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Maria Darwish

Gender, nature and 'positive' affect

A study of visual communication in Nordic digital ecofascism

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Abstract

This study examines how ideas about nature and gender are affectively communicated in Nordic radical nationalism. It focuses on the strategic role of 'positive' affect in ecofascist visual discourse and how gendered representations structure and channel these affective processes. Three research questions guide the study: How does visual communication construct masculinity and femininity through positive affect? What work does gendered positive affect perform as a communication strategy? And how does positive affect contribute to normalizing far-right ecologism through gendered visual communication?

The thesis employs multimodal critical discourse analysis across three sub-studies, drawing on images, captions and texts collected from Telegram and Nordic radical nationalist digital archives between 2020 and 2025. A fourth sub-study consists of a systematic literature review. The first article analyses cuteness in ecofascist propaganda, finding that it disarms viewers by framing extremism as emotionally inviting, recruiting adherents through soft emotional appeals rather than overt aggression. The second identifies the 'contemplative man' trope, which constructs far-right masculinity as rooted in serenity and connection to the land, framing racial exclusion as a moral duty. The third examines the 'wheat girl' figure, showing how aestheticized femininity makes radical nationalism appear natural and desirable, framing ethnic exclusion as a biological necessity tied to fertility and tradition. The fourth article reviews existing scholarship in order to contextualize these visual tactics within broader patterns of far-right ecologism. It confirms that gender serves as a fundamental mechanism for mobilization and ideological justification.

Together, the studies demonstrate that positive affect functions simultaneously as a communication strategy and a tool for subjectification. Gendered imagery bypasses rational critique by framing exclusionary politics as beautiful, organic and emotionally fulfilling. This process recruits by making ideology emotionally appealing, subjectifies by offering gendered templates for identification and normalizes violence by embedding it within familiar frameworks of care and protection. Contemporary far-right discourse has updated fascist gender ideology for modern audiences, producing an aestheticized, softer version that is more difficult to identify as political. It is therefore essential that counter-radicalization strategies and digital literacy programmes that seek to look beyond explicit hate speech understand these mechanisms in order to engage critically with the aesthetics and emotional templates through which extremist ideologies travel and take root.

Keywords: Nordic, ecofascism, far-right ecologism, gender, visual communication, affect, discourse, Sweden, masculinity

Til Magnhild og Omar

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Norwegian summary

Denne avhandlingen dreier seg om hvordan affektiv kommunikasjon formidler forestillinger om natur og kjønn i nordisk radikalnasjonalisme. Studien fokuserer på sosiale konstruksjoner av kjønn i en form for høyreekstrem diskurs kalt økofascisme. Økofascisme bygger på en lang og mangfoldig idétradisjon, til dels nazistisk «Blod og jord»-tankegods, sosialdarwinisme, malthusiansk befolkningslogikk, bonderomantikk og esoterisk mystikk. Denne avhandlingen undersøker økofascisme som det forekommer i ytterste høyres digitale rom gjennom den sosiale medieplatformen Telegram.

Tidligere forskning på affekt har oftest drøftet hvordan folk trekkes til høyrekstremisme gjennom gjennom «negative» og maskuliniserte følelser som hat, sinne og frykt. Men den økofascistiske kommunikasjonen på Telegram er påfallende full av oppløftende bilder: pittoreske landskap, frodige kjøkkenhager, lykkelige familier, kvinner i svale blomsterenger, menn i fredelige grønne skoger. Denne avhandlingen forsøker å forklare den tilsynelatende motsetningen mellom en voldelig, hypermaskulin ideologi og en naturlig, varm og typisk feminin estetikk.

Mål og forskningsspørsmål
Målet med avhandlingen er å studere hvilket «arbeid» positiv affekt gjør i økofascistisk kommunikasjon gjennom å undersøke hvordan kjønnede fremstillinger former og styrer denne affekten. Studien styres av de tre følgende forskningsspørsmålene:

1. Hvordan konstruerer visuell kommunikasjon maskulinitet og femininitet, og hva slags positiv affekt kan identifiseres i denne prosessen?

2. Hvilket «arbeid» utfører kjønnet positiv affekt som kommunikasjonsstrategi?

3. Hvordan bidrar positiv affekt til å normalisere økologisme i det ytre høyre («far-right ecologism») gjennom kjønna visuell kommunikasjon?

Materiale og metode
Studien baserer seg på digital etnografisk metode, og bygger på fire års observasjon i nordiske radikalnasjonalistiske nettmiljøer. Hovedmaterialet består av totalt 11 107 bilder samlet inn fra 41 økofascistiske Telegram-kanaler mellom 2020 og 2025. Materialet omfatter også podkaster og organisasjonstekster fra de nasjonalsosialistiske organisasjonene Den Nordiske Motstandsbevegelsen og Nordisk styrke, samt det høyreradikale politiske partiet Alternativ för Sverige. Materialene fra disse gruppene brukes som kontekst for å forstå den nordiske radikalnasjonalismen.

Hovedmetoden er multimodal kritisk diskursanalyse (MMCDA). Denne tilnærmingen tar utgangspunkt i hvordan ulike semiotiske modaliteter som bilder, tekst, symboler og affekt virker sammen og skaper mening. Analysen bygger på tre teoretiske rammeverk: kjønnsteori, blant annet hybrid maskulinitet (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) og hegemonisk femininitet (Doerr & Svatoňová, 2023; Schippers, 2007); affektteori, først og fremst Sara Ahmeds (2010, 2014) rammeverk for hvordan følelser sirkulerer sosialt; samt teori om normalisering (Billig, 1995; Wodak, 2020).

Artiklene

- Artikkel 1 – Darwish, M. (2024). Fascism, nature and communication: A Discursive-affective analysis of cuteness in ecofascist propaganda. Feminist Media Studies, 0(0), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2024.2313006

Denne artikkelen tar for seg søthet («cuteness») som en positiv affektiv strategi i økofascistiske bilder og memer fra Telegram. Artikkelen identifiserer to visuelle strategier. Den første kalles «å gjøre det truende søtt» («making the menacing cute»). Denne strategien bidrar til å dempe militant eller autoritær symbolikk ved å tilføre uskyldige og søte elementer. Strategien eksemplifiseres ved et fotografi av Adolf Hitler som mater et rådyr, der søthet bidrar til å overføre dyrets uskyld til Hitler selv. Den andre strategien kalles «å gjøre det søte truende» («making the cute menacing»). Den setter

kjente kulturelle symboler inn i en fascistisk sammenheng – for eksempel den finske tegneseriefiguren Snusmumrikken, avbildet under det nazistiske symbolet den svarte solen. Artikkelen viser hvordan disse strategiene representerer fascismen som human og naturlig. Søthet bidrar også til å framstille fascistiske, militante menn som sympatiske og snille, og dermed re-maskuliniseres fascismen som beskytter av 'det gode'. Den viser også hvordan nordiske kultursymboler, som Mummitrollene, brukes til å utforme en særegen nordisk økofascisme.

- Artikkel 2 – Darwish, M., & Gottzén, L. (2025). The contemplative man: 'Positive' affect and masculinity in ecofascist visual communication. Journal of Gender Studies, 0(0), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2025.2479797

Denne artikkelen analyserer «den kontemplative mannen» som et tilbakevendende diskursivt motiv i nordisk økofascistisk visuell kommunikasjon. Motivet viser hvite menn i vakre naturomgivelser som for eksempel går fottur, sitter ved bål, ser utover landskap og tilsynelatende nyter meditativ stillhet. Motivene blandes med runer og slagord som mer eller mindre subtilt formidler et høyreekstremt budskap. Disse representasjonene skiller seg fra ytre høyres typiske konstruksjoner av dominant og militant maskulinitet, og fremstår heller som apolitiske og fredfulle naturbilder. Artikkelen analyserer to undertyper av den kontemplative mannen: ensom ærefrykt («solitary reverence»), menn som framstilles alene i vakre naturomgivelser; og homososial turgåing («homosocial hiking»), grupper av menn i friluftsaktiviteter som dreier seg om kameratskap og selvberging. Artikkelen argumenter for at den kontemplative mannen bidrar til å utvide spekteret av maskuline subjektposisjoner i høyreekstremisme. Denne diskursive tropen bidrar til å fremstille rasistisk ideologi som naturlig, åndelig og jordet, heller enn voldelig og hatefull.

- Artikkel 3 – Darwish, M. (2026). 'The Wheat Girl': Constructions of Gender, Nation and Nature in Nordic Far-Right Ecologism. NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 0(0), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2026.2616488

Denne artikkelen analyserer «hvetepiken»-motivet («the wheat girl») som den fremstilles i økofascistisk visuell kommunikasjon. Hvetepiken formes som en diskursiv trope gjennom bilder av konvensjonelt attraktive unge, hvite kvinner avbildet i solfylte kornåkre eller frodige naturlandskap. Artikkelen undersøker tre tematiske dimensjoner. Temaet «skjønnhet og seksualitet» demonstrerer hvordan idealisert femininitet og Nazismens «Blod og jord»-ideologi kobles sammen som naturlig forbundet gjennom idyllisk estetikk og implisitt seksualitet. Temaet «kulturell og åndelig arv» viser hvordan hvetepiken fungerer som formidler av såkalt «etnisk spiritualitet», som knytter nordisk identitet til en mytisk fortid gjennom norrøne symboler og folkedrakter. Temaet «tradisjon og makt» viser hvordan hvetepiken legemliggjør hegemonisk femininitet: Hun fremstår som passiv, men samtidig som en aktiv og styrket («empowered») vokter av tradisjon og åndelighet. Artikkelen argumenterer for at hvetepiken fungerer som en 'affektiv inngangsport' til økofascistisk innhold på sosiale medier.

- Artikkel 4 – Darwish, M. Fascist ecology and gender: An integrative literature review [Upublisert]

Denne artikkelen kartlegger systematisk eksisterende forskningslitteratur om kjønn i studier av økologisme i det ytre høyre («far-right ecologism»). Litteraturgjennomgangen bygger på 80 tekster fra fagfellevurderte tidsskrift og antologier, og finner at menn og maskulinitet får langt mer både empirisk og analytisk oppmerksomhet enn kvinner og femininitet i gjennomsnitt. Gjennomgangen identifiserer to brede konstruksjoner av maskulinitet: en «naturfiendtlig» maskulin posisjon knyttet til fossilindustrien og klimafornektelse, og en «naturvennlig» posisjon knyttet til det artikkelen kaller «muskuløst miljøvern» («muscular environmentalism») samt rasebasert beskyttelse av territorium. I økologisme i det ytre høyres verdensbilde fremstilles kvinner hovedsakelig som symboler på fruktbarhet, rasemessig renhet, naturen og nasjonen. Gjennomgangen konkluderer med at kjønn har tre funksjoner i det ytre høyres økologistiske logikk: Kjønn bidrar til å legitimere høyreekstrem ideologi, til å mobilisere til handling

gjennom appeller til en beskyttende maskulinitet, og til å definere rasemessig og territoriell tilhørighet gjennom eksklusjon av andre.

Analyse, teori og funn

Sammenlagt viser analysen at positiv affekt først og fremst fungerer på to nivåer. For det første fungerer positiv affekt som et strategisk kommunikasjonsverktøy. 'Positive' naturmotiver fremstår som uskyldige og apolitiske, og bidrar dermed til å gjøre fascistisk ideologi lettere tilgjengelig for utenforstående, og vanskeligere å gjenkjenne som politisk og ideologisk. For det andre fungerer positiv affekt som en mekanisme for subjektdannelse («subject formation»). Den inviterer publikum inn i kjønnede 'følelsesmaler' («emotional templates»), der en får føle seg edel som beskytter og hellig som bærer av blodslinjen. Disse malene binder mennesker til ideologiske posisjoner via følelsesmessige identifikasjoner, uten at de nødvendigvis selv er det bevisst, og uten konkret ideologisk overbevisning.

Kjønn står sentralt i denne prosessen. Konstruksjonene av maskulinitet inkorporerer typisk feminine egenskaper som omsorg, ømhet og mykhet for å skape moralsk legitimitet. Det maskuline subjektet, lest gjennom Young (2003), fremstår dermed som en vis og sympatisk – dog fortsatt handlekraftig – beskytter, snarere enn truende og dominant. Det kvinnelige subjektet fremstår som sterkt («agentic and empowered»), men legitimerer fortsatt en patriarkalsk kjønnsordning. Assosiasjoner til allmenne lengsler til tilhørighet, familie, natur, ro, glede og fellesskap gjør disse kjønnede subjektposisjonene emosjonelt tiltalende.

Avhandlingen viser også hvordan denne affektive kommunikasjonen bidrar til normalisering av høyreekstreme budskap. Ytre høyres diskurs tar i bruk familiære og ladede symboler – som søte dyr, idylliske landskap og folketradisjoner – og gir dem nytt, fascistisk innhold. Den positive følelsen som henger ved det familiære symbolet, fester seg også til de fascistiske symbolene og bygger assosiasjoner mellom det fascistiske symbolet og søthet, varme, omsorg og glede. Således kan et symbol potensielt påvirke et

publikum før et bevisst ideologisk engasjement skjer. Avhandlingen viser dermed hvordan ekskluderende politikk kan bevege seg gjennom estetikk og affekt snarere enn argumentasjon. Denne prosessen kan beskrives som «mainstreaming nedenfra» («mainstreaming from below»): brukerne av sosiale medieplattformene driver høyreekstreme tankemønstre oppover og inn i den visuelle mainstreamen, gjennom hverdagslig innholdsproduksjon og deling.

Konklusjon

Avhandlingen konkluderer med at radikalisering kan skje gjennom estetisk skjønnhet, mobilisering av positive følelser og et stille løfte om tilhørighet. Det er derfor viktig å forstå hvordan positiv affekt og kjønnet estetikk bidrar til å presentere høyreekstrem ideologi som naturlig og attraktiv. Dette gjelder ikke bare innenfor akademia, men også for lærere, ungdomsarbeidere og fagfolk som jobber med forebygging av radikalisering. De må også kunne gjenkjenne disse mekanismene i sin nåværende, estetiserte form.

List of papers

This thesis is based on the following studies, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

I. Darwish, Maria, 2025 [online first 2024]. "Fascism, nature and communication: A discursive-affective analysis of cuteness in ecofascist propaganda." *Feminist Media Studies* 25:2, 443–463.

II. Darwish, Maria, and Lucas Gottzén, 2025. "The contemplative man: 'positive' affect and masculinity in ecofascist visual communication." *Journal of Gender Studies*, online first, 1–14.

III. Darwish, Maria, 2026. "'The Wheat Girl': Constructions of gender, nation and nature in Nordic far-right ecologism." *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research,* online first, 1–22.

IV. Darwish, Maria, manuscript. "Gender in studies of the far right and its natural environment: An integrative scoping literature review."

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1 INTRODUCTION

Swipe through the feed: vast landscapes, flowery fields, rugged mountains, golden autumn leaves, glistening rivers, majestic pines, moist grass in the morning sun. A blonde woman wearing a white gown and a flower crown. Then, a man in outdoorsy clothing sitting by a fireplace, making coffee. A green Odal rune covers the lower half of the image. Next; a balaclava-clad figure holding a piglet. A beaming young family in a field of crops, an archival photograph of a woman with a plump toddler strapped to her side in front of a rural 1800s homestead; a small cottage in a lush garden framed by grassy hills, a sun cross hovering on the horizon. Young women posing in blossoming meadows and wheatfields, sensual eyes, shy smiles, pregnant bellies. A Germanic painting of a breastfeeding mother, foregrounded by the slogan 'Blood and Soil'. A black-and-white postcard of Adolf Hitler feeding a deer, then petting a German Shepherd. Ripe tomatoes and gardening. How-to posts: fermenting cabbage, making seedbeds. Rustic candles, homemade blueberry pie, a billowing yellow dress. Images of red-cheeked, blue-eyed kids in a pasture, caption reading '14 words', implying the slogan: 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children'.

These are snapshots from 'ecofascist' social media feeds. At first glance: idyllic, wholesome and a celebration of simple living and peaceful domesticity. But look closer and find fascist symbols nestling between the flower crowns and homemade pies. Here, the pastoral and the menacing are not in conflict, they cohere. Scroll through, and the apparent contradictions accumulate: tenderness and terror, care and cruelty, nurturing and exclusion. However, these contrasting elements are connected. These juxtapositions form a coherent aesthetic grammar that operates according to its own logic. Through gendered aesthetics and carefully cultivated affects, fascism appears welcoming and attractive. The boundaries between nurturing and hatred, between femininity and masculinity, are being redrawn in these digital spaces in ways that invite closer examination.

This study is situated within the burgeoning field of the political ecologies of the far right (PEFR), which examines the relationships

between far-right movements, ecologism and environmental issues. The study examines how ideas about nature and gender are affectively communicated in Nordic radical nationalism. More specifically, it explores the ways in which what I call 'positive affect' in visual communication on 'ecofascist' social media channels shapes constructions of gender. Consequently, this thesis answers the call for more research on the far right's visual environmental communication and its potential impact (Forchtner, 2023b).

Earlier research has shown that gender is a significant contributing factor in far-right ideology and discourse, and that men in particular are drawn towards the political right (Blee, 2020; Fangen, 2003; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Roose et al., 2022). Moreover, men are affectively attracted to and mobilized towards the far right through emotions like anger, resentment and hatred (Kimmel, 2013; Roose et al., 2022; Wodak, 2015; Fangen, 2003). This literature further associates such 'negative' affect with men and masculinity (see e.g. Kimmel, 2013, 2018; Pearson, 2019). Despite this attention to emotional mobilization, existing scholarship has not adequately examined how positive affects are discursively constructed in far-right ecologism, or what 'social work' they perform. Beyer and Weisskircher (2024, p. 5) call explicitly for research focusing on how the far right constructs emotions discursively and what functions these serve. Yet, a systematic examination of this dynamic within ecofascist contexts remains absent. Moreover, while gender has been established as a significant mobilizing factor in far-right ideology, no study has examined how gendered representations structure and channel positive affective processes in ecofascist visual communication.

