integrate but wish to isolate themselves. The newcomers concentrate in certain areas, and as years pass by the original population starts to avoid them. These areas then diverge and become secluded, and the inhabitants living in them do not become employed. Examples can be found in Europe. (Janhunen, September 2017a, 10–11.)*

Firstly, the problem with integration is expressed as an issue with Muslims, while the West is presented as a wholly separate entity from the idea of what is non-western. Huhtasaari’s statement frames the issue of border control as a reason for internal issues: If borders are kept checked, and no refugees are allowed to enter, none of the issues discussed will become manifest. Once border crossings are allowed, inevitable issues will ensue. By this she is expressing a level of determinism in how accepting refugees will affect the society of a host country. However, Huhtasaari presents a slightly less essentialist view than Halla-aho, providing some mitigating factors by stating that some Muslims do wish to integrate. While she presents the process of isolation as an inevitable outcome, she does incorporate the view that this is through the agency of Muslims, who “wish to isolate themselves”.

### 5.3. Asylum Seekers as an Enemy to State Security

The third theme that was evident in the texts was that asylum seekers were presented to be hostile and threatening, and having the potential to radicalise. While this theme discusses the ways in which asylum seekers are perceived as a threat to society, much of the discussion actually revolves around the concept of asylum seekers who have been declined asylum. These views are supported by arguments related to reports of unrest and violence at asylum centers, which present asylum seekers as being more prone to violence to begin with, and therefore more likely to be a source of trouble to society. Allowing asylum seekers who have been declined asylum to stay in the country, either due to them staying in the country waiting for the appealing process, or due to them “disappearing” or running away from being deported, are argued to pose a “breeding ground for hate”, as declining permanent residence is asserted to make asylum seekers resentful towards the host country. The underlying argument is that asylum seekers being resentful – while having an already predisposed propensity to violence and the potential to become radicalised because of religion – presents the required conditions for radicalisation. Importantly, terrorism and radicalisation are represented as inherently Islamic phenomena.

The threat of terrorism is also often framed as a direct consequence of loose border control. There are constant mentions of the terrorist attack in Turku, which is used as a cautionary tale where it is presented as having a direct link with Finnish immigration and asylum policies. In a 8/2017 article, titled “Bad policies can only be changed by voting”, which brings forth demands on immigration and asylum policies discussed in a True Finns parliamentary group meeting, MP Jussi Halla-aho states the following:

*Turku witnessed an Islamic terrorist attack in which two people were killed and several were wounded. This act was part of the endless series of attacks from which Europe has had to endure during the last few years ... People have now realized, that uncontrolled immigration policies may have an impact even on your own safety.*

(Janhunen, August 2017, 2–3)

Also in this context, the topic of asylum seekers that have been declined asylum were mentioned as a threat to society. The same article states, immediately after the previous quote, that

*The True Finns demand asylum seekers who have been declined asylum to be immediately taken into custody. (Ibid)*

Similar demands of declined asylum seekers needing to be detained are very common. Again, “Islamic terrorism” is linked to asylum seekers by discussing them in the same context. This shows

that asylum seekers are known by the party to be Muslims, whereas anyone of them can become radicalised by a violent Islam.

In an article presenting the views and values of the presidential candidate Laura Huhtasaari, where she discusses the threat of terrorism, she states that “Finland witnessed a terrorist attack, which claimed the lives of two people, while many were hospitalised. The perpetrator, who stabbed his victims on a whim, was an asylum seeker who had been declined asylum. He had presented himself to the authorities using a false name, and also had pretended to be younger than he actually is” (Janhunen, October 2017, 9). By referring to some of the themes discussed in the previous section (5.3. “They are exploiting us”), this quote illustrates how the themes of decline asylum as well as lying about background and age are used in conjunction with the theme of terrorism. She continues, asserting that “Border surveillance and national sovereignty is a better solution than continuing with the same miserable policies and wondering what other EU-member states think of us. Letting in tens of thousands of unknown people does not enhance our security but worsens it” (Ibid). These quotes further illustrate how she frames the threat of terrorism as primarily a border issue, while voicing that the fact that refugees are “unknown” makes them a threat, leaving it up to the reader to imagine what kinds of people may be among these “unknowns”. Interestingly though, in this context, the attacker is not mentioned to be a Muslim. Furthermore, asylum seekers are defined as “unknowns”, rather than stating their ethnic or religious background.

The Turku attack is also presented as proof that Finnish authorities, politicians and media does not take the threat seriously. In an editorial from 8/2017, Matias Turkkila, the editor-in-chief of *Perussuomalainen*, expresses these sentiments by bringing to light several cases of mainstream media personalities, state officials, as well as politicians stating – prior to the terrorist attack – that the threat of terrorism is not a cause of concern in Finland (Turkkila, August 2017, 2).

*Mechkah<sup>14</sup> is an Isis-loving, death-threat churning drug dealer, whose radical behaviour was reported to the authorities by personnel at the reception center [he was staying in]. If one cannot become a target of Supo<sup>15</sup> with this list of merits, I wonder what kinds of ticking timebombs the other 300 might be? (Ibid)*

The statement by Turkkila refers to media reports stating that the Finnish Police and the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (Supo) received a tip the attacker had appeared radicalised. He is also

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of publishing, the attacker was reported to have been called Abderrahman Mechkah. later, it was discovered that he was using a false identity. his real name is Abderrahman Bounane.

<sup>15</sup> Supo is an acronym for Finnish Security Intelligence Service.

referring to reports that Supo had around 350 individuals on their watch-list, who were being monitored as potentially becoming radicalised.<sup>16</sup>

In some instances, the threat of terrorism is discussed even in contexts where it is not necessarily relevant, which suggests the willingness of the Finns Party to discuss the issue. This is clearly visible in an article titled “[MP] Raatikainen on his motion on the national budget: Money appropriated to the church should be cut by half a million”. While the article does mention the proposal to cut on the money going to the church – on the grounds that the church is helping “illegal” asylum seekers – it mainly discusses the growing threat posed by Islamic extremism and terrorism. After the article discusses the issue of terrorism and the increased presence of Finland within “radical Islamic propaganda”, MP Mika Raatikainen states that “There are 11 800 registered asylum seekers who have been declined asylum currently staying in Finland. According to some estimations, there are thousands of undocumented persons staying in the country illegally, of whom we have no knowledge of their whereabouts. Those staying in the country illegally present a security threat to Finland” (Suomen Uutiset, October 2017, 10) This article clearly expresses how the issue of declined asylum seekers staying in the country is associated with security threats, such as declined asylum seekers becoming becoming radicalised. Furthermore, it shows the propensity of the articles for discussing issues important to the party to be discussed in contexts that do not necessarily relate to the topic – which suggests that the True Finns want to talk about the topics of immigration, asylum, threat of terrorism, etc. as often as possible to get their message across.