Positive affect is particularly significant because, historically, ideas of love and harmony within the nation and the family structured historical fascism around a utopian myth of a homogeneous, happy people. Social and ideological movements are motivated by positive ideals. Positive affect refers to emotional experiences that are culturally deemed positive, like joy, love, compassion and serenity. These affects are shaped by cultural scripts that prescribe which emotions are appropriate, aspirational or socially rewarded in a given context (Ahmed, 2014; Ngai, 2005). Within Western gender norms, such affects

are typically coded as feminine through their association with women's traditional roles as caregivers, nurturers and emotional labourers. Consequently, this thesis responds to the identified gaps by examining how these feminized positive affects are repurposed in ecofascist visual communication.

A report from the Swedish Defence Research Agency on ecofascist propaganda has shown that ecofascist discourse is rife with utopian imaginaries of nature, families and animals, imagery that *seemingly* invites more uplifting affective responses than other far-right online spaces (Kaati et al., 2020; see also Hughes et al., 2022). Despite the fact that ecofascism as a far-right ideology is masculinised in its ideology and structures, a large proportion of the digital propaganda examined in the report (Kaati et al., 2020) features uplifting imagery and emotionally inviting content. This is what I term 'positive' and typically feminized affect. Hence, what I refer to as positive affect demonstrates an alternative communication strategy within the far right that capitalizes upon the terrains of hope, possibility and utopia (Varco, 2023). Ecofascism serves as a potent case for analysing the gendered affective communication of the far right beyond typical masculinized and 'negative' affects.

There is significant scholarly confusion and disagreement about what the term ecofascism entails, both empirically and theoretically. Similarly to how the concept 'intersectionality' became a buzzword in gender studies (Davis, 2008), I understand 'ecofascism' to have become a buzzword in studies of political extremism. Its conceptual ambiguity invites a wide range of uses, definitions and results, which contribute to its allure for the media, scholars, activists and practitioners alike. When I started this thesis in late 2020, 'ecofascism' had been used as a self-identifying label by white supremacist attackers in Christchurch, New Zealand; Texas, US; and Bærum, Norway. A further attack, inspired by the first of these, targeted a mosque in San Diego, US, in May 2026. The definition of ecofascism scoured from these (all young male) perpetrators' 'manifestos' centres around extreme Malthusian ethno-nationalism, which is preoccupied with declining birthrates among white people and what they call 'overpopulation' of racialized people. Moreover, several ecofascist incidents

have been linked to Sweden, amongst them a 2019 mink farm fire and the planned bombing of an abortion clinic (Kasurinen, 2020). Hence, we have seen that the ideological formation referred to as 'ecofascism' and the ideas communicated in ecofascist propaganda have the potential to inspire such violent actions by providing an ideological rationale (Hughes et al., 2022), and, I argue, emotional energy.

Earlier research has shown that ecofascism as it exists in the digital realm is constructed through the emotionally powerful character of romanticist imaginaries (Hughes et al., 2022). Ecofascism as an ideology may function as a source of positive energy expressed through utopian visions of a pure and 'natural' future in uplifting imaginaries of nationalism. These imaginaries, which are seen in political communications such as manifestos, images and podcast discussions, are structured by gender, race and nonhuman–human relations to cement white, male supremacy. The highly affective qualities of ecofascism in the online sphere offer a potent entry into far-right extremism. Therefore, studying the affective constructions of gender in ecofascist communication means studying the mobilizing appeal of the far right. Thus, the object of this study is *positive affect in gendered ecofascist discourse*, while the units of study are the affective and gendered constructions manifested in visual communications on the social media platform Telegram. Situated within far-right culture, a sphere traditionally associated with masculinized aggression and exclusion, the study addresses the following puzzle: Why does a large proportion of the digital ecofascist communication emphasize emotions such as joy, love and harmony – affects typically coded as feminine in Western gender norms – despite far-right ideology being masculinized in its structures and appeals? This seeming contradiction indicates that 'feminine' affective terrains operate within a hypermasculine political project and further warrants an examination of how the gendered boundaries between women and men are maintained and negotiated in this empirical context.

I make two central empirical contributions. Firstly, as outlined above, existing research has predominantly examined the emotional underpinnings of the far right in relation to 'negative' and 'masculinized' affects. I contribute to the budding academic discussion on positive

affects in far-right discourse and communication (Pichel-Vázquez & Grau, 2021; Beyer & Weisskircher, 2024; Leser & Spissinger, 2020; Switzer, 2024; Varco, 2023; Nangle & d'Haenens, 2026) by examining how positive, feminized affects function specifically within ecofascist contexts, an aspect that has thus far been largely absent from this literature. Second, existing research has analysed and problematized gender in far-right discourse and communication, but not in far-right ecologism – which here refers to the far-right's ideological responses to environmental problems – or ecofascism specifically. The relationship between gender, nature and the extreme right has received little attention (Forchtner, 2019, p. 314), and I aim to contribute to this field.

It is well-documented that gender is an important factor for individual and ideological mobilization within the far right (i.e. Fangen & Skjelsbæk, 2020; Kimmel, 2018; Köttig et al., 2017). Studying gender within far-right ecologism specifically is important for three main reasons. First, because far-right ecologism often relies upon specific interpretations of both gender and nature based on nativism, essentialism and traditionalism to justify their political and social agendas (see Forchtner, 2019, 2023c; Darwish, 2021). Hence, this study meets the need for a gender-analytical approach to studying far-right ecologism that considers how these ideologies construct and exploit the relationships between gender and nature. By critically interrogating these connections, I contribute to a clearer understanding of the ideological foundations of far-right ecologism. This, in turn, can help activists and public officials to develop strategies to counter the harmful implications for both social justice and environmental sustainability.

Second, analysing gender offers us a perspective not only on the 'extremes', but also on the gendered structures of society in general. I understand gender in far-right ideology to consist of exaggerated culturally traditional ideals. The far right's relationship to gender therefore reveals something about society overall by shedding light on problematic questions and specific issues at a given time. This approach follows Billig's (1995) argument that extreme nationalism makes visible the 'banal' nationalism that is reproduced daily in mainstream society. Similarly, far-right gender ideologies expose the

unmarked gender norms operating in ordinary contexts. Thus, gender can function as a lens through which we can analyse far-right communication and the broader society to which it speaks.

The world of the 2020s is undergoing ecological collapse, intensifying climate change, wars and democratic backsliding, as well as escalating reactionary currents. As the climate and ecological crises deepen, so the appeal of authoritarian, illiberal and xenophobic solutions promoted by fascist forms of ecology may also increase (Lindvall et al., 2020). This leads to the third and final reason for studying gender in far-right ecologism: Fascism's particular accentuation of nature has implications for radicalization into violent extremism, and we should pay attention to the specifics of gender as a factor in the recruitment to fascism in a warming world.

1.1 Aim and research questions

This study aims to examine how ideas about nature and gender are affectively communicated in Nordic radical nationalism. More specifically, the study investigates the function, or the 'work', of positive affect in ecofascist communication, with a particular focus on how gendered representations structure, shape and channel these affective processes. To achieve this aim, I address three research questions that guide the thesis' sub-studies.

1. How does visual communication construct masculinity and femininity and what positive affects can be identified in this process?
2. What work does gendered positive affect perform when used as a communication strategy?
3. How does positive affect contribute to normalizing far-right ecologism through gendered visual communication?

The principal method employed in this study is multimodal critical discourse analysis (MMCDA). This is motivated by my research interest in the semiotic construction and representation of subjectivities and values. In line with critical discourse studies, I see discourse as existing in a contextual and dialectical relationship with other social conditions, rather than being constitutive of reality by itself

(Fairclough et al., 2004; Wodak et al., 2009). Here, discourse implies the making of social meaning through patterns of common knowledge and structures (Wodak et al., 2009), whereas a *text* – for instance, a meme – is one specific realization of a discourse. Multimodal discourse encompasses the socially constructed systems of knowledge that signify and organize aspects of reality using multiple modes of communication (Westberg, 2021, p. 21; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 4; Idevall Hagren & Westberg, 2024; Machin, 2013). In this thesis, I analyse 'ecofascist discourse', which signifies the making of social meaning within ecofascist ideology, language and communication. MMCDA provides analytical tools that enable an exploration of how semiotic modalities such as visuals, captions and affect together create meanings through intertextuality; specifically, how texts relate to other texts through quotations, references or stylistic borrowing on Telegram.

The study is grounded in the discourse approach to affect (T. M. Milani & Richardson, 2021; Ahmed, 2010, 2014; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Westberg, 2021; Wetherell, 2012). I have collected a rich corpus of multimodal empirical material from the social media platform Telegram and from Nordic radical nationalist actors' digital archives, including political texts, podcasts and visual media. Articles 1, 2 and 3 are based on visual analyses of discursive tropes ('the cute masculinist protector', 'the contemplative man' and 'the wheat girl', respectively) constructed from the empirical material that I gathered from the social media platform Telegram between autumn 2020 and spring 2025. Article 4 is a systematic literature review exploring what has been written about gender and far-right ecologism in scholarly journals and books up to spring 2025. The four articles and their research questions are listed below. I focused the sub-studies on the visual material because it most strongly captured the paradoxes that guided my scholarly curiosity. Moreover, I see this thesis as part of a critical research tradition directed at unmasking racist and sexist visual content to contribute a broader 'critical visual literacy' perspective to the social sciences (Doerr, 2021, p. 5; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021) and within civil society more generally.

I was rapidly sucked into the visual world of these social media channels, which were loaded with multiple layers of meaning. It was not only the visual elements that captured my attention, but also their affective dimensions. In multimodal communication, the visual is embedded in, and reinforced by, text as part of a broader semiotic system. But affect is also crucial: the visual's deeply emotive appeal has the ability to bypass critical thinking and connect with deeper levels of human consciousness (Forchtner, 2023b, p. 9; Harper, 2002, p. 13; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). This multimodal digital communication may be situated within the history of investigating and understanding fascist propaganda as aesthetics, as formulated by Walter Benjamin (2008). The variety of images scattered across social media platforms today are contemporary reflections of historical fascist propaganda prints and realist art depicting the imagined community; the 'eco-communion' of the people (Anderson, 2006; Forchtner, 2023b). Rather than using newspapers, pamphlets, posters, film and radio broadcasts, as in the historical European fascist periods, those spreading propagandic communication utilize networked digital platforms that are algorithmically connected.

Articles	Article RQs	Articles responding to thesis RQs
1. Fascism, nature and communication: A discursive-affective analysis of cuteness in ecofascist propaganda	How is cuteness used as an affective communication strategy in ecofascist propaganda, and what may be the intended messages and receptions?	Identifies 'cuteness' as a key positive affect (RQ1). Demonstrates its social labour: disarming viewers in order to normalize extremism by framing it as harmless. (RQ2)
2. The contemplative man: 'Positive' affect and masculinity in ecofascist visual communication	How does the 'contemplative man' trope construct far-right masculinity through affective representations of nature?	Constructs masculinity through serenity and stewardship, not aggression. (RQ1) Legitimizes exclusion as a moral duty. (RQ2)
3. 'The Wheat Girl': Constructions of gender, nation and nature in Nordic far-right ecologism	How does 'the wheat girl' function as a discursive trope in far-right ecological imaginaries, and what does her paradoxical embodiment of both feminine passivity and political agency imply about gender, nation and nature in the Nordic context?	Constructs femininity as reproductive and tied to the land. (RQ1) Naturalizes ideology by framing exclusion as a biological necessity. (RQ3)
4. Systematic literature review	What is known about gender from the peer-reviewed scholarly literature on the far right and its mobilization of the natural environment? How is gender deployed to perform social and ideological work in far-right ecologism?	Confirms gender as a mobilization tool (RQ2). Contextualizes specific tactics within broader patterns of normalization. (RQ3)

1.2 Radical nationalism, far-right ecologism and ecofascism

Scholars have used various terms and concepts to discuss the relationship between the far right and nature, which warrants precise and clear terminology (see section 3.3 on the political ecologies of the far right as a diverse research field). Therefore, in this section I present the three foundational concepts that I have employed in this thesis.

I operate with three hierarchical concepts to capture the relationship between nationalism and ecology: radical nationalism as the broadest, encompassing far-right ecologism, which in turn encompasses ecofascism (see Figure 1).

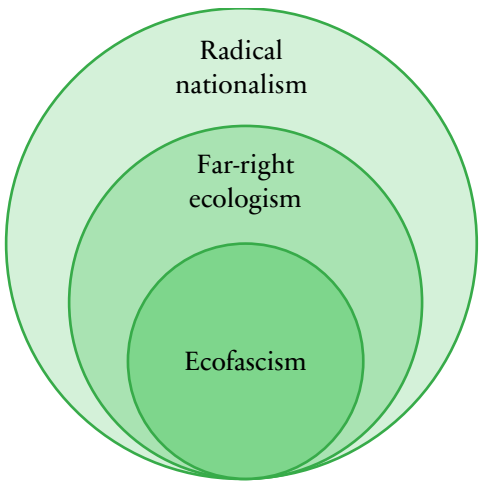

Figure 1

Starting with the outermost layer of Figure 1, radical nationalism is a political ideology that focuses on tying an imagined people to a bordered territory. It encompasses a wide range of political affiliations (Gardell, 2021; Lundström & Poletti Lundström, 2023). Radical nationalism can be understood as an intensification of nationalism's inherent mechanisms, and especially its gender logic (Lundström, 2025, p. 187). Lundström and Poletti Lundström (2023) develop the theoretical understanding of gender logics in radical nationalism by drawing upon established scholarship on gendered nationalism (McClintock, 2016; Young, 2005; see also Lundström, 2025). The

nation is represented as both exalted and vulnerable, in constant need of protection. Radical nationalism amplifies this view by calling for militant action to protect the nation and expecting men to restore traditional gender hierarchies. This gender logic ties into a 'temporality of rebirth'; the belief that the nation's former glory can be reclaimed through collective action.[1] Radical nationalism encompasses an array of ideological and political formations, including fascism and far-right movements. Hence, radical nationalism may encompass both far-right ecologism and ecofascism, as well as a range of other ideological and political formations that are not necessarily tied to ecology. I use this overarching term to discuss expressions that relate to ecofascism and far-right ecologism, but may not clearly fit the strict definitions of 'fascism' or 'the far right'.

The middle layer in Figure 1 is 'far-right ecologism', which initially warrants an explanation of how I understand 'the far right'. I align with scholars who argue that the increasing complexity of far-right politics suggests the adoption of 'the far right' as an umbrella term (Pirro, 2022; Mudde, 2019; Castelli Gattinara, 2020; Köttig et al., 2017). This umbrella concept is also employed by scholars studying versions of ecofascism and far-right ecologisms (Campion, 2021; Forchtner, 2019b, 2023c; Lubarda, 2020). In this thesis, I understand 'the far right' to encompass a multitude of variations of radical nationalist actors, drawing upon ideologies including (but not limited to) fascism, Nazism, ethnopluralism, nativism, identitarianism and white supremacism (Pirro, 2022; Lubarda, 2020). The term 'far right' is commonly criticized for two related shortcomings: its tendency to focus on contemporary populism in isolation from historical fascism, and its dependence upon the left–right spectrum, which risks reducing fascism to a purely 'right-wing' phenomenon in ways that may hinder analytical development (Lundström & Poletti Lundström, 2023, p. 84; see also Karcher & Lundström, 2022). The GAL–TAN framework (Green/Alternative/Libertarian vs Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist) offers an alternative to the left–right spectrum, and

[1] In his definition of generic fascism, Roger Griffin (1995) called this 'palingenetic nationalism' (see section 2.2.1.1).

could help to capture the authoritarian and nationalist dimensions that are central to far-right environmental politics and do not always align neatly with traditional left–right economic positioning (Hooghe et al., 2002). However, I have retained the 'far-right' vocabulary for pragmatic reasons; because it remains the dominant framework in existing scholarship on ecofascism and far-right ecologism, and working within it allows my analysis to build on that body of research. I acknowledge that the left–right spectrum does not fully capture the complexity of fascist ideology, but treat it as a useful heuristic, rather than analytical, claim about fascism's political nature.

To further specify the use of 'the far right' as a term, I draw on Forchtner's (2023b) highlighting of *authoritarianism* and *ethnonationalism* as central tenets in studies of far-right ecologism (see Mudde, 2019; Rydgren, 2018 for discussions of how to define far-right elements). Authoritarianism does not necessarily denote an authoritarian state, but 'the view that authority is to be respected and that infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Forchtner, 2023b, p. 4). Ethnonationalism 'points to a range of exclusionary elements to be mobilized and a rich literature on the "organic" relationship between people and land' (Forchtner, 2023a, p. 4). Together, these tenets – authoritarian organization and the ethnonationalist bond between people and land – make the far right particularly responsive to ecological and environmental thinking.