#### 5.4. Asylum Seekers as Fundamentally Different

The last theme that was evident more or less in all the texts relates to the idea that asylum seekers are fundamentally different than Finns, and therefore, containing the implication that *Finnish people are more important than others*. This is perhaps the most pronounced and clear messages coming out of all of these themes. It is extremely pronounced and an underlying message in most of what they say related to my topic. Therefore, it can be seen as a meta theme. Furthermore, discussions on the expenses of the “asylum system” will be brought up to illustrate how this discourse relates to further characterising an “us” and “them” juxtaposition, and the idea that Finnish interests are the most important.

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<sup>16</sup> For More Information, See: Yle Uutiset. 21.8.2017, ”Police, Supo, Received Tip About Radicalised Turku Suspect In Early 2017”. Recovered On 26.10.2018.  
[https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/police\\_supo\\_received\\_tip\\_about\\_radicalized\\_turku\\_suspect\\_in\\_early\\_2017/9788177](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/police_supo_received_tip_about_radicalized_turku_suspect_in_early_2017/9788177);

By discussing the expenses and the economic burden of the so-called asylum system, further exemplifies the dichotomy of “us” and “them”, and that the interests of Finnish people are presented as more important than helping others. These illustrations criticize the exuberant use of tax-payers’ money which could be used for the benefit of “the people”. On the other hand, they are juxtaposing the struggle of lower class ordinary Finnish people, the perceived crisis of the welfare state, and the money used on Asylum seekers. This is done by either explicitly stating, or by implicit association.

These issues are expressed in conjunction with reminders of how much of an economic burden the asylum process is to the Finnish taxpayer. An example of implicit association would be discussing the lofty expenditure of Asylum centres on one side of a spread, and on the other side discussing the struggle of Finns with headlines such as “Pensioners struggling”, “Young families stuck in a motte”, “Unemployed unable to cope” etc (*Perussuomalainen*, September 2017, 2–3). Another example of implicit association can be found in an article titled “Millions to services for those staying in the country illegally” is followed by, on the other side of the spread, an article discussing poverty among Finns, titled “Over hundred food-aid stations will be left without financial assistance” (*Suomen Uutiset*, January 2018b, 7). Again, the placement of these articles juxtaposes the perceived distress of Finnish people and the financial burden of asylum seekers. Related to “They have forgotten the agony of Ordinary Finns”

Furthermore, statements that explicitly assert the view that Finnish interests should be prioritised are common. Many articles discuss the expenses of the asylum system explicitly in conjunction with calls to rather spend tax revenues on the welfare and health of the Finnish population. This is often mentioned with discussing themes such as Finnish solidarity and the maintenance of national independence. Laura Huhtasaari:

*Internal solidarity means first and foremost, that tax revenues gathered from Finnish taxpayers are used to finance Finnish healthcare and well-being, and not to better the world (Janhunen, October 2017, 6).*

By this statement, Huhtasaari is explicitly stating that Finnish well-being is the more important than the well-being of others. Furthermore, she states a concrete thing, healthcare, as something that tax revenues can be used for, which will increase the well-being of Finns. However, the “instead-of” option, “to better the world”, is abstract, and presented as something naïve and unobtainable. Therefore, the underlying supportive argument as to why Finnish interests should be prioritised, is that Finns should be pragmatic and take care of themselves, rather than being idealist, hopelessly trying to help others. The argument that Finns are expressed to be more important than “others” is



quite explicit in the following example, where Laura Huhtasaari communicates her political views as a presidential candidate:

*Finland is a peaceloving nation, that wishes to co-operate with everyone. However, the responsibility of the president is to take care of the interests of the nation state. The nation state protects the welfare of the citizens better than supranational organs (Ibid).*

In the same article, two pages later, the Turku terrorist attack is mentioned, that the attacker was a case declined asylum seeker, of Moroccan origin:

*Terrorism has come to Finland. Decision makers should admit reality and understand, that these are the consequences if the borders of the nation are not protected (Ibid).*

Economic expenses are sometimes directly linked to the threat of violence. In a column by Halla-aho, discussing the burden and corruption of the “asylum system”, he states that

*Ordinary Finnish people are paying the ‘Asylum Trade’ with their economic wellbeing, their health and even their lives (Halla-aho, January 1, 2018).*

Discussing “health” is left to simultaneously mean two things: firstly, less tax money to healthcare due to economic burden of asylum seekers means less health for Finnish people. Secondly, stating that Finnish people are paying the Asylum trade with their health, Halla-aho is suggesting that having such a mass of asylum seekers is a *threat* to the health of Finns, which relates to previously discussed discourses on the violent behaviour of asylum seekers and the threat of Islamic terrorism. Finally, the phrase “even their lives” is a more direct reference to the threat of terrorism. This quote contains two interesting dimensions. On the one hand, it frames asylum seekers as potentially violent and radicalised. On the other hand, it contains a criticism towards people upholding the “asylum system” (which includes state authorities, mainstream media that is uncritical of immigration, government policies, etc.) as being culpable for this threat of violence and terrorism (which already has manifested in the form of a terrorist attack), which is “paid” by “ordinary Finnish people”. This furthermore illustrates a “us” and “them” dichotomy, in two dimensions.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I first discuss the relationship of the key discourses most relevant to my topic, which relate to asylum seekers, Islam, Muslims, and terrorism, to show that they are discursively linked to each other in the rhetoric of the Finns Party.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, I present the idea that the social categories of asylum seeker, Muslim, and Islam form a “meta discourse” of the “other”, where the discourse of asylum seekers provides information on how Islam and Muslims are represented by the party. Second, I discuss, in relation to the social identity model for the development of collective hate by Reicher et al. (2008) how the Finns Party juxtaposes positive representations of the in-group (Finnish people, “the West”) to a negative and threatening representation of the out-group (Muslim asylum seekers), which accentuates the out-group threat and seeks to justify discriminatory proposals toward asylum seekers. Then, I discuss, by recalling the concept of “differentiating the other” by Lynn and Lea (2003), how the targeting of asylum seekers instead of Muslims or Islam is to a degree a strategic decision to shield and mitigate against accusations of racism. Finally, I discuss my findings and analysis in light of existing literature.