In this thesis, I use the term far-right ecologism to refer to the far right's ideological engagement with the natural environment and environmental issues. This term has been conceptualized differently by scholars such as Lubarda (2020, 2024) and Moore and Roberts (2022), and I diverge slightly from both frameworks. Lubarda's (2020, 2024) theorizing of far-right ecologism presents an ideological framework that aims to identify the broad and complex relationship between the far right and ecology. In Lubarda's framework, developed in his comprehensive study of far-right ecologism in Eastern Europe, far-right ecologism is constituted by more or less stable ideological elements, including

> 'ideologically decontested concepts such as Manichaeism (binary moral contrasts), naturalism (using nature as a blueprint for the human world), organicism (the nation being an indivisible whole; the organism), nostalgia (for the idyllic landscapes), spirituality (as derived from 'nature')' (Lubarda, 2023, p. 187; see also Olsen, 1999; Voss, 2014).

Several scholars have adapted this framework to their own contexts (for instance Mihai & Ungureanu, 2024 for a Romanian case study; Rosamond & Davitti, 2022 for a reading of FRE from a human rights perspective). Moore and Roberts (2022) instead define far-right ecologism as, 'those forces that seek to produce and enforce racial hierarchies in and through natural systems. It is not one singular project, but a diverse array of responses to crises' (p. 16). They trace the history of far-right ecologism as the reactionary nature politics from which contemporary far-right environmental mobilization draws and argue that the extreme right is increasingly repositioning itself in response to the climate crisis, seeking to capitalize on ecological anxiety as a route to renewed political relevance (Moore & Roberts, 2022, p. 3). Thus, the multivalence of the term suggests that the term 'far-right ecologisms', in the plural, better captures its different uses (Brodtmann, 2026).

Similarly to Lubarda (2024) and Moore and Roberts (2022), I understand far-right ecologism as a spectrum of political manifestations, and ecofascism as an extreme variant of far-right ecologism. While far-right ecologism captures a broad spectrum of far-right politics from populism and parliamentary politics to so-called 'extreme' right activism, ecofascism has a narrower scope in that it is linked to the violent and purging impulse of fascism (Lubarda, 2024). Before turning to ecofascism, I briefly situate my approach within cultural understandings of fascism. Because this study's object of analysis is gendered constructions in ecofascist discourse, primarily in visual communication, my approach to fascism is rooted in what may be called the culturalist tradition, which is associated particularly with the work of Mosse (1996) and Griffin (1995). This tradition emphasizes ideological and cultural analysis as key to understanding fascist phenomena. It targets

aesthetics, culture, discourse and representation, and is thus well-suited to my analytical endeavour.

Scholars have used different concepts to describe what I understand as a strong affective drive within fascism. Paxton (2005) holds that it is more plausibly linked to a set of 'mobilizing passions' that shape fascist action than to a consistent and fully articulated philosophy. Similarly, Thomas and Eley argue that fascism is defined by 'ideological energies' rather than parties and institutions, and emphasize the aesthetics and visual allure of fascist propaganda (2020, p. 6). For Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021), illusions of conspiracies, defence and fossil fuels constitute 'mythical energies' that propel fascism forwards. These accounts are inspired by Roger Griffin's (1995) definition of fascism as a radical authoritarian and totalitarian ultra-nationalism in which an imagined rebirth of the nation is believed to purify and revitalize both the people and the land, so-called palingenetic fascism. Fascism mobilizes its affective drives within a 'cultural rebellion' against modernity, seeking to purge the people and the land of what it claims to be the corrupt, decadent and degenerate qualities found in liberal calls for equality and social justice (Sternhell, 1994; see also Gentile, 1996; Payne, 2014). Mosse critiqued traditional historians' downplaying of aesthetics as follows:

> As historians we were not accustomed to give aesthetics much weight as against economic or social forces. We failed to see that the fascist aesthetic itself reflected the needs and hopes of contemporary society, that what we brushed aside as the so-called superstructure was in reality the means through which most people grasped the fascist message, transforming politics into a civic religion. (Mosse, 1996, p. 246)

Rather than entering the longstanding historiographic debate about traditions in fascism scholarship concerning what fascism fundamentally *is*, my concern is how fascism *works*: how it mobilizes affect, aesthetics and gendered imagery to produce meaning (Griffin, 1995; Mosse, 1996; Eley & Thomas, 2020; see also Paxton, 2005).

Finally, I arrive at the innermost layer in Figure 1: ecofascism. This term has been used in numerous contexts both inside and outside academia to signify an array of meanings, but here I concentrate on its uses in far-right contexts. On the Telegram channels I investigated, some users initially employed the ecofascist label, naming channels 'EcoFash' or similar variations. During the years of data collection (2020–2025), this explicit self-identification seemed to fade, coinciding with increased banning and censoring of content by Telegram.

The self-identifying label has also been used outside digital spaces: Finnish deep ecologist Pentti Linkola (2011; Protopapadakis, 2014) openly identified as an ecofascist. This shows that ecofascism functions both as an emic term, an insider's identity marker in online spaces, and as an etic term, an outsider's analytical category to understand its usage and purpose.[2] This ambiguous employment of the term and its many potential meanings reflect the disagreements about what ecofascism is, where it appears and how it should be studied (see Simpson & Cheever, 2025). The following overview maps the main scholarly definitional approaches before proposing a working definition for this thesis.

1.2.1 Ecofascism as ideology

A number of scholars have treated ecofascism as a more or less coherent, if marginal, political ideology, closely allied to fascism itself. Biehl and Staudenmaier (2011) offered one of the earliest and most influential formulations, defining it as the 'preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns' (p. 14). Around the same time, Zimmermann (1995) conceptualized ecofascism as a possible ideological formation in which ecological

[2] Lubarda (2020, p. 715) notes that 'ecofascism is not a term used by its proponents, who generally (though the Christchurch shooter is an exception to this rule) avoid referring to themselves as eco-fascists, eco-Nazis or with any similar terms'. I think there is some disingenuous and humorous engagement with the term among its proponents online, but I maintain that it has seemingly also been adopted with genuine ideological intent in the materials I have studied.

degradation is framed as a threat to the racial integrity of a people and used to justify authoritarian, collectivist leadership based on masculinist-martial values (p. 209). Campion (2021) offers the most systematic recent formulation, defining ecofascism as a 'subform of fascism', and as a 'reactionary and revolutionary ideology that champions the regeneration of an imagined community through a return to a romanticised, ethnopluralist vision of the natural order' (p. 2). Moore and Roberts (2022) take a similar structural approach, deriving ecofascism from a broader definition of fascism as a political form that seeks to reharmonize the nation state by expelling a racialized Other through paramilitary means (p. 12). In their account, ecofascism names the dimension of fascist politics most invested in grounding itself in nature (Moore & Roberts, 2022, pp. 12–13). Lubarda argues that ecofascism is too imprecise a concept, preferring instead 'far-right ecologism' as a broader framework. In Lubarda's (2020) view, ecofascism names the most extreme position on a broad spectrum of far-right ecological thought, characterized by Nazism's Blood and Soil thinking, naturalism, organicism and mystical ideas about land and identity. These 'ideology-oriented' definitions provide historical grounding and aim for conceptual precision and are thus useful for identifying the core features of ecofascism as a political formation. The following approaches ask how and under what conditions these formations emerge, spread and take new shapes.

1.2.2 Ecofascism as historical resurgence

Some scholarship approaches ecofascism primarily as a historically recurring force. These scholars ask: under what conditions do ecofascist politics re-emerge, and what new forms do they take? Thomas and Gosink (2021) and Simpson and Cheever (2025) situate ecofascism within the context of climate breakdown, arguing that environmental crisis creates the conditions for colonial logics, ecocide, authoritarianism and racially exclusionary politics to resurface. Dyett and Thomas (2019) demonstrate that ecofascist sentiments are not confined to the far right but bleed into liberal politics, appearing in philanthropic discourse, population control advocacy and mainstream environmentalism. Dubiau (2022) offers a useful framework for understanding how this spread occurs. He defines ecofascism as a political project of

territorial defence which uses environmental protection to preserve the conditions for reproducing race and identity. This emerges from two mutually dependent processes: the 'ecologization of fascism', in which far-right movements adopt ecological concerns, and the 'fascistization of ecology', whereby ambiguities within environmentalist thought open the door to reactionary reinterpretations. Dubiau (2022) argues that ecofascism is the product of their interaction. Taken together, the historical resurgence perspectives show that ecofascism is not confined to organized movements but can emerge and spread across different political contexts and periods.

1.2.3 Ecofascism as ambient condition

Another approach further broadens the scope of ecofascism. Anson and Bannerjee (2023) explore the concept of 'everyday ecofascism', and examine how environmentalism and xenophobic violence intersect in contemporary political and social contexts through film and media. Similarly, Ahmann and Oguz (2025) define ecofascism as fascism applied in the name of protecting the environment, understood as an 'ambient condition' rather than a distinct political project (p. 921). This approach enables the capturing not only of organized extremist movements but also of subtler, everyday forms such as the greenwashing of colonial land expropriation, the racial and class logics embedded in mainstream wellness culture and the rhetoric of racial replacement as it intersects with environmental concerns. This framework treats ecofascism as a continuum, arguing that ordinary manifestations cultivate the cultural terrain in which more explicit ecofascist logics take root.[3] This approach offers a broad and potentially rich analytical scope, but risks diluting the concept of ecofascism to the point where its specificity is lost.

[3] Developed in a special issue of the journal *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (Ahmann & Oguz, 2025).

1.2.4 Ecofascism as cultural imaginary

The last cluster of approaches emphasizes 'sensibility' over ideology. Hughes et al. (2022) understand ecofascism as an 'extremist sensibility (as opposed to ideology) existing primarily in the register of the imaginary (as opposed to the operational) and expressing itself through cultural artifacts and symbolic gestures of political violence (as opposed to policy or practice)' (p. 2). I understand sensibility here as referring to diffuse, affective and aesthetic ways of experiencing ecofascism, as opposed to through a structured, coherent system of ideology. In this context, Hughes et al. (2022) define ecofascism by employing Romanticism, antihumanism and mysticism as orienting dispositions. In a similar vein, Forchtner (2023b) discusses 'eco-communion' as an affective bond that extends the imagined national community (see Anderson, 2006) to include the natural environment in far-right ecologist imaginaries (pp. 4–8). Eco-communion views humans as part of a shared ecosystem with non-human animals, plants and landscapes. This connection motivates environmental concerns but also acts as a boundary mechanism by defining who belongs to 'the people' and what belongs to 'their homeland', often excluding outsiders or invasive elements in order to maintain purity and stability (Forchtner, 2023b, p. 6). In this approach, images, aesthetics and emotional attachments to landscape are politically operative. This take is particularly useful for studying ecofascism in digital subcultures, where ideology is often expressed through memes, aesthetics and symbolism, rather than as explicit doctrine.

The approaches discussed above reflect ongoing scholarly disagreement about what ecofascism is, where it appears, and how it should be studied. The definition I propose below selectively draws upon elements from these debates rather than resolving them. In this project, ecofascism is approached as a spectrum of ideas, primarily examined through far-right social media, which can shift mainstream conceptions of ecology and environmentalism and inspire reactionary politics and violence. By 'a spectrum of ideas', I mean that ecofascism is not a fixed or organized ideology but a diffuse and shifting formation that can surface across different contexts without requiring conscious identification or formal membership (cf. Lubarda, 2023). Like far-

right ecologism more broadly, ecofascism springs from radical nationalism's ideologically 'thick' crux: the exclusionary connection between an imagined people and a bordered territory. Drawing on Forchtner's (2023b) concept of eco-communion, I further understand ecofascism as an extreme form of this affective bond, one in which attachment to landscape and nature becomes infused with racial exclusion and political violence. This definition treats affect and the digital context as central analytical dimensions.

Returning to Figure 1, which illustrates ecofascism as nested within far-right ecologism and radical nationalism, I wish to point out that the diagram only captures this internal relationship between the three formations. However, as the discussion above suggests, ecofascist logics can migrate beyond the far right, shaping mainstream environmental and political discourse. Rooted in Malthusian thinking, such logics can emerge from and operate within a range of other contexts, including digital culture, liberal politics, philanthropy and everyday wellness discourse. This thesis focuses on one specific site: the digital far right, where ecofascist ideas are actively produced, circulated and made affectively resonant.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 situates the study in its broader historical and political context, tracing the relationship between fascism's 'ecological' roots and contemporary Nordic expressions of ecofascism. Chapter 3 presents a literature review that draws upon studies of the far right and political ecologies, gender and visual and affective communication, including a discussion of the findings of Article 4. Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework, centring gender in radical nationalism, affect and normalization. Chapter 5 presents the research design alongside discussions of the analysed material, positioning and ethics. Chapter 6 offers summaries of the four articles. The thesis concludes with a synthesis of the findings and a discussion of their broader implications.

2 BACKGROUND: CONTEMPORARY AND HISTORICAL ECOFASCISM

This chapter introduces the background and context of the study. I begin by discussing ecofascism's ideological roots, paying particular attention to esoteric German fascism, Malthusianism and Romanticism. The particularly gendered dimensions of (eco)fascism are taken up in chapters 3 and 4, although it should be noted here that fascism has historically been understood as an intensely masculinized phenomenon, both a men's movement and a hardened masculine ideology (cf. Mosse, 1998; Griffin, 1995). Second, I present contemporary expressions of ecofascism in the context of a warming world, tracing how these shape current ecofascist formations both within and beyond the Nordic context. Third, I discuss the Nordic context specifically, including its particular history, movements and groups.

2.1 Fascism's green heritage

Understanding ecofascism's contemporary expressions requires an examination of its ideational roots. The first historical academic review of the phenomenon of 'ecofascism' was delivered by social ecologist Janet Biehl and historian Peter Staudenmaier in 1995.[4] Their study explores how far-right movements have appropriated environmental ideas for reactionary purposes, tracing these roots from Nazi Germany to present-day ecofascist currents. In the following, I present Nazism's nature-based 'ecological' heritage.

2.1.1 Blood and soil: Nazism

Nazism is an important source for contemporary ecofascism as explored in the present study. Nazism is a variant of fascism; a radical authoritarian and totalitarian nationalism, the core of which is a 'palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism' (Griffin, 1995, pp. 1–

[4] See also the pioneering work of Olsen (1999). Bramwell (1985) made a significant contribution to the history of green national socialism, but she was criticized for, among other things, maligning environmental activism (e.g. Stephens, 2001).

12). In other words, the fascist idea of rebirth and purification is a central tenet of Nazism. What distinguishes Nazism from typical fascism is its obsession with race, eugenics, anti-Semitism, sociobiology and its adaptivity (Griffin, 1995, pp. 7–8; Frøland, 2017, p. 413). For Hitler, nature's divine force manifested itself in the Aryan race in a pseudo-religious manner and 'Aryan blood' was imagined as enriched by the divine forces of the Universe (Frøland, 2017, pp. 179–180). Hence, Nazism and fascism build upon an occult and esoteric nature-based heritage that contributed to legitimizing Aryan supremacy (Frøland, 2017; Gardell, 2022; Goodrick-Clarke, 2002).

It is imperative to acknowledge the influence of Nazism's Blood and Soil ethos if we are to understand contemporary ecofascism. Nazism is built on a 'Völkisch' nature-based ideology, which has its roots in the German national romanticism of the 1700s, and refers to a romantic, anti-modern, populist understanding of the German people as an organic, rural unity connected to the land (Frøland, 2017, pp. 22, 98; Altgeld, 2018; Mosse, 2021).[5] Similarly, Nazism sought to connect the German Volk to 'authentic' origins, appealing to the Herderian[6] notion of the rural countryside as the 'natural' repository of national virtue (Kiernan, 2014, p. 34). The Third Reich's military leader Heinrich Himmler and Minister of Food and Agriculture Richard Darré are viewed as the chief ideologues behind the Blood and Soil ethos (Blut und Boden). This ethos posited that German 'blood' was inextricably bound to German soil, not only in Germany but also through eliminationist and violent expansions of Aryan 'lebensraum' (living space) (Grill & Bramwell, 1987; Biehl & Staudenmaier, 2011; Evans, 2004).[7]

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[5] There is a large corpus of German literature on the Völkisch culture. See for instance von Schnurbein and Ulbricht (2001) Röpke & Speit (2019) and Schmidt (2014).

[6] The 18th-century German theologian Johann Gottfried von Herder is hailed as the 'father of Romantic Nationalism' (Fox, 1987, p. 565).

[7] It must be noted that, while Nazi decision-makers often shared values with early twentieth-century conservationists, in practice the production of armaments and preparations for war consistently took precedence over

This Blood and Soil heritage emerges into view in contemporary far-right discussions on ethnopluralism, where people who are 'alien' to the soil are considered unfit to live there. In brief, Nazism's Blood and Soil ideology bound racial identity to the land, establishing a logic of exclusion that continues to inform contemporary ecofascism.

2.1.2 Esotericism, romanticism and Malthusianism

Fascism's green roots draw from several intellectual heritages, which are presented here primarily through: firstly, its esoteric influences; second, its romanticization of peasant agrarianism; and third, Malthusianism. The notion of a golden age, imagined through lost paradises such as Hyperborea, Atlantis and Thule, and theosophical thought provided foundational mythologies for fascism (Forsell, 2022; Gardell, 2022; Forth, 2025). The obsession with 'the original' is an element found at fascism's innermost core (Dahl, 2006, p. 128). The idea of decline presupposes a notion of greatness, and the simplest way to establish greatness is through fulfilling an origin, a beginning (Dahl, 2006, p. 128). This quest was exemplified by the Russian occultist Helena Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy in the late nineteenth century, whose esoteric teachings about root races, Aryan origins and ancient civilizations provided pseudo-spiritual legitimacy to racial hierarchies (Forsell, 2022; Hanegraaff, 2013). Blavatsky's ideas about a primordial Aryan race descending from mystical lands such as Atlantis and Hyperborea, along with her concept of the 'Central Sun' as a cosmic power source, were appropriated by Nazi esotericists, who used them to construct mythologies linking racial purity to spiritual evolution and cosmic forces. These esoteric traditions thus provided early fascism with a mythological link between racial purity and ancient, mystical origins.