### 6.2 Social Categories

In this section I discuss three key social categories present in the newsletters, which are of interest for my research, and how each of them are interlinked. These categories are asylum seeker, Islam, Muslim. Each of these categories represents a version of the “other”, which, as discussed in the theory chapter, include categorical generalisations and essentialisations of what constructs a category. Discussing these three categories in isolation does not reveal the big picture however, but the intertextuality and interdiscursivity of these categories forms the context through which we can understand them (Bryman, 2012, 555). As I clearly state in the findings chapter, discussions of asylum seekers are very common, while Islam and Muslims are only mentioned sparingly. However, I argue that even with relatively scarce explicit mentions of the categories “Islam” and “Muslim”, the asylum seeker discourse is both anti-Islam and anti-Muslim. Thus, in the coming paragraphs I illustrate my argument, which is that together, intertextually and interdiscursively, they form something that one could call a “meta discourse” of the other, that combines discourses within a discourse.

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<sup>17</sup> I am inquiring into the discursive relationship between the use of these social categories. Thus, I view each social category as a discourse in its own right.

Asylum seekers are described to exploit Finnish welfare, to cause erosion of Finnish society, and as a threat to state security. These descriptions are very similar to what I discuss in the literature review chapter, where Van der Valk (2003) as well as Mols and Jetten (2014) found populist radical right parties to commonly problematize asylum seekers and refugees with negative categories, such as criminality, threats to public security, religious extremism, decline of the nation, as well as increased social costs. Furthermore, the Finns Party writings construct asylum seekers as lazy, of lesser intellect, and in constant need of being taken care of. Importantly, as I have illustrated in the findings section (“Asylum seekers an enemy to state security”), the threat of terrorism is often discussed in conjunction with representations of asylum seekers, even when it would seem unrelated to the topic of discussion in an article. Terrorism is presented as inherently and unequivocally an Islamic phenomenon, as it is only discussed in conjunction with a Muslim perpetrator. Furthermore, if terrorism is constructed as something Islamic, it constructs Islam as a guiding force that leads its believers to conduct terrorist acts.

In the newsletters, the Finns Party does not take a stance on the debate on the nature of Islam, differing from most European examples discussed in the literature review chapter. Islam is not explicitly expressed as an ideology, or even a religion. However, the overall representation of Islam is associated with a number of negative categories: The word “Islam” is mostly used in its adjective form, “Islamic”, often before words “violence”, “terrorism”, “extremism”, and “fundamentalism”. Thus, while the representation of Islam by the Finns Party does not really establish what Islam is, it becomes constructed as something that represents violence and oppression, and something that imbues those who believe in it (or are classified as believing in) as potentially violent. Thus, when the word Islamic is mentioned in a seemingly neutral context, such as “refugees are mostly coming from Islamic countries” (see theme “Fear of Erosion of Finnish Society” in findings chapter), the social category “refugees” (and thus asylum seekers, both are used interchangeably) becomes intertextually associated with terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism. These views differ quite clearly from Sakki and Pettersson (2015) as well as Keskinen (2014), who studied political blogs of Finns Party MPs, and from research on the British BNP (Wood and Finlay, 2008), Dutch PVV (Rooyackers and Verkuyten, 2012; Stavrakis et al., 2017, Verkuyten, 2013), Sverige demokraterna (Sakki and Pettersson, 2015), whose MPs were found to express threatening visions of Islam as a violent and oppressive ideology. Furthermore, visions of the spread of isolated Muslim communities controlled by Shari’a law were present in research by Wood and Finlay, Rooyackers and Verkuyten, as well as Stavrakis et al.

As I mention, the category “Muslim” is used quite scarcely. Interestingly, when discussed, some form of mitigation is usually present. The category is usually used as a reminder in some instances that asylum seekers do indeed come from Muslim dominant countries. Thus, the interconnectedness of the discourses on asylum seekers, terrorism, Islam and Muslims follows the following logic: if terrorism is inherently Islamic and Islam is associated only with negative categories, if asylum seekers are represented as potential terrorists, and asylum seekers are Muslims, then it goes to show that there are strong links between each of these discourses, even when they are not usually represented in the same context. Thus, the discourse on asylum seekers also constructs negative and oppressive images on Muslims and Islam. This is in stark contrast to how Sakki and Pettersson (2015) and Keskinen (2014) found Finns Party MPs discussing Muslims in their personal blogs, where Muslims were *explicitly* found to be constructed as “a deviant group of people”, with a “threatening ideology”. Furthermore, in the case of Sakki and Pettersson (2015), the use of rape statistics were found to be used to argue for the deviant nature of Muslim populations. These kinds of explicit representations are all absent in my findings. However, even if Muslims are not explicitly expressed in the fashion as Sakki and Pettersson, as well as Keskinen found, very similar categories are constructed on asylum seekers. Thus, Muslims do become indirectly, through the asylum seeker discourse, represented as deviants.

The following example illustrates how these discourses are connected to each other. Recalling two quotes from the findings chapter, where Laura Huhtasaari, the then presidential candidate, is expressing her election themes three months prior to presidential elections (both quotes are from the same article). She represents the in-group, Finnish people, in positive terms, while arguing for the sovereignty for the state to make individual decisions on immigration and refugee policies free from the control of the EU. She is arguing that because of loose immigration policies, Finland has to deal with refugees of unknown backgrounds, who have a tendency to radicalise, and who present a threat of conducting a terrorist attack. Thus, she argues for increased border surveillance. In constructing an out-group, Huhtasaari only mentions one of the categories, asylum seekers, by mentioning the Turku terrorist attack, reminding the reader that it was perpetrated by an asylum seeker of Moroccan origin, who was declined asylum, while having lied to the authorities about his origin and age. In the rest of the article, she does not directly mention any of the three categories.