The Ariosophists were intellectual forefathers of Nazism who developed occult knowledge about runes and ancient Germanic mysticism (Forsell, 2022). The Thule Society and related esoteric groups served as direct predecessors to early National Socialism, establishing

environmental concerns such as forest preservation, conservation and pollution control (Uekoetter, 2006).

networks that combined nationalist politics with occult beliefs (Dahl, 2006, pp. 83–84). References to 'Thule' often appear in digital ecofascist spaces. Founded in Munich in 1918, the society promoted Aryan racial theories and Germanic mysticism while providing organizational infrastructure and ideological foundations for the emerging Nazi movement. Moreover, the SS developed its own research institute, Ahnenerbe (Eng: Ancestral inheritance), founded in 1935, which was dedicated to studying supposed Germanic heritage through pseudo-scientific racial theories (Dahl, 2006, pp. 97–98). Under Himmler's leadership, Ahnenerbe combined archaeological expeditions, racial research and occult investigations to provide scholarly legitimacy to Nazi ideology and the SS's claimed role as guardians of Aryan heritage (Butters, 2023, p. 64; Forsell, 2022). Together, these organizations helped to establish the ideological connection between racial identity, ancestral land and nature that remains central to ecofascism today.

The occult and mystical aspects of Nazism were developed in the post-war era by, among others, the fascist author Savitri Devi (1959; Goodrick-Clarke, 1998) and the Italian philosopher Julius Evola (1995; Furlong, 2011). These figures are frequently cited and depicted in ecofascist meme-culture, and seem to be especially popular among its pagan and militant segments (Hughes et al., 2022; Macklin, 2022). Both Devi and Evola were interested in the traditionalist philosophy, which presupposes a perennial form of spiritual wisdom that is eternal, inherent in being itself and can be only achieved through contemplative stillness (Sedgwick, 2004; Furlong, 2011; see Hammer, 2019 for historical Swedish traditionalism). Through these traditions, ecofascism inherited its focus on the mystical, the pure and the original, grounding its environmental politics in spiritual and affective, rather than rational, terms. These esoteric currents remain visible in the digital material analysed in this thesis, particularly in references to runes, and figures such as Evola and Devi.

However, fascism also contained a modernist strand that differed from this backward-looking tradition. This form of fascism is best represented by the Italian Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) (Spackman, 2008). Unlike the Völkisch focus on returning to a

primordial past, Marinetti celebrated the destruction of the old world. He did not view decline as a tragedy, instead seeing it as a necessary step towards a violent rebirth. His vision emphasized speed, technology and the machine over rural simplicity. For Marinetti, war was a form of hygiene that cleared the way for a new future. Hence, fascism in its different permutations was not only about preserving an ancient origin, but also about accelerating change through destruction to create a new order (see also Evola, 1995). This modernist drive complements the esoteric longing for origins and together they form a heritage of both reaction and revolution.

Romanticism gave National Socialism a mythologized past through which racial identity and the land became inseparable. The mythical blue-eyed and beautiful Germanic peoples, initially written about by the Roman historian Tacitus, were used to imagine a strong German folk in the Third Reich (Dahl, 2006, p. 45). This romanticized history of an idealized original people was retold through art and music (such as the works of Wagner). The Nazis used the Germanic people to construct a parallel between an idealized and healthy rural life in the countryside and what they portrayed as degenerate Jewish urban life (Dahl, 2006, p. 45). Influential race biologists and German anti-Semites such as Julius Langbehn (1851–1907) argued that farmers were the centre of the universe and the driving force of both history and the cosmos (Dahl, 2006, p. 48). This vision was further supported by Darré and Himmler. Darré, who spearheaded green National Socialism, connected agrarian romanticism with racial nationalism. Darré argued that only farmers (particularly blond peasants) could enable the nation's racial and spiritual recreation, positioning environmental protection and racial purity as inseparable goals. In this way, romanticism contributed to making racial hierarchy feel both natural and inevitable.

The romanticization of nature also shaped broader popular movements in Germany. The youth movement, the *Wandervögel* (translating roughly to 'wandering free spirits'), played a role 'in carrying a back-to-the-land logic to the German popular culture in the early 1900s' (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 9). A large proportion of these 'right-wing hippies' who communicated a sensitivity to the natural

world were apolitical, which in practice aligned them with Nazism's political influence (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 9). Glorifying the rural life also contributed to shaping the Völkisch movement, which gained a strong foothold in the Weimar Republic. Völkisch tradition has its roots in the German national romanticism of the 1700s, and refers to a romantic, anti-modern, populist understanding of the German people as an organic, rural unity tied to nature (Frøland, 2017, pp. 22, 98). The Völkisch movement has seen a resurgence in Germany in recent years (Dannemann, 2023; Varco, 2023). This heritage established ecofascism's core logic: Ecological health and racial purity were presented as inseparable, making the defence of nature synonymous with the defence of 'blood'. As discussed in the Nordic context below, this agrarian romanticism found particular expression in Scandinavian radical nationalism, and its traces are visible in the nature-based imagery circulating across the digital spaces examined in this thesis.

2.1.3 Malthusianism and population logic

Malthusian ideas about population and scarcity also contributed to the intellectual foundations of ecofascism. Discussions about population growth were popularized throughout the 1960s, and have contributed to rooting ecofascism in Malthusian arguments about population growth. Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) was a British economist known for his theory of exponential population growth. He argued that populations grow faster than food production, inevitably leading to resource scarcity and famine (Linnér, 2023). In 1968, two significant works were published that came to shape the discourse in the Global North about population, resources and climate change. In their book *The Population Bomb*, biologists Anne and Paul Ehrlich (1968/1989) argued that overpopulation drives urbanization and overconsumption, leading towards resource catastrophe. Similarly, ecologist Garrett Hardin's essay 'The Tragedy of the Commons' (1968) argued that shared resources inevitably degrade through individual self-interest, and require authoritarian control. His later work 'Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor' (Hardin, 1974) compared wealthy nations to a lifeboat with limited capacity, surrounded by drowning people. He questioned whether 'good intentions could be

sufficient excuse for the consequences of our actions', arguing that rescue diminishes the quality of life for those already aboard (Hardin, 1974). This lifeboat analogy was later developed further by the self-declared ecofascist Pentti Linkola, a Finnish ornithologist). He wrote that, when a lifeboat is surrounded by begging people, '[t]hose who love and respect life will instead grab an axe and sever the hands clinging to the gunwales' (Linkola, 2011, p. 92). This logic justified extreme violence against vulnerable populations in the name of ecological survival. Such anti-humanist ecology, combining Malthusian pessimism with calls for authoritarian resource control, became foundational to contemporary ecofascist thought.

In the same vein, ecofascism also draws upon perverted interpretations of deep ecology – an environmental philosophy holding that nature has intrinsic value independent of human use – fashioning its biocentric ideas into anti-humanism (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996/2011; Bratton, 1999). While deep ecology seeks to challenge anthropocentrism, ecofascism refashions these ideas into anti-humanism,[8] suggesting for instance that humanity functions as a parasitic species whose existence degrades the natural world, and that dramatic population reduction, or even human extinction, would allow 'nature' to flourish freely (Taylor, 2019; Davies, 2021; cf. Theweleit, 1987). This misanthropic strain intersects with social Darwinist logic, where 'survival of the fittest' becomes a naturalized law governing human societies (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996/2011, pp. 40–42). Under an ecofascist interpretation, this translates into explicit racism. The argument is as follows: Certain peoples (invariably racialized) are deemed 'overpopulated', in line with the Ehrlichs and Hardin, and burdensome on the earth, while white populations must be preserved and their declining birthrates reversed (Campion, 2021; Dyett & Thomas, 2019; Modena, 2020). The biocentric language of deep ecology is thus appropriated in ecofascist discourse to support eugenicist reasoning, where concern for 'nature' masks eliminationist fantasies

[8] I treat anti-humanism here and elsewhere as a discursive construction rather than a philosophical position, analysing how ecofascist discourse deploys it to naturalize racial exclusion.

directed at racialized others (Darwish, 2021). In this context, anti-humanism is not a philosophical critique of human exceptionalism, but rather a selective application that racializes which human populations are considered problematic, and which must be preserved. The concern for 'nature' becomes a justification for the differential valuation of human lives based on race and geography. These intellectual heritages – esoteric mysticism, agrarian romanticism and Malthusian population logic – converged to form fascism's green roots, wherein environmental concern became inseparable from racial exclusion. As this thesis shows, Malthusian population logic remains a recurring strand in contemporary digital ecofascism.

2.2 Contemporary ecofascism

Between 2019 and the early 2020s, white supremacist attackers in Christchurch, New Zealand, Texas, US and Bærum, Norway self-identified as ecofascists in their writings. In May 2026, a further attack was added to this list, when two teenagers who had met and become radicalized online attacked a mosque in San Diego, US. All the perpetrators were young men who published 'manifestos' outlining their ideological beliefs. These manifestos centred around extreme ethnonationalism, expressing a preoccupation with declining birthrates among white people and 'overpopulation' of racialized people (Anson & Banerjee, 2023; Campion, 2021; Hughes et al., 2022; Macklin, 2022; Tarin, 2024; Sitton, 2026). As mentioned above, young men in Sweden were also linked to ecofascist incidents and networks, including a 2019 mink farm fire and a planned abortion clinic bombing (Kasurinen, 2020; Poohl, 2021). These incidents sparked scholarly, media and civil interest in ecofascism as a phenomenon. Moreover, following the COVID-19 pandemic, phrases such as 'humans are the virus' and 'nature is healing' entered mainstream discourse (Bosworth, 2022). Such discourse was quickly identified as ecofascist, spurring further attention to ecofascism as a phenomenon (Allison, 2020). Despite the significance of these incidents and the related rhetoric, the elevated focus has to some degree exoticized ecofascism as something new and unique, and failed to recognize its historical roots or its iteration of colonial logics. These incidents are best understood as expressions of ideological currents with deep historical roots.

The climate crisis provides an important context for understanding the contemporary resurgence of ecofascism. As I write these words in spring 2026, the globe has plummeted into an irreversible human-made climate crisis, which has loomed large on the horizon for several decades (depending on where in the world one is situated). This crisis, alongside other intersecting crises (Fraser, 2021), provides the foundations for contemporary fascism. The development of fascism as a historical force relies (among other factors) upon crises in modern capitalist states (Eley & Thomas, 2020). Scholars drawing on historical materialism and racial capitalism have formulated different frameworks to comprehend the fascist turn in an overheated world (Turner & Bailey, 2022; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021; Thomas & Gosink, 2021; Simpson & Cheever, 2025). Cara Daggett (2018) introduced the concepts of fossil fascism and petro-masculinity to show how fossil fuel systems have historically buttressed white patriarchal power, creating identities tied to fossil fuel use that, when threatened by climate change, can nourish authoritarian desires and compensatory violence (see also Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). One particularly concerning dimension of this fascist turn is ecofascism, in which the environmental crisis itself becomes weaponized to justify exclusion and violence.

Alongside these ideological developments, the far right developed deliberate strategies for spreading its ideas. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, thinkers associated with the European New Right, particularly Alain de Benoist, argued that political change must be preceded by a battle of ideas fought in cultural spaces (Bures, 2023). This metapolitical strategy prioritises the shifting of cultural norms over direct political action, and has shaped how contemporary far-right movements operate. This includes their use of digital platforms to normalize radical ideas through humour, aesthetics and everyday imagery (Maly, 2023). This metapolitical orientation is particularly visible in far-right digital spaces, where ecofascist ideas are packaged into accessible and normalized visual language.

The reach of these strategies is visible across multiple scales. In their analysis of different manifestations of ecofascism in the twenty-first century, Thomas and Gosink (2021) show how ecofascist ideas

permeate centrist politics as part of the resistance to the climate crisis. The authors focus on how the worsening ecological crises may intersect with growing political turmoil, the rise of autocratic governments and the threat of fascism. They argue that the discourse around climate has shifted from denialism to securitization: Western nation states implement efforts to secure themselves against the millions of climate refugees who are predicted to migrate by 2050 (Thomas & Gosink, 2021). Rather than focusing on small-scale ecofascist 'agents', they zoom out to the transnational level and hold that the destruction of ecosystems for profit, national policies based on Malthusianism and the increased securitization of borders against future climate migrants should be labelled ecofascist practice (Thomas & Gosink, 2021). Similarly, Simpson and Cheever (2025) argue that ecofascism should be understood as not just a coming threat 'on the horizon' (e.g. Moore & Roberts, 2022), but as a continuation of colonial logics built on violence and racial capitalism (Saldanha, 2020; Sultana, 2022). Thus, while ecofascism operates across multiple scales, from state policy to transnational networks, this thesis focuses on its manifestation in online spaces. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that ecofascism is an active political force expressed through the dynamics of crisis and authoritarian mobilization.

2.3 Nordic radical nationalism: From historical to contemporary actors

The North has occupied a significant place in the fascist imagination, based on ideas about the mythical origins of the white race, and 'racial excellency' (Karcher & Lundström, 2022). In the Nordic countries, fascism developed through interactions between and beyond national boundaries, especially between Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. These four countries provide the basis for what I refer to as 'Nordic'. While Iceland is also a Nordic country, it has had less fascist activity and comparatively limited contact with the other four. The term 'Scandinavian' refers to Sweden, Norway and Denmark. After World War II, Scandinavian Nazi parties were banned, disbanded or went underground (Bangsund, 1984; Lööw, 2009). Modern Scandinavian neo-Nazism emerged around 1960, with adherents distancing themselves from wartime Nazism by adopting labels such as 'radicals'

or 'nationals' (Fangen, 2001, pp. 76, 77). The urge to camouflage Nazi sympathies was stronger in Norway and Denmark, which were occupied by Nazi Germany, than in neutral Sweden. This may explain why Sweden developed the largest Nordic neo-Nazi scene (Fangen, 2001, p. 173). Unlike the Scandinavian countries, Finland fought alongside Nazi Germany during the Continuation War (1941–1944), and domestic fascist and far-right movements had been active since the interwar period. However, the linguistic distance between Finnish and the Scandinavian languages meant that ideological exchange with Swedish, Norwegian and Danish networks was more limited than cross-Scandinavian contact, although not entirely absent. This factor shapes the empirical focus of the thesis on Swedish radical nationalism, although Swedish networks are understood here as embedded within the broader Nordic context.

Traces of early ecofascist thought in the Nordic region lie in radical nationalism. In early twentieth-century Scandinavian nationalist thought, thinkers like the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén articulated views connecting national identity to natural landscapes, emphasizing that Swedes were united through both historical bonds and their 'rooted' attachment to nature, land and territory (Lundström, 2025, p. 208). Agrarian movements in the Nordic region also carried antisemitic and authoritarian currents. In Norway, the farmers' movement and the Agrarian Party were shaped by strong rural nationalism with antisemitic undercurrents, reflecting how agrarian romanticism and racial exclusion were intertwined in the Nordic context as well as the German (Emberland, 2009). This emphasis on the organic persisted in later Nordic nationalist movements.

By the 1980s, the Danish National Socialist Movement had incorporated environmental causes into its platforms and attracted members through environmental messaging (Christensen, 2025). While this focus contained strategic elements, it also reflected a genuine ideological shift influenced by thinkers who promoted biologistic worldviews (Christensen, 2025, p. 185). One of the leaders in this shift was the Dane Povl Riis-Knudsen, who published the pamphlet *National Socialism: The Biological Worldview* in 1986 (Riis-Knudsen, 1987; Sallamaa & Malkki, 2022). Riis-Knudsen's biologistic framework

contributes to providing contemporary Nordic Nazi movements with an ideological foundation that repackages racial hierarchy as adherence to natural law.

Some fractions of the Nordic radical nationalist milieu were preoccupied with animal rights and environmental protection. Heléne Lööw (2002) shows how the Nazi 'Nordic Reich Party' (Nordiska rikspartiet, 1956–2000) and several smaller groups focused on issues of animal welfare, species preservation and ecological health. The Nordic Reich Party was an important node on the Swedish radical nationalist scene. It was led by Göran Assar Oredsson and briefly by his wife Vera Oredsson, as the first (and only?) female Nazi leader in the world.[9] The party used a sun cross symbol, published magazines including *Nordisk Kamp* and *Solhjulet*, and maintained a paramilitary group called Riksaktionsgruppen (RAG). The Nordic Reich Party incorporated animal protection slogans into its messaging, reflecting how 'fighting the torture of animals have [sic] been a long-standing part of the National Socialist propaganda' (Lööw, 2002, p. 197). According to Lööw (2002), this emphasis on animal welfare formed part of a broader ideological focus on purity that shaped the movement's moral framework.

In a similar vein, Nordic radical nationalism connected gymnastics and exercise to the resurrection of an ancient form of Nordic masculinity (Kunkeler, 2019, p. 88). Several Swedish fascists, like the leading figure Sven Olov Lindholm (1903–1998), were inspired by the health regime of Are Waerland, whom contemporary Nordic Nazis called '[t]he founder of the Swedish health movement' (Nordfront, 2013; Kunkeler, 2021). Health and physical purity were important elements in these 'green' currents of radical nationalism.

During the 1980s and continuing until the early 2000s, the skinhead culture emerged in Nordic neo-Nazism (Bjørgo, 1997; Fangen, 2001; Kimmel, 2007). Groups ranged from violent skinhead gangs such as Norway's Boot Boys and Sweden's 'Vitt Ariskt Motstånd' to more

[9] Vera Oredsson and her husband opposed internal gender discrimination within the organization and what they called 'masculinism' (Schau, 2014, p. 34).

disciplined Viking-inspired organizations resembling 'militant boys' scouts' (Fangen, 2001, p. 34). Members of Vitt Ariskt Motstånd contributed to starting the Swedish Resistance Movement in 1997, which was the precursor to the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM).

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a militant National Socialist organization operating across the Nordic countries. Currently led by Sweden's Fredrik Vejdeland, with approximately 300 active members[10] as of 2024, the NRM seeks to overthrow Nordic democracies and establish a pan-Nordic nation based on National Socialist ideology (although they have tried to engage with parliamentary systems) (Fielitz et al., 2020). The NRM has been an important node for Nordic radical nationalist organizing over the last few decades, with several individuals active in far-right extremism having passed through the organization, maintained connections with it and/or formed splinter radical nationalist initiatives (Fielitz et al., 2020; Klungtveit, 2020). The organization was banned in Finland in 2017 for promoting violence, and several members have been convicted of violent offences, including a fatal street assault (Krekling, 2017). However, it remains legal in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The NRM claims that its national socialism differs from the German form because it is more inspired by Riis Knudsen's biologistic worldview: '[Knudsen] viewed National Socialism from a biological point of view, seeing it as a comprehensive solution to the problems we see in the world today' (Nordic Resistance Movement, 2016, p. 10). Knudsen wrote that the

> 'Laws of Nature' govern human lives, and that these laws are based on 'an infinite love of the creation in all its diversity, a deep, unconditional respect for the wisdom of Nature, and an ardent will to preserve life as it has grown out of this wisdom' (Riis-Knudsen, 1987, p. 4).

Its manifesto, *Our Path* (Nordic Resistance Movement, 2016), outlines a racial rather than class-based socialism and positions the movement

[10] They can, however, mobilize several hundred more for events (Crenshaw & Robinson, 2025).

as an environmental party advocating sustainable human–nature relationships, organic standards and animal welfare alongside its racial politics.

The NRM attempted to position itself as a 'new green party' during the 2018 elections, but this failed and resulted in its fragmentation into several smaller groups from 2019 onwards, leading to a decline in popularity. One new fragment includes the paramilitary underground group 'Nordic Strength' [Nordisk Styka]. This group highlights the biologistic and holistic aspects of Nazism, frequently discussing environmental, nature-related and climate-related topics in its media outlets. More recently, the Nordic far-right landscape has seen a resurgence through decentralized 'Active Club' networks, which sometimes collaborate with the NRM (Vingren, 2025; Gottzén & Switzer, 2026). These Active Clubs are run by young, militant men pursuing extreme ideological positions with a strong emphasis on physical activism. They organize far-right gyms and fight clubs and document these online (Litterer, 2025). Both the NRM and newer groups document their social outdoor activities such as hikes and beach clean-ups, sometimes performed as masculine conquests of natural spaces (cf. Westberg & Årman, 2019; Campion & Phillips, 2023). These can be compared to the activities of the German youth movement 'Wandervögel' discussed above (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996/2011, p. 9). These continuities suggest that nature-based ideology has remained a consistent thread within Nordic radical nationalism, from its historical roots to its contemporary online expressions.

This chapter has established the background and context for understanding contemporary ecofascism. It has situated ecofascism within broader scholarship on fascism's relationship to crisis, framing it not as a future threat but as an ongoing historical force rooted in colonial violence, with material political consequences. The chapter has traced fascism's 'green roots' to three intellectual heritages: esoteric mysticism, agrarian romanticism and Malthusian arguments for population control, which together establish a logic wherein environmental concerns become inseparable from racial exclusion. Examining the Nordic context divulges that these themes have persisted within radical nationalist movements from the early twentieth century to the

present, from early biologistic worldviews and animal rights discourse to the Nordic Resistance Movement and its splinter group Nordic Strength, as well as the burgeoning Active Club network. Taken together, these historical and geographical perspectives demonstrate that environmental discourse has been a consistent ideological and organizational element within both fascism in general and Nordic radical nationalism specifically, providing the foundations for analysing contemporary ecofascist expressions.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter, I described the context and historical heritage of contemporary ecofascism. While my research is situated within the broader field of research on the far right, it contributes more specifically to the field of 'the political ecologies of the far right' (PEFR), and studies of far-right communication, as well as to studies of gender and the far right. Hence, in this chapter, I begin by reviewing previous research on the emergence of PEFR as a field and common themes in that research, as well as the ecological rhetoric of the far right. Second, I present earlier research on the gendered narratives that sustain the far right generally, and gender and PEFR specifically. Third, I present earlier research on the digital, visual and affective characters of far-right communication. The final section synthesizes these findings in order to articulate the study's contribution.

3.1 Political ecologies of the far right

The burgeoning research field that is often referred to as 'the political ecologies of the far right' (hereafter referred to as PEFR) examines the relationships between far-right movements, ecologism and environmental issues. Research within this field studies the complex and often contradictory ways in which far-right parties, organizations and ideologies engage with nature, climate change and environmental politics. The field brings together researchers from history, political science, geography, environmental studies, communication studies and related disciplines. Scholars have been preoccupied with how those on the far right articulate and mobilize the natural environment, from climate obstruction to conservation and claims to be protecting the diversity of the homeland's 'nature' (see several case studies in Allen et al., 2024). While several studies have examined variants of nationalism's relation to nature, especially in terms of homeland and belonging (Deudney, 1997; Smith & Smith, 1999; Anderson, 2006; McClintock, 1995), the current review explores studies on the far right and the environment more specifically. To date, there have only been a handful of literature reviews dealing with different aspects of the far right and the environment (Bryant & Farrell, 2024; Forchtner, 2019a; Lubarda & Forchtner, 2022). The following

discussion is organized chronologically, inspired by Lubarda and Forchtner's (2022) review of 'past, present and future' studies on far-right ecologisms from the 1990s until 2022.

Lubarda and Forchtner (2022) highlighted four important works published in the 1990s that shaped the PEFR field, all focusing on the German context (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996/2011; Geden, 1996; Jahn & Wehling, 1991; Olsen, 1999). These accounts criticized Bramwell's 1985 book on Walther Darré and the 'Green' Nazi party for overvaluing and simplifying Nazism's environmentalism (see also Stephens, 2001), as well as paving the way for contemporary scholarship. Geden (1996) discussed what he called 'right-wing ecology', which was further conceptualized by Olsen (1999) to show how German far-right groups grounded their understanding of human beings as indivisibly 'rooted' within their specific nation, culture and territory. Olsen held that '[t]he key to understanding right-wing ecology's distinctiveness as an environmental discourse lies in appreciating the implications of this view of human cultures as just another piece of nature' (1999, p. 20). He termed this way of seeing the world 'eco-naturalism' (nature as the blueprint for the social order), and listed other foundational elements: 'eco-organicism' (nature and society viewed as an organism) and 'eco-authoritarianism' (illiberal politics as the best solution to the environmental crisis) (Olsen, 1999). Together, these concepts showed how environmental protection was (and still is) framed as inseparable from nationalist ideology.

Biehl and Staudenmaier (1996/2011) focused on ecofascism as their central concept, defining it as 'the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns' (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1995, p. 4). Lubarda and Forchtner (2022) found that these authors made significant contributions; firstly, in emphasizing mysticism as a pillar of contemporary ecofascism and, secondly, in criticizing the philosophical stance of deep ecology and its ambivalence towards humanity, which was popular at the time. Biehl and Staudenmaier warned that such ambivalence likened deep ecology to misanthropic ecofascism (see Chapter 2; the idea that humanity is a destructive burden on nature, fused with far-right politics). Both observations also flagged how the link between mainstream and liberal

environmentalism could be forged with fascism. The majority of the studies published during the early 2000s still focused on the German case and Nazism, especially its conservation efforts and the Blood and Soil ideology (e.g. Brüggemeier et al., 2005; Lekan & Zeller, 2005; Uekoetter, 2006).

The 2010s saw an increasing interest in non-German cases, and, following Lubarda and Forchtner (2022), two main factors explain this timing. First, the climate crisis became recognized as a major global challenge that prompted political actors across the spectrum to propose solutions and, second, the far right gained renewed global prominence during the 'fourth wave' of mainstreaming following the 2008 economic downturn and the 2015 'refugee crisis' (Mudde, 2019). These developments continue to shape current scholarship (Lubarda & Forchtner, 2022). Researchers have since examined how the far right uses environmental issues to support nationalist goals and have also compared these strategies across different countries. Scholars have investigated different national contexts, such as Italy (Armiero & Graf von Hardenberg, 2013; Guerra, 2025), Portugal (Saraiva, 2016), India (Sharma, 2012), Austria (Voss, 2014), the UK (Coupland, 2016; Turner-Graham, 2019), Hungary and Poland (Lubarda, 2024). In the Nordic countries, scholars have examined the Danish People's Party's environmental imaginaries (Kølvraa, 2019b), the Finn's Party's environmental populism (Hatakka & Välimäki, 2019), Nordic climate denialism (Hultman et al., 2019; Krange et al., 2019; Vowles, 2024) and ecologism in past and present Nordic Nazism (Christensen, 2025; Westberg & Årman, 2019; Szenes, 2021; Darwish, 2021). However, few of these studies foreground gender as an analytical lens.

Lubarda and Forchtner (2022, p. 92) hold that there seems to be a rudimentary consensus within the scholarship regarding the key components of far-right ecologisms: A Manichean division between the good people, meaning the nationalists, versus the evil polluters, elites and insincere greens, and a general naturalist and organicist understanding of land and ethnos. Moreover, earlier research showed that this division extends into a binary between the global and the local. Several studies have demonstrated that far-right actors reject the global climate in defence of the local environment, and that nature

conservation is equated with defence of local national territory, borders and cultural identity (Turner & Bailey, 2022; Benoist, 2023; Forchtner & Olsen, 2023). Researchers have studied how far-right actors respond to climate science, ranging from outright denial to selective acceptance (Ekberg et al., 2022; Jacques et al., 2008; Jylhä et al., 2020; Krange et al., 2019). The research analyses how current far-right parties incorporate environmental themes into their platforms, often opposing climate policies while claiming to protect 'homeland' flora and fauna (Lubarda, 2024; Backlund & Jungar, 2022; Fagan, 2018; Hultgren, 2015; see Forchtner, 2019b for an overview). The findings show that some far-right groups reject climate science entirely, while others acknowledge environmental problems but propose nativist or nationalist solutions. Similar trends on denialism are found in Brazil (Mendes Motta & Hauber, 2023; C. R. S. Milani et al., 2025), the US (Daggett, 2018), the broader European setting (Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2024) and the Nordic countries (Krange et al., 2019; Vowles, 2024; Vowles & Hultman, 2021). Hence, earlier research has demonstrated that 'the local' takes precedence over 'the global' in far-right nature imaginaries.

To summarize, scholars have explored the link between the far right and ecology from the 1990s to the present using different approaches. They have also found that far-right actors hold different views about how to respond to climate change. Despite this, previous studies indicate that ecological themes have consistently featured within far-right movements, usually characterized by a 'rooted' nationalism and a dualistic opposition between the 'people' and 'elites'. Consequently, earlier research has shown that 'the local' takes precedence over 'the global' in these nature imaginaries. While gender has been rather overlooked in earlier studies on PEFR, contemporary research increasingly identifies it as a mechanism for naturalizing exclusion and hierarchy. Notably, gender has remained a peripheral concern in this field, and the gendered dimensions of far-right ecologism's affective communication have not been systematically examined. The next section reviews general literature on the far right and gender, before reviewing the existing studies of gender within PEFR specifically.

3.2 The far right and gender

Earlier research on the far right has developed and built upon the well-documented premise that notions of gender and radical nationalism constitute and structure one another. Scholars of historical fascism, such as Roger Griffin (1995) and George Mosse (1998), documented how fascism elevates masculinity into a national symbol which plays a vital role in its manifestations. Historical studies have shown that fascism tends to invoke a 'golden age' of heroic and militant men (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002). Based on her study of Nazi Germany, Claudia Koonz (1987) argued that the heterosexual gender relation is crucial in fascist social organization and divides the social realm into male and female domains. Fascism's relationship to gender has also been theorized by post-colonial and feminist scholars, who saw fascism's gender matrix as built upon colonial logics of exploitation and dehumanization, whereby nature was (and indeed still is) commodified and feminized (Césaire, 2000; Lugones, 2010; Sultana, 2022). This scholarship emphasizes that the fascist impulse to exploit and dehumanize others stems from European colonialism and must be understood as a longitudinal historical process.

Earlier research has established that historical European fascist propaganda portrayed women primarily as symbols of national purity, and as mothers and homemakers (Koonz, 1987; Lawrence, 2018; Lower, 2013; Grazia, 1992; Gottlieb, 2003; see Blee, 2003 for the US context). While the construction of femininity in historical Nordic fascism specifically remains understudied (Kunkeler, 2021, p. 172), existing research has revealed certain patterns that coincide with European fascism as presented above. However, as noted by Jensen and Dahl (1988), Norway's Nazi party, 'Nasjonal Samling', also represented women as workers and party members in visual communication, alongside the more typical representations as homemakers. This historical scholarship shows that women were first and foremost imagined and depicted as inhabiting the domestic sphere, but, in practice, women's roles were subject to changing social demands and norms.

Scholars of contemporary far-right movements and ideology have further explored its gendered aspects. The far right often undertakes a 'politics of patriarchy' that positions the nation as a family in need of

a strong fatherly leader presiding over women and children (Norocel, 2013; Wodak, 2015; see also Mudde, 2007, pp. 90–118 on gender in European radical-right parties). Studies from the Nordic countries show that a heroic form of masculinity is frequently depicted through references to Viking culture. The figure of the Viking warrior serves as a powerful symbol that connects modern Nordic men to an idealized, legendary past, and historians Kølvraa (2019a) and Lööw (2016) have shown that this connection helps to define and strengthen ideas about what it means to be a 'real man' within these milieus. The Viking imagery also supports a protective and territorial way of thinking, built on the belief that Western culture and values are currently being threatened or attacked, and that sturdy, white men are responsible for defending and preserving these values (Aharoni & Féron, 2020). Ultimately, these gendered narratives construct a vision of masculinity in which white men are cast as the heroic defenders of a besieged Western heritage.

In her ethnographic study of the Ku Klux Klan, as well as Nazi and Christian identity organizations in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Blee (2003) outlined four feminine archetypes: the goddess/victim, the race traitor, the wife/mother and the female activist. These tropes recruited women by defining their roles within the racial project and established boundaries by expelling women who did not conform (Blee, 2003, p. 122). Research on contemporary representations of far-right femininity illustrate tensions between traditional and modern roles, and between the domestic and public spheres (Askanius, 2021c; Leidig, 2023; Mattheis, 2018). Doerr and Svatoňová (2023) demonstrate this tension in their analysis of the US far-right sphere on Telegram, showing how expressions of 'hegemonic' femininity conflict with conservative nationalist ideals of womanhood. Moreover, spiteful and negative portrayals of liberal, non-binary and minority women aided in establishing acceptable far-right femininity. These studies show that far-right femininity emerges as a contested terrain where traditional roles are negotiated against modern realities and strict boundaries.

Research has shown that far-right gender norms are reinforced through digital influence. Studies on far-right women's social media

presence and female far-right influencers reveals how extremist ideology is disseminated through lifestyle content (Darby, 2021; Leidig, 2023; Tebaldi, 2023a). Eviane Leidig (2023) demonstrated that far-right female influencers integrate racial and conspiratory messaging into posts about maternity, pregnancy, organic foods and family life. Furthermore, Leidig (2023) highlights the ways in which such gendered strategies exploit platform structures to normalize extremist narratives alongside everyday domestic content. In sum, these practices embed extremist ideologies into everyday physical and domestic spheres.

This section has, until now, outlined scholarship showing that the far right depends upon rigid gender hierarchies through idealized historical imagery and archetypes that reinforce exclusionary nationalism and defend traditional values. The rest of the section narrows this focus by examining how such imagery and gender norms have been documented within far-right ecologism specifically.

Studies on gender within far-right ecologisms reflect tendencies seen in broader research on the far right as detailed above, yet they also expose distinct specifics unique to this field. Much research on gender and far-right ecologisms focuses on masculinity and forms of climate denialism and obstruction. Several scholars have found what I call in Article 4 the 'anti-nature masculine stance', which is characterized by 'industrial/breadwinner' (Hultman et al., 2019; see also Pulé & Hultman, 2021; Vowles, 2024), 'fossilized' (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 394) and/or 'petro' masculinity (Daggett, 2018). As noted in Article 4, this stance rejects climate science in an effort to protect fossil-fuel economies and traditional male labour roles and privileges. However, several (more recent) works have also highlighted what I refer to as the 'pro-nature masculine stance', which is instead characterized by 'muscular environmentalism' (Forchtner & Olsen, 2023; Christou, 2023). This stance embraces nature but frames it as a territory to be defended through racial purity and authoritarian control, and its ecological sensibility is directed towards conquest and exclusion. For instance, Loadenthal (2022) shows how eco-accelerationist tendencies capitalize on protective masculinity, which seeks to shield the vulnerable and feminized natural world from external threats.