*Allowing in tens of thousands of unknown people into the country does not improve security but worsens it (Janhunen, October 2017, 9).*

Instead of directly talking about asylum seekers, she uses the term “unknowns”. By using the word “unknowns”, she is able to present asylum seekers as unpredictable, that any kinds of people,

including terrorists, might be among these people coming in as refugees. This narrative is further enhanced by combining the mentioning of the Turku terrorist attack, which serves as a physical proof and warning tale of what can happen if Finland keeps allowing asylum seekers inside its borders. This point she describes directly in the following excerpt from the same article:

*Terrorism has come to Finland. Decision makers should admit reality and understand, that these are the consequences if the borders of the nation are not protected* (Janhunen, October 2017, 6).

In this excerpt, again, asylum seekers or their dominantly Muslim backgrounds are not mentioned. Instead, “Terrorism”, an abstract term, is presented as the enemy. Furthermore, it is presented as a direct and essential consequence of “unprotected borders”, a reference to the influx of asylum seekers. As asylum seekers are mostly Muslims, Muslims come to be indirectly associated as a terrorist threat, even though the word “Asylum seeker”, nor “Muslim” or “Islam” is mentioned in the entire two-page long article. Furthermore, Terrorism does not need to be mentioned as Islamic, as the discourse of “terrorism” already contains the idea that it is inherently Islamic, which is constructed elsewhere in the texts. Ostensibly, it would seem it is difficult to criticise her of being oppressive towards any specific group, because she avoids mentioning them by name. However, If asylum seekers are indeed Muslim, terrorism is Islamic, and asylum seekers are a terrorist threat, Muslims all become constructed as potential terrorists, driven by a violent Islam.

The entire negative discourse on asylum seekers, Islam and Muslims, is related to several discriminatory proposals that the Finns Party advocates towards asylum seekers. Firstly, they want to close the borders from allowing refugees in, especially from Sweden which is the most common route through which refugees have crossed to Finland. To this end, they call on increased border surveillance. Secondly, they want to detain asylum seekers who have had their asylum applications declined, and propose them to be sent back to their country of origin once the process of appeals is done. Thirdly, they propose shortening the appeal period once an asylum application has been declined. However, they do not give a precise time for how long an appeals period should take.

### 6.3 The Social Identity Model for the Development of Collective Hate

In this section, I operationalise the social identity model proposed by Reicher et al. (2008), and analyse how it may help identify how the oppression of Muslim asylum seekers, is presented as morally acceptable. Furthermore, I illustrate how positive representations of the in-group accentuates the negative representation of the out-group. The model is expressed by Reicher et. al. as follows:

Firstly, an in-group must be constructed as a distinct category, with specific norms, beliefs, practices (step 1) that is heralded as virtuous and just way of life (step 4). Secondly, the out-group must be also constructed as a social category (step. 2), but must also be seen as threatening the norms and values of the in-group (step 3). The more virtuous the in-group and the more threatening the out-group is constructed, the oppression of the out-group becomes more justified. Finally, if these four steps are met, it is not only justified but a moral imperative to oppose the out-group (step 5). I argue that the rhetoric of the Finns Party seems to at least partly follow these five steps of justification, discussed by Reicher et al. The “us” is represented with essentialist but positive attributes (eg. “peace-loving Finns”, Jovial Danes”), while the “other” is expressed as negative or representing a threat (Islamic violence, terrorism).

### **Construction of out-group as threatening**

As was discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the out-group can be defined as a discourse that includes Muslims, Islam, asylum seekers, all of which refer to Muslim populations. The way this out-group is represented, as clearly expressed in the previous section, is with negative, essentialist categories. The main negative categories that are used by the Finns Party to represent the out-group are economic burdens, threats toward security, and threat towards Finnish cultural homogeneity. While some opinions construct the out-group threat as something at odds with Finnish values, the most common ones were clearly physical threat (terrorism) and economic threat (the cost of asylum seeking).

### **Construction of in-group as virtuous**

As I have shown in the findings section, the Finns Party constructs several in-groups. The most common of them is simply Finnish people or the Finnish nation. In some cases, the in-group to which the out-group is juxtaposed to is not Finland, but the “West” or “Old Europe”, to which Finland is considered to be included. Also, in some cases the in-group is constructed through external examples, for example by presenting the case of supposedly failed immigration policies in Sweden or successful ones in Denmark. In these examples, the in-group is constructed by proxy as “Danes” or “Swedes”. All of these examples constructs an us vs. them dichotomy, and especially in the examples where the in-group is constructed beyond the Finnish borders, a clear dichotomy between the “East” and the “west” are constructed, which resonates very clearly with orientalism. Thus, similarly to how I argue that the discourses on asylum seekers, Islam and Muslims forms a meta-discourse of the other, discourses related to “the West”, Europe, Finland, and the Finnish nation forms a meta-discourse of “us”.

As I show in the findings chapter, the Finns Party constructs the “virtuousness” of the Finnish people vis á vis external threats towards the economic wellbeing as well as the cohesion of Finnish society. As I show in the findings section, through the discourse of asylum seekers, the Finnish become constructed as opposite to how asylum seekers are represented: whereas asylum seekers are represented as lazy, violent, oppressive, greedy, and exploitative, Finns are represented as calm, peaceful, tolerant and generous even to a fault. Finns are often referred to as “the Finnish nation”, or “the Finnish people”, constructed as cohesive, homogenous entity with these aforementioned essentialist characteristics. The following excerpt, by Laura Huhtasaari, discussed in the findings chapter, is an example of an essentialist construction of Finland as a cohesive, positively represented entity:

*Finland is a peaceloving nation, that wishes to co-operate with everyone* (Janhunen, October 2017, 6).

Finland is represented as being in the forefront of human rights development and equality, whereas asylum seekers are said to represent the opposite. Consider the following example, discussed in the findings chapter:

*It is a taboo to talk about nations that are decades behind us in terms of human rights and equality* (Asunta, September 2017, 13).

The “us”, Finnish people, are represented as progressive and liberated, directly juxtaposed to nations that are not. “Nations” here implicitly refers to nations represented by asylum seekers. However, intertextually, the “us” also represents Western values.

In some cases, Finland is constructed as having an honourable history, where the exploitation by asylum seekers is tarnishing the honour and virtue of the Finnish nation:

*The so called asylum process in Finland is the greatest sham by which the Finnish nation are being conned, even on the eve of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Finnish independence* (Männistö, November 2017, 17).