Moreover, Christou's (2023) analysis of the Cypriot far-right party, the National Popular Front, shows how online messaging constructs a masculinist protection narrative, framing men as heroic defenders of a feminized homeland threatened by both Turkish occupation and environmental destruction. In my own study of gender and nature in the Nordic Resistance Movement's media outlets, I found that the movement's understanding of care for nature, and consequently of environmentalism, is masculinized and translated into sexist, racist and anti-humanist agendas (Darwish, 2021). In short, far-right ecological communication reproduces familiar gender logics, but nature and the environmental register give them a particular shape and intensity. Taken together, these studies reveal a recurring gendered binary: masculinity is associated with the hard, the territorial and the protective, while femininity is tied to the soft, the domestic and the vulnerable.

Research shows that the ideal far-right male must be hardened, disciplined and self-sufficient to shield himself from the threats posed by modernity, immigration and 'gender ideology' (Holzberg, 2024; Mihai & Ungureanu, 2024; Pichel-Vázquez & Grau, 2021). This anxiety drives a masculinist protection logic (see Article 1), whereby men must act as armed guardians of a feminized nature and nation (Christou, 2023; Lash, 2025; Moore & Roberts, 2022). This 'muscular environmentalism' seems to be prevalent in ecofascist narratives. It is also visible in what Farrell-Molloy (2022) calls atavist masculinity in his thematic study of ecofascist Telegram channels and the hypermasculine: a longing for the fantasy of ancestral manhood, 'informed by ancient warrior cultures' (Farrell-Molloy, 2022, pp. 12, 62). The limited research on gender in ecofascist imaginaries reports similar constructions of militant, martial masculinities, but also men as providers and protectors in rural life (Christou, 2023; Hughes et al., 2022; Macklin, 2022; Moore & Roberts, 2022; Tebaldi, 2023a).

In line with typical representations of far-right femininity, research shows that women in far-right ecological communication are symbolically tied to motherhood, presented as vessels of racial purity and perceived as being in harmony with nature (Zoé, 2023; Tebaldi, 2023a). They are also symbolically portrayed as victims and used to justify xenophobia against immigrants (Hughes et al., 2022; Tebaldi,

2023a). Scholars have noted that nature itself is feminized in being presented as available for nurture or exploitation. This reinforces women's confinement to domestic and reproductive roles and links women's roles to the symbolic protection of the nation, purity and nature (Hughes et al., 2022; Beyer & Weisskircher, 2024, see also Article 3). In her analysis of far-right environmentalist aesthetics, Richards (2025) discusses the 'tradwife' movement, which promotes traditional gender roles and employs the aesthetics of domestic and rural life. Scholars have shown that 'trad' women are discursively positioned as the soft, feminine traditional wife, in contrast to the strong, hard male body (Burnett & Tebaldi, 2025; del Campo, 2023; Tebaldi, 2023b). Hughes et al. (2022) find that women are seemingly framed more positively and in less overtly misogynistic ways in ecofascist propaganda than in broader far-right discourse. The gendered imaginaries presented in recent studies also emphasize heteronormative reproduction, and heterosexuality is enforced as a prerequisite for racial continuity, with large families described as a political duty (Farrell-Molloy, 2022; Tebaldi, 2023a). Overall, the research indicates that gendered imagery in far-right ecologism ties women's roles to family, nature and the protection of the nation.

Summarizing this review of gender in the literature on far-right ecologism, research shows that the far right often frames environmental issues in gendered terms. Its discourse often describes nature as feminine, requiring masculine protection against external forces, thereby presenting social hierarchies as natural and unavoidable. While some actors deny climate change, others adopt extreme environmental positions. However, both approaches share a similar logic: They portray local identity as masculine and under threat from external feminized and global influences. The reviewed research shows that far-right discourse constructs a rigid binary in relation to nature: masculinity is linked to the 'local' and 'hard', bounded, defensible environment, while femininity is tied to the 'global' and 'soft' diffuse, borderless 'climate'. From earlier scholarship, I draw the conclusion that this gendered framework justifies the subordination of women, the exclusion of racialized others and the use of violence to maintain the 'natural' order. While these studies establish gender as a central mechanism, no research has examined how affects are structured by gender

in ecofascist communication specifically. This thesis contributes to the broader scholarship on gender and far-right ecologism by analysing how gendered imaginaries are constructed through affective visual communication in ecofascist contexts. The next section reviews scholarship analysing how the far right communicates through images and affect in the digital era.

3.3 Visual and affective far-right communication strategies

This section examines previous research on how far-right actors leverage multimodal digital platforms and visual strategies to build community, project power and normalize their ideologies within mainstream culture. Moreover, it discusses how positive affect is employed in far-right ecological communication and how this process is connected to gendered logics.

In this digital age, the far right often communicates via multimodal digital media outlets like blogs, podcasts and websites, alongside social media platforms like Telegram, TikTok and Instagram. However, this is a rapidly changing landscape. Research has shown that Telegram became increasingly popular with the far right after a series of bans by Facebook and Twitter (now X) in 2019 (Urman & Katz, 2020). Papacharissi (2014) notes that visual communication on social media platforms spreads propaganda but also creates connectivity and a sense of in-group community through interactions such as reactions, likes, hashtags and reposts across digital networks. Other studies have shown that far-right activists frequently pair offline activities, such as demonstrations, training and fighting, with an online presence by posting videos from political events and sharing memes and quotes across various social media platforms. For instance, the Soldiers of Odin – a vigilante group that was active across the Nordic countries in the 2010s – used social media to share images of intimidating men in black clothing patrolling the streets to demonstrate territorial control (Aharoni & Féron, 2020; Ekman, 2018; Nikunen et al., 2021). Similarly, members of the far-right fight gyms network 'Active clubs' gather followers on social media platforms like Telegram, and publish clips and images from their offline activities (Litterer, 2025; Vingren, 2025).

Studies have concluded that the far right is usually critical of the established media and seeks to shape narratives on its own platforms (Baugut & Neumann, 2019; Chagas, 2024). However, existing research shows that the established media have given far-right actors visibility and amplified far-right beliefs in several national contexts (Ellinas, 2010; Esser et al., 2017). This has led scholars to stress the importance of studying the far right as a cultural space (in addition to a political space) that functions to normalize far-right ideas and permeate mainstream culture (Askanius, 2021a; Miller-Idriss, 2017; Teitelbaum, 2017; Wodak, 2025). Taken together, these studies show that far-right digital communication functions as both propaganda and cultural normalization, making it particularly important to study its visual and affective dimensions. This is what this thesis addresses through its analysis of gendered imagery in ecofascist visual communication on social media.

Research shows that mainstreaming often emerges through cultural expressions (Askanius, 2021a; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017; Miller-Idriss, 2017). For instance, Kølvraa (2019a) shows that contemporary Nordic Nazis have to some degree replaced WWII imagery with pagan signs and Viking iconography to make the ideology more palatable. Furthermore, earlier research demonstrated the efforts to make Nordic far-right extremism positive and accessible, tying into a global context of fascist mainstreaming efforts (Askanius, 2021a; Brown et al., 2021; Kallis, 2015). The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) launched a mainstreaming project in 2018, aiming to reach youth, women and families, as well as dedramatizing Nazi ideology. Askanius (2021a) discusses how these efforts contribute to creating a 'Nazism light', intended to be a soft and passable version of Nazism (p. 32). Extant research also shows how normalization and the softening of violent content occur through memes and the appropriation of cartoons (Schmid et al., 2025; Hakokõngäs et al., 2020). Through the use of irony, humour and layers of coded messaging, far-right memes frequently recontextualize cartoons – for instance, the now global Pepe the Frog – mixing these with national socialist messages (Askanius, 2021b; Hokka & Nelimarkka, 2020). Hence, the appropriation and remixing of familiar signifiers are important tools in far-right cultural communication. This visual and aesthetic dimension

has increasingly drawn scholarly attention, particularly in studies of how the far right communicates ideas about nature and the environment.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly directed attention towards the visual, discursive and aesthetic dimensions of contemporary far-right environmentalism (Forchtner, 2023c; Burnett, 2025; Richards, 2025). Texts in the edited volume *Visualising far-right environments: Communication and the politics of nature* (Forchtner, 2023c) focus on images and visual communication in cases from Europe, the US, Russia, South Africa, India and the Pacific. A primary finding is the centrality of physical territory. Many chapters highlight the affirmation of homeland and landscape, and the countryside is often imagined as the 'backbone of the nation' (Aguilera-Carnerero, 2023, p. 15). Images are effective at depicting beauty and creating what Forchtner (2023b) calls 'eco-communion', as discussed above, referring to an emotional bond that extends the concept of a (national) imagined community to include the natural environment. Richards' (2025) recent volume on far-right aesthetics argues that the far right uses visual and aesthetic strategies to make its ideologies appealing. Far-right actors mix romantic images of nature with political messaging, and Richards uses Benjamin (2008) to explain how the 'aestheticization of politics' conceals their violent and racist goals. Richards (2025) also shows how these visuals distract from the real causes of climate change, such as capitalism's unsustainable hunt for profit, and contribute to framing environmental protection as a way to defend national borders and racial identity. Overall, these studies show that far-right environmental aesthetics works on two levels simultaneously. On one level, it builds emotional attachment to the land and nature, creating a sense of belonging and community. On a second level, it draws sharp boundaries that tie this attachment to nationalism and racial purity, framing environmental protection as inseparable from the defence of ethnic identity.

As noted, far-right visual communication frequently builds emotional bonds between people and the land, as well as between people and nature. This is achieved, for instance, by emphasizing 'the beautiful, which facilitates a restful and contemplative mind […] and the

sublime, that is, the vast and magnificent capable of moving the mind' (Forchtner, 2023b, p. 7; see also Pietiläinen, 2023; Vicenová et al., 2023). The far right is also shown to mobilize 'the natural' as a dedramatizing and sentimental rhetorical tool. For instance, in Forchtner and Kølvraa's (2017) analysis of German extreme-right social media, nature-based imagery offered 'ambiguous depiction[s] of an "affective" experience or intensity', inviting the observer to 'a spiritual retreat' into the timeless realms of nature (pp. 271–272). Hence, far-right depictions of nature do not necessarily appear as overtly ideological but rather work at affective levels. Similarly, Westberg and Årman (2019) demonstrate how ideals of living 'a natural life' and outdoor lifestyle aesthetics emerge as expressions of a 'natural' and 'healthy' masculinized embodiment of Nordic national socialism, contrasted against a 'sick', feminized, Semitic and degenerate modernity (see also Campion & Phillips, 2023; Tarant, 2019). Hence, previous research has revealed the normalizing potential of nature and how 'the natural' functions ideologically. The rest of this section follows this affective thread to review the literature on affect and emotion in the far right, before turning specifically to affect in studies of far-right ecologism.

Qualitative studies on affect and emotions within contemporary far-right movements have predominantly focused on the articulation of fear, hate, anger and humiliation in interview data (Fangen, 2001; Latif et al., 2018; Mattsson & Johansson, 2019), and in discourse studies of political media outputs (Ahmed, 2001; Breeze, 2019; Keller & Askanius, 2020; Wodak, 2015). In his interviews with white American men, Kimmel (2013) found that their anger stemmed from a sense of 'aggrieved entitlement': a feeling that social and economic privileges had been taken away from them. Wodak (2015) demonstrated that such emotions are strategically deployed across far-right speeches, media and political campaigns to normalize exclusionary politics. Ethnographic work with German neo-Nazi youth has similarly shown that hate is not merely a private emotion but something shaped by broader political and institutional forces (Shoshan, 2016). Ahmed (2001) argued that these emotions do not simply reside in individuals but circulate socially, binding groups together around shared objects of fear or hate. Regardless of what data has been used, the studies

reach similar conclusions that affect and emotion fuel political mobilization and may be strategically deployed in far-right rhetoric to scapegoat others, and to bypass rational argument. However, this focus on 'negative' sentiment does not capture the everyday and 'positive' emotions that also sustain these communities.

The last decade has seen a budding scholarship on the mundane and uplifting affects of far-right imaginaries. In their study of the affective practices and performances of the radical right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Julia Leser and Florian Spissinger (2020) focus on how 'ordinary affects' produce legitimacy, render far-right politics appealing and contribute significantly to the normalization of far-right discourse. Ruth Breeze (2019) employs a corpus-assisted analysis of the affective-discursive practices of the British radical right party, UKIP, showing that the party projects anger, fear, worry and concern, alongside more 'positive affects' such as pleasure and pride (Breeze, 2019, pp. 34, 39). Moreover, Forchtner and Kølvraa (2017) find narratives of intimacy and silliness, and what they call 'straight-forward "friendly" emotionality' (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017, p. 274) in their multimodal analysis of images on extreme-right Facebook pages. In these feeds, the authors find subtle moves towards a more horizontal bond with Nazism that makes Nazism more accessible to a young audience (see also Askanius, 2021a). Ultimately, these findings suggest that 'positive' and everyday emotions play a crucial role in legitimizing and sustaining far-right movements alongside typical 'negative' narratives.

Love as a political affective narrative has also been addressed by recent scholars. Pichel-Vázquez and Grau (2021) analysed the Spanish radical-right party Vox's leader, showing how love functions as a political narrative with tangible effects. Love unifies the in-group while establishing an affective boundary between 'objects of love' (nation, family, equality, men) and 'objects of hate' (feminism, immigration, gender and sexual diversity). In the Nordic context, Switzer (2024) examined the affective landscapes of the Swedish far-right movement 'Det Fria Sverige'. He found that activists negotiated stigma through affective practices of righteousness, love and humour in their efforts to preserve their self-image (Switzer, 2025). Beyer and Weisskircher

(2024) argue that love as a discourse is particularly present in far-right ecologism. They call for an academic focus on how the far right discursively constructs emotions, and the functions these fulfil, rather than discussing the 'authenticity and accuracy of far-right love' (Beyer & Weisskircher, 2024, p. 5).

In his study of Völkisch settlers in Germany, Varco (2023) found that they create rural homesteads based on love for the ingroup and the land, founded on ethnonationalist Blood and Soil principles. Völkisch settlers have attracted scholarly attention in recent years, and their media outlets produce copious material in the affective terrains of utopia, love and hope (see also Beyer & Weisskircher, 2024). The Völkisch discourses offer alternative, but exclusionary and violent, responses to the climate crisis through affective narratives of hope, possibility and utopian thinking (Varco, 2023; see also Dannemann, 2023; Röpke & Speit, 2019).

Moreover, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, earlier research by the Swedish Defence Research Agency examined how ecofascism appears in digital spaces (Kaati et al., 2020). Researchers analysed over 1,000 images from Telegram and found that the content often focuses on uplifting and utopian visions. Such images, constituting almost half of the surveyed material, conveyed an 'identity-constructing message' (Kaati et al., 2020, p. 11, my translation). The theme revolved around 'idyllic scenes of nature, depicting a dreamlike world filled with untouched beauty' (Kaati et al., 2020, p. 11, my translation). More than 60% of the utopian material portrayed animals and landscapes. Some images featured people, particularly women and children, in caring roles or traditional attire, alongside rustic cottages in natural settings, symbolizing aspirations worth defending. These utopian depictions frequently incorporated symbols: nearly 35% included historical elements like Norse runes or markers of Western civilization's origins. The study suggests that this style helps to package racist ideas as environmental protection, and that the green and, in my terms, 'positive' imagery masks the underlying hate (Kaati et al., 2020). Taken together, the studies discussed above suggest that love, hope and utopian feeling play a significant role in sustaining far-right ecological imaginaries, alongside the more commonly studied

negative affects. This thesis examines this dynamic through its analysis of affective visual communication in ecofascist social media content.

Such 'positive' affective communication is often connected to gendered logics. Mattias Ekman's (2014) analysis of Swedish far-right extremist YouTube videos shows how uplifting affects, expressed through creativity, playfulness and camaraderie, support the construction of masculine visual tropes alongside militant elements. Elizabeth Pearson's (2023) ethnographic work on the English Defence League similarly demonstrates this hybrid nature of far-right masculinity. Despite the English Defence League's confrontational activism and rhetoric of protecting white women from Muslims, Pearson observed men regularly displaying care and vulnerability, challenging simplistic understandings of far-right masculine identity. In my own study of gender and nature in the Nordic Resistance Movement's media outlets, I found that, in their understanding, the typically feminised qualities of care for nature, and consequently environmentalism are masculinized and translated into sexist, racist and anti-humanist agendas (Darwish, 2021).

Taken together, these studies suggest that positive emotional bonds, such as friendship, mutual support and care, are important when we seek to understand how far-right masculine subjects are formed and maintained. Previous research has shown that ecofascism is seemingly rife with utopian imaginaries, and consequently positive representations of gender. These findings invite a more thorough investigation of the gendered and affective logics of ecofascism. Yet, existing visual and affective studies rarely examine how gender organizes the logics they describe. Ekman (2014) and Pearson (2023) gesture towards this connection, but neither addresses far-right ecological visual communication specifically, nor does any existing study examine how positive affects are structured by gender in ecofascist social media content. This thesis addresses that gap directly.

3.4 At the intersection

This chapter has presented research on the evolution of political ecologies of the far right (PEFR) as a field, and has shown that far-right ecologism is built upon a rooted nationalism and a binary, gendered division between the local and the global. While gender has received increasing analytical attention within PEFR, existing studies have focused predominantly on masculinity expressed through negative, militarized and exclusionary affects, what I term the 'anti-nature' and 'pro-nature' masculine stances. The feminized, positive affective dimensions of far-right ecologism, and ecofascism specifically, remain unexamined. The chapter has also established that contemporary far-right movements rely heavily on visual and affective strategies to normalize their ideologies, deploying negative affects such as fear and anger alongside more positive ones such as love, hope and belonging to build community and recruit members.

Three specific gaps emerge from this review. First, research on affect and emotion in far-right movements has focused predominantly on 'negative' affects such as fear, hatred, anger and resentment. While a budding scholarship on 'positive' and everyday affects is taking shape, no study has yet examined how positive and gendered affects function specifically within ecofascist contexts. Second, research on gender in PEFR has established a recurring binary in which masculinity is tied to hard, territorial and protective representations of nature, while femininity is confined to domestic and reproductive roles. However, no study has yet examined how gendered representations specifically structure and channel positive affective communication in ecofascist visual communication. Third, while the visual and aesthetic dimensions of far-right environmental communication have attracted growing scholarly attention, these studies rarely examine how gender organizes the affective and aesthetic logics they describe. Kaati et al.'s (2020) finding that nearly half of ecofascist Telegram content is dominated by utopian, positively charged imagery, including women, children and animals in idyllic settings, directly invites a gendered and affective analysis that has not yet been undertaken.

In this thesis, using ecofascism as a case, I examine how positive and gendered affects are discursively constructed in far-right visual

communication and what work they perform. In doing so, I respond to calls in previous research for research on the discursive construction of emotion in far-right ecologism and extend the field by bringing a gender-analytical perspective to this affective terrain. The analysis shows that gendered representations not only accompany positive affects but actively structure and naturalize them, making ideology feel like belonging, care and love rather than politics.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks that inform the project and are deployed in the articles. It also describes the key concepts underpinning the analysis. I draw upon theories from various disciplines to analyse the gendered, visual and affective dimensions of ecofascist communication. To begin, I establish my understanding of gender as a theoretical category and examine how gender and radical nationalism are theorized as inextricably intertwined, including discussions of hybrid masculinity and hegemonic femininity. Second, I develop my approach to affect, paying particular attention to positive affect as a mobilizing force. Third, I integrate my approach to gender and affect with theories of visual communication and propaganda to trace how radical nationalism becomes normalized. Finally, I synthesize these theoretical strands into a coherent analytical lens with which to approach the empirical data.

4.1 Gender and radical nationalism

Gender is understood in this thesis as a logic by which social practice is ordered, and as inextricably bound to historical and cultural dynamics and other intersecting social identities (Connell, 2005). Moreover, gender is a social practice that refers to bodies and what bodies do; for instance, in the reproductive arena (Connell, 2005, p. 71). The social practice of gender cannot, however, be reduced to the body.

While gender is understood as fluid, relational and non-binary, what it means to 'be a man' or 'be a woman' is always shaped by intersecting social hierarchies such as race, class and ethnicity, producing multiple and overlapping identity positions (Connell, 2005; Butler, 1999). The analytical focus here is therefore on the social construction of gender in the contemporary Nordic context. This analytical point of departure is based on the distinctions between men and women as social categories, which is accentuated in fascism's binary logic of gender, which naturalizes biological sex as essential (Roose et al., 2022). Thus, my venture is to analyse the discursive *meanings* attributed to gender: how gender is socially constructed in Nordic radical nationalism through visual media.

In line with feminist scholarship, I treat gender as constitutive of nationalist projects (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; McClintock, 1995). Within this framework, nationalism operates through gendered logics that position women as biological and symbolic reproducers of the nation, responsible for transmitting cultural values and maintaining ethnic boundaries (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). Hence, I understand nationalist imaginaries as relying on gendered metaphors – i.e. the nation as mother, the homeland as a female body – that naturalize hierarchies and justify both the protection and control of women (Enloe, 1989; Nagel, 1998). Far-right ideology is also positioned here as built upon essentialized gender binaries that naturalize hierarchies between men and women, framing these hierarchies as integral to racialized and nationalist projects (Köttig et al., 2017; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2014). Gender is thus fundamental to my analysis of how nationalist and far-right movements construct collective identity and political legitimacy.

Existing theories suggest that the far right attracts men primarily because it offers a way to construct and prove masculine identity, rather than simply due to a shared ideology. I approach the empirical material through the work developed by Kimmel (2007, 2018), who argues that joining these movements is a performative act designed to 'prove' manliness. Similar research has established that factors such as social exclusion and mental health struggles often drive men towards extremism because these spaces allow them to validate their masculinity (Fangen, 2003; Mattsson & Johansson, 2021; Gottzén, 2025). Far-right spaces thus function as arenas for performing and proving manliness, which makes it essential to understand gendered communication strategies when analysing their appeal. Consequently, I employ these theories in order to understand how gendered narratives attract men to the far right on both ideological and individual levels.

To understand women's engagement with the far right, this study draws upon the concept of 'femonationalism', which describes how nationalist politics co-opt feminist discourse on gender equality to construct racialized hierarchies between 'civilized' Western nations and 'backward' immigrant populations (Farris, 2017; Meret & Siim, 2013; Indelicato & Lopes, 2024; Jungar & Jupskås, 2024). This

framework explains that women are attracted to the far right through fear of the backward other, as well as through ideas about 'modernized' traditional and complementary gender roles. Many female far-right influencers employ femonationalist strategies and gendered narratives on digital platforms in order to direct audiences towards far-right ideology (Askanius, 2021c; Darby, 2021; Leidig, 2023). Radical nationalist women's social media accounts often function as gateways to more extreme content online, recruiting both women and men into far-right spaces (Leidig, 2023; Tebaldi, 2023b). Consequently, I build on the premise that women play a significant role in attracting both men and women to far-right spheres.

4.1.1 Hybrid masculinity

When theorizing expressions of masculinity in the ecofascist discourse, I primarily employ the concept of hybrid masculinity, developed by Tristan Bridges and C. J. Pascoe (2014). I find hybrid masculinity useful for conceptualizing the negotiation of typically feminized elements such as care and compassion in fascist masculinity. The concept of hybrid masculinities denotes the 'selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities' (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 246). Scholarly work utilizing this concept usually asks whether masculinities are changing in their attitudes towards inclusivity and equality, and has been used to theorize mainstream masculinities, showing the 'flexibility of patriarchy' and how male supremacy is both secured and obscured (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 256; Johnson, 2005). Hybrid masculinity as a concept builds on Connell's (2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) influential theory of 'hegemonic masculinity', which in turn refers to a social system and pattern of practices that constitutes the dominant way of being a man within a particular gender hierarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 832, 848). Studies of masculinity and the far right have used this concept to demonstrate that nationalist movements construct idealized masculinities centred on national defence, positioning men as protectors and warriors while subordinating alternative expressions of

gender (Roose et al., 2022).[11] Scholars applying this theory in the Nordic context have shown that hegemonic masculinity has developed as caring, in tandem with gender-equality policies such as paternity leave (Hearn et al., 2012, p. 39; Johansson & Klinth, 2008).

The point of discussing hybrid masculinities in concert with extremist masculinities is not to investigate whether extremist masculinities are becoming more equality oriented. Inequality is a founding principle of fascism, and hierarchy is its social structure. Fascism is founded on patriarchy and gender domination, which its proponents do not usually deny; rather, fascism refutes the claim that this oppression is unjust. However, Bridges and Pascoe (2014, p. 247) note that '[h]ybrid masculinities may be best thought of as contemporary expressions of gender and sexual inequality'. Hence, the concept of hybrid masculinities helps to illuminate how fascist discourse strategically incorporates non-traditional masculinized-connoted behaviour into its masculine practices in order to secure its legitimacy.

The visual texts that I have reviewed in Article 1 depict militant or masked men in connection with signifiers of cuteness, such as animals or children. This performance is reminiscent of what Messner (2007) calls the 'kindergarten commando' in his study of American masculinity. It represents a masculinity 'foregrounding muscle, toughness and the threat of violence' followed by 'situationally appropriate symbolic displays of compassion' (Messner, 2007; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 251). This interaction serves to soften authority and invite a trust response, which results in power relations becoming obscured (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 251). Such a softening fortifies social symbolic boundaries by reinscribing domination in obscure ways. Employing hybrid masculinity as a theoretical concept helps me to understand how the strategic combination of dominance and care makes extremist masculinity appear more palatable, while maintaining underlying hierarchies.

[11] Connell herself read German fascism as 'an exemplary form of hegemonic masculinity', in which irrationality, violence and discipline were exalted qualities (Connell, 2005, pp. 148, 193).

The construction of masculinity in ecofascist discourse can also be understood through what Bridges and Pascoe (2014) call discursive distancing as part of hybrid masculinity. This refers to how white, privileged men in particular seek to create some distance between themselves and hegemonic masculinity, enabling them to 'frame themselves as outside of existing systems of privilege and inequality' (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 250). The ecofascist discourse creates discursive distance from normative masculinity by appealing to the constructed truth of a nature-based hierarchy. The claim is that modern men are misogynistic because they 'allow' feminism and the disintegration of gender roles and family values. Nordic fascists hold that they in fact *respect* women by revering them as nurturing creatures through the 'universal laws of nature' (Nordic Resistance Movement, 2016; Darwish, 2018). Moreover, racialized men are framed as cruel and compassionless towards animals and nature. In Nordic ecofascism, only white people are viewed as capable of understanding and appreciating the sacred connection between humanity and nature. This perspective is constructed in direct opposition to the 'urbanite, liberal' individual, who is portrayed as blinded by the decadence and degeneracy of the modern era (Nordisk Radio, 2017).

Article 2 demonstrates how ecofascist discourse incorporates the 'contemplative man' into its masculine ideal. By presenting men as introspective nature-lovers rather than aggressive brutes or passive left-liberals, ecofascist discourse can claim distance from both explicitly violent extremism and modern liberal men. This ethno-nationalist and anti-urban framing extends to rejecting Nordic gender equality and its associated normative masculinity, positioning radical nationalist masculinity as truer and more natural. This creates discursive distance between fascist and normative masculinity, allowing the misogyny inherent in fascist masculinity to be obscured and instead attributed to liberal, normative masculinity. In short, ecofascist discourse can be understood through the lens of hybrid masculinity: It masks its inherent misogyny by adopting 'contemplative' traits, such as caring, gentle and aesthetically 'soft' representations of men in nature, allowing it to reject modern gender equality while still claiming moral superiority.

4.1.2 Hegemonic femininity

In Article 3, I draw upon Doerr and Svatoňová's (2023) theorization of far-right femininity, focusing on the concept of 'hegemonic femininity'. Their study of visualizations of womanhood found on US far-right Telegram channels is based on the tension between the growing involvement of women in the far right's political leadership roles and its traditional ideology of wifely submission (see also Mattheis, 2018). This creates what they call an 'image problem': Women's increased political engagement challenges the credibility of conservative gender ideals. Doerr and Svatoňová draw on Schippers' (2007) theorizing of hegemonic femininity as a cultural ideal of femininity that legitimates and reproduces a gender hierarchy. To Schippers, hegemonic femininity is a set of characteristics that are considered 'womanly' and establish and legitimize a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity, thereby guaranteeing men's dominant position and women's subordination. Importantly, Doerr and Svatoňová contrast this against Connell's (1987) concept of 'emphasised femininity', which describes a subordinated form of compliance that accommodates men but holds no power. In contrast, Schippers' 'hegemonic femininity' shows that certain feminine traits actively legitimize masculinity and create hierarchies among women themselves. This shifts the focus from women only enacting obedience to wielding a relational power that supports the gender order.

Doerr and Svatoňová (2023) found that portrayals of women depicted them either as 'passive' objects of a far-right imaginary or 'active' political subjectivities. The authors define the latter to comprises 'hegemonic' far-right women ('approved') and 'feared' left-liberal women ('disapproved'). The passive representations, which they term 'emphasized' ('approved') and 'despised' ('disapproved') femininity, are anonymized depictions of women's bodies as either appealing or unappealing to the male gaze. The most frequent portrayal in Doerr and Svatoňová's (2023) study was what they call 'emphasized femininity' (seemingly not the same as Connell's version above): women represented as wives, girlfriends and mothers who are attractive to the male gaze, submissive and non-emancipated, and often depicted as potential victims of violent crimes perpetrated by migrants (p. 12). Indeed,

this representation aligns with earlier research that found far-right femininity to be depicted as pure, passive and vulnerable.

In my study of the wheat girl, I found several such 'emphasized' feminine representations of women, the wheat girl trope typically being read through this lens. However, I focused the analysis on hegemonic femininity because it captures an interesting tension in the material: While the wheat girl appears to be passive and decorative (aligning with 'emphasized femininity'), she simultaneously functions as an agentic transmitter of tradition and spiritual knowledge (aligning with 'hegemonic femininity'). Within the wheat girl trope, hegemonic femininity allows women to exercise agency in ways that ultimately support male dominance and patriarchal norms, reframing 'gender equality' as alignment with traditional values rather than dismantling hierarchies.

To summarize this section on gender and radical nationalism, gender is shown to be inseparable from nationalist projects, which is demonstrated by the concepts of hybrid masculinity and hegemonic femininity. Fascist discourse strategically incorporates feminized elements while maintaining patriarchal hierarchies, and this shapes how the far right defines identity, structures internal power and connects with potential supporters. However, these connections require emotional resonance if they are to function effectively. It is therefore essential to understand how these gendered identities are felt when analysing their power. In the following, I discuss theories on affect as a social process.

4.2 Affect and emotion

This study is based on the premise that affects and emotions are social processes and products. The last 40 years of research on affect and emotions in the social sciences has generated a rich set of concepts, perspectives and theories (see Bericat, 2016; Hemmings, 2005). The common understanding of emotions is that they are generated within the individual organism of the self, and constitute 'the bodily manifestation of the importance that an event in the natural or social world has for a subject' (Bericat, 2016, p. 493). However, the nature of emotions is relational and therefore they occur within the subject in

tandem with external forces (Jasper, 2011). This means that the contextual culture defines what, when and how we 'should' feel, and the cultural matrix of any emotion and the patterns of social action commonly associated with it need to be addressed (Bericat, 2016; Jasper, 2011). This relational and cultural approach to emotion informs my analysis of how ecofascist visual communication strategically mobilizes affect.

Social studies of affect have generally resulted in two main tracks. The first is what is often called affect theory, primarily drawing upon Brian Massumi's (1995) work. Scholars in this 'Massumian' vein espouse a view of affect as ultimately exceeding meaning-making and thus discourse. This branch usually see emotion as a structuralist fix that translates raw affect into language (Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). In this thesis, I do not adopt this position, but situate my study within the second track, which is the discourse approach to affect. Following scholars like Ahmed (2014), Milani and Richardson (2021) and Westberg (2021), I treat affect and emotions as intertwined with and inseparable from social practice. The discourse approach locates affect within discourse, and orients itself towards the functions of affect in social meaning-making. In this thesis, I use the terms affect and emotion interchangeably to describe the multimodal processes through which objects are produced, shared and politicized. Affect and emotion refer to the capacity of bodies and signs to move us, and how that movement is named, circulated and given shape within a specific historical context. I use the word 'feelings' to denote the subjective lived experience of being moved.

I particularly draw inspiration from phenomenologist Sara Ahmed (2010a, 2014). In the analysis of my three empirical studies (Articles 1–3), I employ concepts from Ahmed's (2010a, 2014) framework describing how emotions become political and social and how they circulate. My focus is thus on meaning-making, how affects circulate discursively, shape subjects and can be employed strategically in political communication. I adopt her concept of the 'affective economy', which explains how the *objects* of emotion circulate, rather than the emotion itself. As these objects – for instance images, tropes and symbols – move through discourse, they become 'sticky'; saturated by

affect through repetition (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11). This stickiness allows objects to become associated with specific bodies or groups, which generates social tension and defines subjectivities. For example, a specific visual trope might become 'sticky' with fear, thereby 'sticking' that fear to a particular demographic (Ahmed, 2014, p. 64). Hence, I approach affect as an object of analysis but also as a methodological entry point. Moments of 'affective dissonance' (Åhäll, 2018) in the material, for instance when something appears contradictory or deceptively soft, are treated as analytically productive, revealing underlying power structures. Ahmed (2010a, 2014) and Åhäll (2018) have helped me to orient the analysis towards what affects do politically: how they reproduce gendered and racial hierarchies as natural or self-evident.

Jasper's (2011) conceptualization of emotions as 'moral batteries' is useful for analysing the interplay of affect, gender and the far right. He states that the contrast between 'positive' and 'negative' emotions motivates action or demands attention: 'An emotion can be strengthened when we explicitly or implicitly compare it to its opposite, just as a battery works through the tension between its positive and negative poles' (Jasper, 2011, p. 291).[12] Similarly, Ahmed (2014) finds that racist and violent 'hate' groups often describe themselves as loving organizations on their websites (p. 42). The US groups she discusses claim to love their nation, communities or race so deeply that their retaliation against any threat is justified. Hence, they frame hate as a secondary reaction to love for the threatened object, i.e. the white race. Furthermore, the love for this shared object, i.e. whiteness,

[12] My approach is not to be confused with that of Randall Collins (2005), who distinguishes between positive and negative emotional energy in the sense of (respectively) shared and non-shared feelings within social movements. In his understanding, shared emotions are always positive because they unite a social group and release energy. This means that anger and hate can be positive emotional energy despite being considered 'negative' emotions (Latif et al., 2018). Negative, as in non-shared, emotions draw energy away from the group. In contrast, I conceptualize positive and negative affects as ways in which language shapes gender, rather than as measures of group unity.

explains the shared 'communal' response of hate (Ahmed, 2014, p. 43). This framing links these far-right groups to positive emotions and values, and makes their actions appear redemptive and liberating rather than aggressive (Ahmed, 2014, p. 123; see also Kalm & Meeuwisse, 2020). In this way, Ahmed shows that love and hate each rely on the other to define themselves through contrast and, like Jasper (2011), she argues that negative and positive emotions cannot be analysed separately – they work together and must be contextualized dynamically. Extrapolating this argument to the data in this thesis, it follows that positive affect needs negative affect to define itself. The two co-exist within a moral battery, amplifying each other and offering evaluations of 'good' and 'bad'. Moreover, as love becomes the property of a particular kind of subject (Ahmed, 2014, p. 123), so positive affect becomes the property of the subjects in ecofascist discourse: the cute masculinist protector, the contemplative man and the wheat girl. Thus, positive affect works as a tool for subjectivation, marking these figures as morally good and worthy.