In this example, not only individual Finns are being conned, but the entire nation. This contains the thought that exploitive behaviour is an affront to the entire nation, which is accentuated by referring to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Finnish independence. Thus, not only is the “Finnish nation” being exploited, but also its honor and history. The Finnish nation, an abstract, thus becomes constructed as an entity with human features, such as pride and dignity, with a 100-year long history that should be honoured.

In some cases, the in-group is constructed as “the West”, or “Europe”, to which Finland is seen as ideologically and mentally a part of.

*Old Europe only watches from a distance as millions and then tens of millions of refugees, most of them Muslims, head towards the old continent. The move continues from country to country while borders are not being bothered to be checked ... We have a common enemy and its name is terrorism. Terrorism shall have no place in our country (Suomen Uutiset, September 2017, 11).*

Here, Europe is referred to as “Old Europe”, which accentuates the idea of Europe with an ancient history, a history which is being threatened. The same can be said of the use of the term “the old continent”. Furthermore, terrorism is represented as threat not only to Finland but to the entirety of the Western world. Thus, the in-group becomes constructed as not only Finland, but also the Western world, that represents the notion of “us”.

The following example, discussed in the findings section, consists of each step discussed by Reicher et al. It illustrates how the dynamics of in-group and out-group representation are used to justify oppression of the out-group.

*Sexual as well as other kinds of violence flourished. Danish newspapers that had criticised Islamic violence were attacked by petrol bombs. Along with mass immigration, Danes were awoken to the reality that for however much they tolerated otherness, this otherness did not necessarily have any intention of tolerating Danes. Lax attitudes towards immigration and integration had led to the situation where a lot of not so lax folk lived in the country ... Danes are still a jovial nation, but they have taken their heads out of the sand. Bad things should not be tolerated. (Halla-aho, September 2017, 5).*

The in-group here is by proxy “Danes”, or “the Danish nation”, which represents “us”. This in-group is represented by essentialist characterisations of being tolerant, and “jovial”. Furthermore, the out-group is constructed with negative, essentialist categories. First, Islam is represented as violent: Talking about “Islamic violence” alludes to the idea that violence done by Muslims is inherently something Islamic. Secondly, it argues that immigration from Muslim majority countries leads to violence, and that Muslims do not integrate with the original population. Importantly, the in-group is lauded for “taking their heads out of the sand”, and “awaking to the reality”, which lends to the idea that these aforementioned negative, essentialist categories are obvious, and to realise this should be as simple as it would for an ostrich to remove its head out of the sand to realise it is in mortal danger.



Importantly, given that the out-group is constructed as violent and threatening a “tolerant and jovial nation”, accentuates how viciously the out-group becomes to be represented. This example ends in a moral imperative: “bad things should not be tolerated”. This is what Reicher et al. states as the fifth step of their model: when ‘they’ are constructed as threatening ‘our’ virtues, it becomes “not only justified to defend ourselves but also morally imperative” (Reicher et al., 2008). “Bad things should not be tolerated” does not refer to only immigration, but more importantly towards Muslims and Islam. It constructs Islam, Muslims, immigration and integration as simply “bad”, and thus they should not be tolerated. Through this argumentation, however, Halla-aho is not only attempting to justify discriminatory proposals towards Muslim asylum seekers: “bad things” refers to the entirety of the issues that Halla-aho constructs. It refers to “immigration”, to lax attitudes towards immigration, but also Islam that is prone to violence. Thus, according to Halla-aho, none of these things should be tolerated.

I argue that similar to my argument on the meta-discourse of the “other”, that tied together discourses on asylum seekers, Muslims and Islam, a similar meta-discourse becomes constructed of the in-group. Thus, the “us” vs. “them” binary becomes constructed as not only “asylum seeker” vs. “Finnish people”, but also a “west” vs. “east” dichotomy, where the “us” is synonymous with not only the Finnish population or even the “Finnish nation”, but also the Western world, which is represented in some sense as a cohesive unit, which represents progression, human rights, and peacefulness. This dichotomy of the discourses of “us” and “them” is very similar to what Edward Said (1978) argues in *Orientalism*, and resembles the binaries discussed in the literature review. Whereas the discourse of “us”, represents progress, human rights, peace, tolerance, the discourse of “them”, relating to Muslim asylum seekers coming from the wider MENA region, represents intolerance, violence and backwardness. Thus, as Said states, the “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” rings true in how the Finns Party constructs in-groups and out-groups.

### **What does this say in relation to my research question?**

The model helps me to illustrate how the positive construction of the categories “Europe”, “West” and “Finland” as the in-group accentuates out-group threat. It also helps me understand that negative constructions of an out-group inherently involves the construction of a positive in-group. Furthermore, the model is relevant in answering how the Finns Party justifies discriminatory proposals towards asylum seekers, most of whom come from Muslim majority countries. These policy proposals include closing the borders from allowing in refugees, as well as detaining asylum

seekers who have been declined asylum and sending them back to their countries of origin. The positive representation of this in-group as having a virtuous way of life enhances the out-group threat and serves as an attempt to justify discriminatory *proposals* towards asylum seekers, such as closing Finnish borders, detaining declined asylum seekers and sending them back to their countries of origin. I however conclude that the model does not allow me to answer how the Finns Party justifies discriminatory *attitudes* towards asylum seekers, such as finding them threatening in the first place, as this builds a tautological argument.

I argue that discrimination is not only the advocacy of oppressive policies, but perhaps more importantly associating a group of people with negative essentialist categorizations, such as constructing a group of people as threatening. All of these tenets of oppression are visible in how the Finns Party represents Islam and Muslims through the asylum seeker discourse. While both Verkuyten and Reicher et al. states that their theoretical aim is to understand the justification of out-group discrimination, neither makes this distinction between oppression as policy, and oppression in discourse, in how they describe the model. Thus, I the trouble of applying this model for my thesis involves an issue with the model itself: Part of oppressing an out-group, especially in the case of the Finns Party, is that the out-group is essentialised as representing a threat. This essentialisation in itself is oppressive. Thus, if representing an out-group as threatening is justified by representing the out-group as threatening the in-group, the model produces a tautology. Thus, the model only helps to understand the justification of (advocating) oppressive policies, but not how one would justify constructing a group as threatening (or any other negative category) in the first place. In this case, the model would be used to argue that representing the out-group as threatening is attempted to be justified by representing the in-group as virtuous and the out-group as threatening. This, again, is a tautology.

#### 6.4 Differentiating the Other

In this section I discuss my findings in light of the concept “differentiating the other”, which was introduced in the theoretical framework chapter. In some research I discussed in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters, differentiating between Muslims as a group and Islam as a violent ideology was used to justify oppressive views towards Muslims. However, in the writings of the Finns Party Islam is not discussed as an ideology, or even as a religion. Differing from how e.g. Verkuyten found that Wilders of the Dutch PVV differentiated between Muslims as a group of people and Islam as a violent and oppressive ideology in order to avoid accusations of being prejudiced towards a social group, the Finns Party does not make this distinction.

The concept of differentiation is present in other ways in my findings. Asylum seekers are differentiated in two ways: firstly, between the deserving and undeserving ones, which is very similar to how Lynn and Lea (2003, 433) found asylum seekers to be differentiated between “real asylum seekers and bogus ones”, and secondly, between those who have been declined asylum and those who are still waiting for a decision for permanent residence status. Most asylum seekers are constructed as undeserving, either because they were deemed so by the state (declined) or because they are argued to be welfare refugees exploiting the Finnish system. Differentiation here serves two purposes: Firstly, by conceding that some asylum seekers are deserving, the Finns Party on the surface are straying from seeming oppressive towards *every* asylum seeker. Secondly, by concluding that most asylum seekers are merely exploiting Finnish welfare, as opposed to the few who have been traumatised by war, the Finns Party is attempting to justify policies that are discriminatory, such as closing borders. Thus, this differentiation allows the Finns Party to ostensibly present themselves as not discriminating against all asylum seekers. Even then, differentiating between declined asylum seekers and non-declined ones allows the Finns Party to argue that an asylum seeker who experiences a great disappointment, such as not being given asylum, is at a great risk of becoming radicalised because of ensuing resentment toward the Finnish state. This emphasises and reconstructs the discourse that (Muslim) asylum seekers are impulsive and potentially violent, and that a negative experience in their life can easily lead to radicalisation.

A similar differentiation strategy is evident when discussing Muslims. In most cases where Muslims are discussed explicitly (which is not very often), the Finns Party differentiates between “good” and “bad” Muslims. The following example illustrates this argument:

*Even though among the newcomers there are Muslims who truly have a wish to integrate into the West, there are also those who do not wish to integrate but wish to isolate themselves* (Suomen Uutiset, September 2017, 11).

This example contains a show concession, as I discuss in the theoretical framework chapter (Antaki and Wetherell, 1999). By arguing that “while some Muslims do have a wish to integrate”, the implication is the opposite, that most Muslims do not. By doing so, the writer can ostensibly distance themselves from essentialising Muslims as a group and appear non-discriminatory, while still making an oppressive claim of Muslims. Thus, the concession is merely “for show”. Furthermore, this example constructs the idea of what a “good” Muslim is supposed to be like, which is that they should “truly wish to integrate”. I also argue that due to the fact that most instances where the word Muslim is used, there is a show concession present, supports my argument that the Finns Party is doing its utmost to keep up an image of being neutral towards any specific ethnic or religious group.

If in other examples Islam was constructed as a violent ideology to justify discrimination of Muslims, while ostensibly remaining neutral towards Muslims, I argue that the Finns Party is straying away from discussing Islam and Muslims altogether and targeting asylum seekers instead. Despite this, as I have already discussed at length in the first section of this chapter, the anti-asylum seeker discourse is also anti-Islam and anti-Muslim. Thus, based on my findings, *the Finns Party seems to mask its anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments in its overt anti-asylum seeker discourse*. By avoiding discussing Muslims and Islam, the Finns party are instead targeting asylum seekers or refugees, which, while not abstract terms, are not inherently defined by affiliation to a nationality, religion or ethnicity. I suggest that the frequent representations of the category “asylum seeker” as opposed to the very infrequent representations of the categories “Muslim” and “Islam” is a strategic decision, in order to evade accusations of overt oppression of a specific minority. This view is supported by the notion, argued by van Dijk, Verkutyen, Reicher et. al. as well as many other scholars, that some sort of justification or mitigation for expressing oppressive views is needed in order to defend against accusations of racism.<sup>18</sup> This idea is further supported by Wahlbeck, and Sakki and Pettersson who argue that the Finns party has a history of refraining from making openly oppressive statements about specific minorities, and in 2011 signed a proclamation “Against Discrimination, Racism and Violence” (Wahlbeck, 2016, 582). Therefore, I argue, that by targeting asylum seekers, and refraining from explicitly discussing their attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, the Finns party is attempting to construct a threatening out-group without appearing islamophobic or racist. This is, again, in line with previous examples of the Finns Party attempting to retain a non-discriminatory image.

## 6.5 Literature

My findings chapter corroborates with literature that argue that the Finns party often expresses its negative views towards minorities as being a threat to the functioning of the welfare state, as I illustrate in the findings chapter. As Sakki and Pettersson show, immigrants and refugees were represented as “welfare abusers”.

Sakki and Pettersson, and Wahlbeck agreed that the Finns Party have historically been striking a balance between keeping a moderate image, while radical and xenophobic voices have persisted among individuals associated with the party. My findings are to a degree in line with this statement. I show that the discourses on Islam and Muslims are very negative, and construct similar

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<sup>18</sup> Eg. van Dijk states that general norms and values prohibit blatant forms of prejudice towards specific minorities, and that “language users who say negative things about minorities are well aware of the fact that they may be understood as breaking the social norm of tolerance and acceptance.”

constructions as other European examples I discuss in the literature review. Through the asylum seeker discourse, Islam is constructed as representing violence, fundamentalism, and terrorism, whereas Muslim asylum seekers are represented as welfare exploiters, the influx of whom represents a threat to the security of the Finnish nation, but also the cohesion of Finnish society.

However, I argue that my findings show a clearly toned down rhetoric compared to most populist radical right comparisons. These reasons have been discussed in this chapter. Anti-Islam and anti-Muslim leanings, though evident, are in most cases very indirect, and there exists no discussion of what Islam means for the party, as it is not represented as an ideology or even a religion. Thus, my findings suggest that the Finns Party are indeed attempting to keep a somewhat moderate image, as Sakki and Pettersson, as well as Wahlbeck state, and trying to avoid accusations of openly prejudiced attitudes towards specific minorities. In comparing literature related to how Islam and Muslims have been represented in radical right populist parties in most European cases, it becomes evident, as expressed in this chapter, that the Finns Party manages to retain a more restrained, less explicit and overt image when it comes to representations of Islam and Muslims. Even though I argue that the oppressive and essentialist notions expressed about asylum seekers are implicit representations of Muslims, and to a degree of Islam, these representations still retain a level of moderation when compared to how eg. Geert Wilders of the Dutch PVV (Verkuyten 2012) or the British BNP (Wood and Finlay, 2008) expressed, in very explicit terms, their views of Islam. Furthermore, my findings illustrate that the argument that the Finns party often expresses its minority position through criticisms of multicultural society, expressed by Jungar and Jupskås (2014, 215) as well as Wahlbeck (2013) proved to not be among key issues raised in the materials.

## 7. Conclusion / Discussion

This thesis inquires how Islam and Muslims are represented through in the political discourse of the (True) Finns Party. The themes I present in the findings section show how asylum seekers, Islam, and Muslims are represented with a number of negative categories. Asylum seekers are represented as exploiting the welfare state and the goodwill of the Finnish people, threatening the erosion of Finnish society, threatening state security by terrorism), and as fundamentally different to Finnish people. I argue that representing asylum seekers as a terrorist threat, representing terrorism as an inherently Islamic phenomenon, and the fact that asylum seekers are coming from Muslim majority countries builds a strong connection between each discourse. Due to the interconnectedness of the discourse on asylum seekers, Muslims, Islam, I argue that together they represent a meta-discourse of the “other”. Thus, representations of asylum seekers are indirectly representations of Muslims, and to a degree of Islam.

I also suggest that the discursively constructed in-group categories of Finland, Finnish nation, “the West” and Europe become a meta-discourse representing “us”. Relating to the integrative social identity model of the development of collective hate by Reicher et al., the positive representation of this in-group as having a virtuous way of life enhances the out-group threat and serves as an attempt to justify discriminatory *proposals* towards asylum seekers, such as closing Finnish borders, detaining declined asylum seekers and sending them back to their countries of origin. I however conclude that the model does not allow me to answer how the Finns Party justifies discriminatory *attitudes* towards asylum seekers, such as finding them threatening in the first place, as this builds a tautological argument.

I assert that the rhetoric of the Finns party towards Muslims and Islam is toned down compared to many European examples. Firstly, Islam is not discussed as an ideology or a religion as it was in most contemporary examples of PRR parties. Secondly, the Finns Party targets asylum seekers instead of Islam and Muslims, and some sort of mitigation is present when Muslims are discussed explicitly (the use of show concessions), which supports the notion that the Finns Party is attempting to retain a moderate image and to not seem oppressive towards a minority group. Thus, one of my main arguments is that the Finns Party masks its anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments in its overt anti-asylum seeker discourse. These arguments corroborate with literature that states that the Finns Party have a history of trying to keep a moderate image when it comes to specific minority groups, due to signing the anti-discrimination proclamation in 2011, as well as due to the hate-speech

convictions (related to Islamophobic blog-posts) of party MPs Halla-aho and Hirvisaari, which resulted in a media backlash against the party. It would seem, that especially when expressing its views with “one common voice” (such as the party newsletter), the party is refraining from explicitly oppressive rhetoric, while individual platforms of MPs (such as blog texts) allows party members to express more overt rhetoric.

Finally, it remains somewhat of a mystery as to why there exists very little research on the representations of Muslims by the Finns Party, as well as by other actors in Finland in general. One possibility is that the rhetoric of the party as a whole has been intuitively seen as not very Islamophobic, due to their attempts to retain a non-racist image. However, as shown in this research, the Finns party *does* construct images of a generalised Muslim threat, even if in more subtle ways than in other European cases, which *does* have a negative impact on how Muslims are perceived in Finland. Perhaps the lack of research shows that the Finns Party has, to a degree, succeeded in its strategy to remain outside the harshest criticisms. This is why, I believe, that this topic of research is desperately understudied in the case of Finland. It is, of course, a factor to consider that the relative size of the population of Muslims in Finland is not as great as in many other European countries. Thus, public debates related to Islam, which have been very heated in many countries with a larger Muslim population, have not been as pronounced in Finland. However, with the so-called refugee crisis, political debate on issues such as immigration, asylum has increased. As most refugees coming to Finland are of Muslim backgrounds, the question of how Islam and Muslims are represented remains as relevant as ever.

## 7.1 Further research

This study furthers Middle Eastern studies in the sense representations of Muslim asylum seekers coming from the wider MENA region are representations of the Middle East as well. The Middle East is not a set geographical area, but a socially constructed idea, one which has been mainly constructed from a Western hegemonic point of view. The way this thesis describes the construction of the other is very similar to an orientalist view of the “East”, as something antithetical and opposite to notions of the “West”. Through its construction of the “Eastern” other, the Finns Party is also constructing and formulating what is considered the Middle East. The representations of Middle Easterners in Europe shapes the understanding of what is considered as the Middle East, and what kinds of images of Middle Eastern cultures, societies, and mentalities are being constructed. These

constructions have a wide-ranging effect, that influence international politics, and, as should be obvious from this thesis, on internal European politics as well.



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## 8.2 Newsletter articles

- Asunta, M. *Perussuomalainen*, ”Turvapaikkajärjestelmä perustuu valheelle” (“The asylum system is based on a lie”), September 2017, 12–13.
- Asunta, M. *Perussuomalainen*, ”Minua on uhattu, syljetty, ja haukuttu” (“I have been threatened, spat on, and verbally abused”), October 2017, 18–19.
- Halla-aho, J. *Perussuomalainen*, “Pohjoismaisia tunnelmia” (“Nordic Moods”), September 2017, 5.

- Halla-aho, J. *Perussuomalainen*, “Opin tie, Ruotsin tie” (“The way of learning, the way of Sweden”), November 2017, 5.
- Halla-aho, J. *Perussuomalainen*, “Vapaasta liikkumisesta” (“About free movement”), January 2018, 6.
- Janhunen, I. *Perussuomalainen*, “Huonoa politiikkaa voi muuttaa ainoastaan äänestämällä” (“Bad politics can be changed only by voting”), August 2017, 2–3.
- Janhunen, I. *Perussuomalainen*, “Saavatko radikaali-tahot vapaasti mekastia Suomessa?” (“Are radical actors allowed to freely racket in Finland?”), September 2017a, 10–11.
- Janhunen, I. *Perussuomalainen*, “Jopa 65 prosenttia ikätestatuista turvapaikanhakijoista valehtelee ikänsä” (“Up to 65% of age-tested asylum seekers lie about their age”), September 2017b, 14–15.
- Janhunen, I. *Perussuomalainen*, “Presidentin täytyy huolehtia kansallisvaltion edusta” (“The president must take care of the interests of the nation state”), October 2017, 6–9.
- Janhunen, I. *Perussuomalainen*, “Evitskogin vastaanottokeskus ylitti budjettinsa miljoonalla” (“The reception center of Evitskog exceeded its budget by a million”, November 2017, 16–17.
- Männistö, M. *Perussuomalainen*, “Vastaanottokeskuksessa jatkuvasti ongelmia” (“Constant troubles in reception centers”), October 2017, 16–17.
- Männistö, M. *Perussuomalainen*, “Vaaralliseksi luokiteltuja turvapaikanhakijoita Lahdessa” (“Asylum seekers classified as dangerous in Lahti”) November 2017, p. 17–19.
- Suomen Uutiset. *Perussuomalainen*, “Perussuomalaist ovat palanneet juurilleen” (The [True] Finns have returned to their roots”), August 2017a, 4–5.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, ”Haaveileeko Vapaavuori halpatyömarkkinoista?” (“Is Vapaavuori dreaming of a market for cheap labor?”), August 2017b, 8.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Juvonen haluaa laittomasti maassa olevat rekisteriin: ‘Avoin piikki palveluihin selvitettävä’” (“Juvonen wants to register all illegal immigrants: ‘Open tab for services must be investigated’”), August 2017c, 13.

- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Tavio käännäyttäisi potentiaaliset terroristit jo rajalla: Tiedustelun lisääminen ei riitä terrorismia vastaan” (“Tavio would turn away potential terrorists already on the border: Increasing intelligence is not sufficient against terrorism”), August 2017d, 14–15.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Huhtasaari: Vihapuheesityöksillä yritetään estää keskustelu” (“Huhtasaari: accusations of hatespeech are attempts to silence discussion”), September 2017, 11.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Kirkolle myönnetystä määrärahasta otettava puoli miljoonaa pois” (“Raatikainen on his motion on the national budget: Money appropriated to the church should be cut by half a million”, October 2017, 10.
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- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Turvapaikkabisnes kannattaa: Luona Oy:n toimitusjohtajalle 137 000 euron palkankorotus” (“Asylum business is profitable: the CEO of Luona oy received a 137 000 euro raise”), November 2017b, 17.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Vihapuhepoliisit nakertavat poliisin luottamusta” (“hatespeech police hinders the trust towards the policeforce”, November 2017c, 20–21.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Huhtasaari olisi tarvittaessa valmis sulkemaan rajan Torniossa: ‘En halua Ruotsista turvapaikanhakijoita tänne’” (“Huhtasaari ready to close border in Tornio when necessary: ‘I do not want any asylum seekers from Sweden to come here’”), January 2018a, 4–5.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “Miljoonia laittomasti maassa olevien palveluihin” (“Millions directed towards services to illegal immigrants”), January 2018b, 7.
- . *Perussuomalainen*, “PS tyrmää kokoomusministerin haaveet pakolaiskiintön kasvattamisesta” (The Finns Party dismisses the dream of the minister of the National Coalition Party to increase refugee quotas”), February 2018, 2–3.
- Turkkila, M. *Perussuomalainen*, “Tyhmiä kysymyksiä” (“Foolish questions”), August 2017, 2.





## 9.0 Appendix

The following table illustrates the coding process and how each theme stems from the initial codes and the axial codes:

Table 1: Coding process

| <b>Initial Codes</b>   | <b>Axial codes</b>   | <b>Themes</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Asylum seekers an economic burden</p> <p>Finnish healthcare</p> <p>Finnish welfare</p> <p>Healthcare for “illegal immigrants”</p>   | <p>Finland is a generous and virtuous society; good values</p> <p>Asylum seekers do not share these values – <i>different</i> (less virtuous)</p> <p>Asylum seekers threaten “Finnish-ness”</p> <p>Asylum seekers will never blend with Finns – <i>too</i> different</p> | <p>Asylum Seekers as Fundamentally Different than Finns</p> |
| <p>Asylum seekers lie about their age; They’re not traumatized like they claim to be;</p> <p>Asylum seekers lie about their past</p> <p>Untrustworthy</p> <p>Asylum seekers target Finland because of generous asylum system</p> <p>Asylum seekers are pampered by existing system</p> <p>Finnish asylum system expensive;</p> <p>Asylum system allows outsiders to exploit it</p> | <p>Asylum seekers as cunning and manipulative</p> <p>Finnish state overly generous;</p> <p>Asylum seekers not truly in need of <i>help</i> but instead looking for a <i>better</i> life.</p>   | <p>Asylum seekers exploiting Finnish generosity</p>         |
| <p>Asylum seekers cannot be trusted;</p> <p>ASdec may seek revenge;</p> <p>Declining AS application may lead to radicalization;</p> <p>ASdec need to be sent back as quickly as possible;</p> <p>ASdec exploit long application times;</p>   | <p>Asylum seekers potential religious extremists</p> <p>Asylum seekers are a security threat</p> <p>Asylum seekers working against the Finnish immigration system</p>  | <p>Asylum Seekers as an Enemy to State Security</p>         |

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p>ASdec need to be detained until sending back;</p> <p>Terrorist attack by ASdec;</p> <p>If not detained, they may disappear underground;</p> <p>ASdec a breeding ground for increased crime and terrorism;</p> <p>Terrorism;</p> <p>Reception centers a place for violence;</p>                       |  |   |
| <p>Fear of ghettoization; Fear of islamization;</p> <p>Social exclusion of immigrant populations, leading to violence, extremism;</p> <p>Failures of integration;</p> <p>Asylum seekers resistant to integration;</p> <p>Security threats not taken seriously by public;</p> <p>Islamic hatespeech;</p> | <p>Assimilation is impossible;</p> <p>Culture incompatible with Finnish values;</p> <p>Asylum seekers forcing changes to Finnish society</p> | <p>Fear of Erosion of Finnish Society</p> |