To further understand how affect shapes subjects through communication, I have employed a multimodal critical discourse perspective. Hence, in addition to my definition of affect as the capacity of bodies and signs to move us, I also understand it as a multimodal practice that works through several different modes of communication (Westberg, 2021; T. M. Milani & Richardson, 2021). This approach allows me to focus on 'subject formation', meaning 'how discourses can attract, seduce, repel or provoke, thereby making people subject to certain emotions in relation to different social phenomena and political issues' (Westberg, 2021, p. 21). Through this framework, I understand ecofascist communication to contribute to subject formation by shaping emotional responses to nature, gender and political ideology. Subject formation also concerns how discursive tropes are formed through affective interpellation. By a discursive trope, I mean a recurring figurative device that conveys meaning, constructs social and ideological frameworks, and generates affect through its repetitive circulation (see Ahmed, 2010, Chapter 5). Examples of such tropes employed in radical nationalist (and popular) rhetoric may be the 'ugly feminist' (Doerr & Svatoňová, 2023), the 'swarming immigrants' (Davies, 2021) and the 'impotent liberal' (Vaughn, 2022).

Subject formation concerns both how individuals become open to certain emotions and how discursive tropes are constituted through an 'affective economy' of circulation and repetition (Ahmed, 2014). This circulation forms not only individual subjects but also collectives. Papacharissi (2014) terms these 'affective publics': groups that form around shared emotions circulating through digital networks via likes, reposts and hashtags. They are not fixed communities but emerge through communication itself. Ecofascist discourse mobilizes this dynamic, as audiences are drawn into political community through engaging with affectively charged content. I use the theories concerning subject formation and affective publics to analyse how gender is affectively communicated and circulated through visual and multimodal practices.

4.2.1 The 'positive' affective turn

This section discusses the concept of 'positive affect' as it is employed in this thesis. The analysis centres on what may be called – to paraphrase Ahmed (2014) – the 'positive affective economy' of gendered ecofascist communication. The theoretical focus on what I call positive affect emerges from two interrelated origins. Firstly, the analysis draws from an empirical observation regarding existing scholarship on far-right ideology, its movements and motivating forces. To date, much of the research in this field has concentrated predominantly on what might be termed affects of hostility, or what cultural theorist Sianne Ngai (2005) refers to as 'ugly feelings', meaning affective states that are culturally coded as 'negative'. These include anger, hate, fear and resentment (Kimmel, 2013, 2018; Roose et al., 2022; Wodak, 2015; Fangen, 2003; Shoshan, 2016). This body of literature has undertaken the substantial work of illuminating how such emotions drive far-right engagement and mobilization. However, empirical research shows that uplifting imaginaries occupy a significant proportion of ecofascist communication (Kaati et al., 2020; see section 5.2.2 for an assessment of this report). This seeming incongruence with earlier research sparked my interest in 'positive' emotional experiences, such as joy, love and compassion in the ideological communication of ecofascist digital spaces.

Secondly, the analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework of Ahmed's (2010b, 2014) scholarship on affect. There has been a turn towards critically theorizing positive affects and emotions in cultural queer studies, as seen in the work on optimism by Berlant (2011) and Snediker (2009), Muñoz (2007) on hope and utopia, as well as Ahmed (2010a) on happiness. These studies have critically examined how positive affects contribute to controlling people and maintaining hierarchies (see also Beauvoir, 1989; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 2020). While Ahmed (2010b, 2014) has not deployed 'positive affect' as a defined theoretical term in the manner of 'affective politics' or an 'affective economy', she nevertheless employs it throughout her work to examine how happiness produces its objects.[13] She observes, for instance, that happiness may create its own objects, and that such objects may be 'passed around, accumulating positive affective value as social goods' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 21). This framework draws explicitly on a Marxist analysis of value accumulation (Ahmed, 2014, Chapter 2). Certain objects become linked to positive affect through their frequent circulation, and this circulation in turn creates affective objects. This dynamic is exemplified by how objects may be endowed with positive affect even before we experience them ourselves; for instance, the object of heterosexuality, marriage and tradition. She calls these 'happy objects' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 219), and clarifies:

> We can also anticipate that an object will cause happiness in advance of its arrival; the object becomes available within a horizon of possibility because it has already been given positive affect. The judgment that some things are good not only precedes our encounter with things, but directs us toward those things. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 220)

This means that these objects, such as marriage, cars, jobs or heterosexuality, are loaded with expectations of happiness because our cultural scripts tell us they will deliver it. It therefore follows that happiness can be used to sustain power, oppression and hierarchies. An example of this dynamic is the trope of 'the happy housewife' or 'the happy slave', which is fabricated by the person in power in order to

[13] (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 16, 21, 24, 28, 136, 222; 2014, pp. 121, 219, 220).

exploit the other (Ahmed, 2010, p. 2). A position presented as happy by those in power is not necessarily experienced as such by those who inhabit it. In Ahmed's (2010a, p. 269) words: 'Happiness is promised to those who agree to cover over the causes of unhappiness: the promise of happiness is a promise of return. To speak out about violence and injustice is to refuse this promise.' Hence, what circulates is not the feeling itself, but the *promise* of the feeling – an expectation that lags behind reality.

I employ Ahmed's framework to identify what constitutes these happy or positively charged objects circulating within radical nationalist or ecofascist discourse, particularly as they intersect with gender. I also use it to examine how these promised feelings work to orient subjects towards exclusionary political positions and to naturalize exclusionary ideologies. Thus, I offer the definition of positive affect as emotional experiences that are culturally deemed positive, like joy, love, compassion and utopian visions, which become attached to certain objects that then circulate as social goods, directing subjects towards them.

While I emphasize the role of positive affect in ecofascist social media, it should be noted that an overly dualistic approach may obfuscate ambiguities in far-right politics because affect is never exclusively positive or negative but rather moves and transforms depending upon what it encounters. With affect existing as complex mixtures rather than clear-cut categories, it is not always possible to discriminate 'positive' from 'negative' (Ngai, 2005; Ahmed, 2010). As discussed above, hate speech directed towards an outgroup may simultaneously signal love towards the ingroup, and vice versa (Ahmed, 2001). Another expression of positive affect in far-right spaces might be humour, which has been subject to a relatively large amount of scholarly attention. Humour is often weaponized in far-right communication in combination with hatred in order to spread racist and sexist jokes (Askanius, 2021b; Fossberg & Fangen, 2025; Hakokõngäs et al., 2020; Nagle, 2017; Schmid et al., 2025). This combination creates positive affects through explicitly degrading rhetoric that nonetheless makes extremist content more engaging and shareable.

Leser and Spissinger (2020) call for a 'post-dualistic' understanding of political affects in their study of the affective practices and performances of the party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). They focus on 'ordinary affects', which means highlighting potentially overlooked dynamics that may have influenced the successes of far-right political organizations, and critique the focus on 'negative affects' in studies of affective politics because it tends to lead to the overlooking of ambiguity and context (Leser & Spissinger, 2020). I agree with them that it is important to look beyond negativity in the affective politics of far-right agents and, indeed, that the term positive affect necessarily constructs its semantically loaded opposite as negative affect. Rather than insisting upon a dualistic understanding of affects, my intention is to use positive affect as an analytical tool to understand precisely those facets of affective communication within the far right that extend beyond the 'negative', and to tease out affective transmissions that are commonly deemed positive.

In Article 1, I have employed the concept of 'cuteness' to understand positive affective communication. Cuteness occupies both affective and aesthetic realms and is related to the Japanese Kawaii culture (J. P. Dale et al., 2016; Hasselgren, 2020). Cuteness usually triggers a physical and affective response, functioning as a 'potential' rather than determined human response to a definable set of stimuli (Dale, 2016, p. 35). As an aesthetic, cuteness can be strategically manipulated for a variety of purposes: artistic, but also commercial and political. Cute studies is an emerging academic field that critically examines the cultural, psychological and social dimensions of cuteness as a pervasive aesthetic in global culture (Dale, 2016). While cuteness is a feminised aesthetic, it is fundamentally ambiguous and ideologically malleable (Ngai, 2015). Hence, cuteness can inspire a range of affects depending on the context of the cute object. In the article, I show that cuteness operates as an affective mechanism that normalizes extremist ideologies by aligning them with positive emotions and familiar cultural symbols. The cute objects thus function as sticky sites that collect and hold emotion. The use of cuteness is not necessarily unique to ecofascist communication strategies, but the article argues that this strategy is particularly effective in ecofascist propaganda because it connects to esoteric ideas about natural empathy among white people

that can be effectively demonstrated through visual media. As a case study, however, the workings of ecofascist social media may be understood as outlining how cuteness functions within radical nationalist digital spaces in general.

Feminist and post-colonial theories inform my understanding of how positive emotionality can be a way to conceal violence and exclusion, not only by framing domination as care, but also by masking hierarchical and racialized power relations as benevolent or natural. Iris Marion Young (2005) theorizes the connections between violence and love and shows that the framing of violence as protection contributes to maintaining a gendered hierarchy. Those who seek to legitimize their right to protect must appear to be kind and loving, but also capable of exerting power and violence. Building on postcolonial feminist scholarship, nationalism itself is structured through gendered and familial imaginaries in which the nation is figured as vulnerable and in need of protection (McClintock, 1995). Within these imaginaries, women often come to symbolize the moral and reproductive core of the nation. As Shome (2001) further argues, white femininity functions as a key site through which racialized national boundaries are secured, mediating inclusion, exclusion and belonging. Fascist movements draw strongly on these logics, constructing themselves as masculine protectors of a possibly feminized nation (or land), where the nation is considered vulnerable and open to invasion, or even penetration (Ahmed, 2014; Rosamond & Davitti, 2022). I have used Young's theory to understand how the idea of the loving nationalist protector justifies (eco)fascism's ethnopluralism, separatism and border protection (explored in detail in Article 1). These studies inform the theoretical framework that I have applied to analyse how positive emotions can function as vehicles for exclusion.

To summarize this section on affect and emotion, Ahmed's (2010a, 2014) framework demonstrates how emotions circulate and create subjects. I use this framework to show how positive affects like happiness, love and cuteness become attached to exclusionary politics, promising emotional fulfilment while concealing violence. This positive affective economy functions strategically to seduce the reader via romanticized nature imagery and gendered symbols, making

extremist ideology appear natural and appealing. Through this process, positive affect also functions as a tool for subjectivation, marking certain figures as morally good and drawing audiences towards exclusionary political positions.

4.3 Communication and normalization

This thesis takes visual communication as its empirical focus. Visual communication on social media can consist of propaganda, but it also includes general content that brings people together, building a sense of shared identity through the small daily interactions of likes, reactions and reposts (Papacharissi, 2014). In this thesis, I understand communication as the socially and culturally shaped process through which meaning is produced and interpreted using multiple semiotic modes (e.g. images, texts, symbols) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2021). These meanings are context-dependent, and subject to interpretation. The main form of communication analysed in this thesis is content posted on ecofascist Telegram channels.

Visual communication can also take the shape of propaganda. To explain what propaganda *is,* I begin with Jowett and O'Donnell's (2015) definition as 'the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist' (p. 7). To understand *how* ecofascist propaganda functions, I approach it through multimodal critical discourse analysis, examining how visual and textual elements construct gendered meanings (see chapter 5). This framework adds dynamism to Jowett and O'Donnell's (2015) definition, revealing that propaganda is more complex than simple 'manipulation'. Ecofascist propaganda in decentralized digital networks is not state managed and it does more than just manipulate, it also *seduces* through feminized nature imagery and positive emotions. Visual communication imbued with ideology is often intentionally ambiguous (Warlaumont, 1995). These visuals work as emotional sites where contradictory political concepts can exist side by side, blurring ideological boundaries and allowing hybrid forms to emerge (Lubarda, 2023). Within this visual and affective communication, I approach ideology through the lens of critical discourse analysis,

whereby it is best understood through its discursive realization (Fairclough, 2013a). The visual and affective communication offers certain belief systems, which are here understood as *expressions* of ecofascist and far-right ecologist ideology. Consequently, I treat the memes and images circulating within these digital spheres as discursive practices that express ecofascist and far-right ecological worldviews. While ideology is not the central theoretical concept of this thesis, the discourse approach allows me to analyse how these visual forms actively construct political meaning in practice.

I complement this approach with Benjamin's (2008) theory about fascist aesthetics in order to emphasize how ecofascist content aestheticizes politics through romanticized nature imagery (see also Richards, 2025). While print culture served as the primary medium for propaganda in the twentieth century, digital platforms now facilitate the spread of political messaging. Drawing on Benjamin's (2008) work, I examine fascist propaganda through the lens of social media's technological affordances. Benjamin argued that the mechanical reproduction of art destroys the 'aura' of an artwork, the distinctive, authentic existence of a work in time and space. It follows that digital visual media lack this original presence. However, memes as digital artefacts move beyond reproduction by functioning through a remix culture in which users consciously alter and adapt content, transforming static messages into dynamic communication tools. The specific platform characteristics and affordances of Telegram, and how this shapes the circulation of ecofascist visual content, are discussed in chapter 5.

To understand the function and social labour of ecofascist propaganda, I apply the concept of normalization. I draw upon Rheindorf and Wodak (2019, p. 307) understanding of normalization processes as:

> the incorporation of fringe ideologies into the mainstream – not only of politics but of popular culture and other fields as well – through recontextualisations and resemiotisations, usually moving from backstage to frontstage, and across fields as well as genres.

Wodak (2025) states that normalization refers to the normative level of social conventions and moral values, which may be challenged and subsequently changed, frequently resulting in discursive shifts, while she defines mainstreaming as 'the empirical manifestations (of different kinds) of normalised developments' (pp. 28–29). Such normalization involves the strategic softening of discourse to appeal to a wider audience extending beyond the far right, which is a key tactic in contemporary transnational efforts to integrate fringe ideas into the mainstream (Askanius, 2021a; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017; Miller-Idriss, 2017).

However, relying only on the 'fringe-to-centre' model proposed by Rheindorf and Wodak (2019) assumes a morally pure mainstream from which corrupt extremes diverge. As Brown et al. (2021) argue, the liberal mainstream has always contained exclusionary hierarchies. I concur with their position, which is critical of the concept of 'mainstreaming', perceiving the mainstream as neither 'good' nor fixed, but fluid and subject to changing norms. When referring to mainstream discourse, I mean the hegemonic discourse which is structured by the Nordic, and generally Western, liberal democracies, and which appears natural and commonsense. In Sweden specifically, this mainstream has entailed the swift normalization of radical nationalist and anti-gender discourse following the 2022 election when the right-wing block won, reflecting worldwide authoritarian trends (Gemzöe et al., 2025). The Nordic model of gender equality, including paid parental leave and gender quotas, has been constructed as highly successful in national and international discourses on the Nordic countries. Sweden in particular has cultivated a self-image as the world's most gender-equal country, a position described as 'Swedish exceptionalism' (e.g. Martinsson et al., 2016; Jezierska & Towns, 2018). In this context of shifting norms, examining how ecofascist communication blurs the boundaries between wholesome domesticity and radical nationalism demonstrates the fluidity of what counts as 'mainstream'.

When discussing normalization and mainstreaming, it is important to note that exclusionary forms of nationalism and environmental governance can emerge within liberal democracies (Billig, 1995). Liberal-

democratic orders have historically coexisted with, and at times relied upon, racialized hierarchies, gendered inequalities and extractive relations to non-human nature and animals. In this sense, ecofascist logics do not enter liberal politics from the outside but can arise through ordinary policy debates, crisis narratives and technocratic solutions to environmental problems. Ecofascism can thus be understood as a formation that develops within 'everyday' liberal practices, rather than as a fully external or exceptional ideology (Ahmann & Oguz, 2025). From this perspective, what appears to be the 'mainstreaming' of racist or ecofascist ideas often involves the reworking and intensification of existing liberal assumptions, as shown in analyses of centrist climate politics that prioritize exclusionary or authoritarian responses to ecological crisis (Simpson & Cheever, 2025; Dyett & Thomas, 2019; Thomas & Gosink, 2021).This theoretical tension requires a refinement of the concept of normalization. Since the mainstream is a site of latent exclusionary logics, normalization does not simply consist of the introduction of 'fringe' ideas. Ecofascist visual communication renders implicit anxieties into explicit legible imagery, and it is through this visual articulation that normalization occurs. Drawing on Barthes' (2012) concept of myth, this process can be understood as a form of naturalization, where radical nationalist meanings become anchored to familiar, wholesome imagery, making the ideology appear to be common sense. Moreover, the mundane register of this visual language normalizes its nationalist content through familiar, everyday aesthetics (cf. Billig, 1995).

My analysis posits that ecofascist visual communication functions to both *soften* radical discourse to make it more palatable to an unsympathetic audience, and to *recode* existing anxieties (such as the fear of environmental collapse or the desire for a traditional order) within the liberal mainstream. These anxieties in turn become an explicit, visually appealing nationalist narrative. Wholesome, positive affective aesthetics thus contribute to bridging the gap between the implicit biases of the liberal order and explicit radical nationalist ideology, framing ecofascism as the means to resolve the fears already present within the liberal mainstream. The concepts of 'normalization' and 'the mainstream' are relevant here because they help us to trace how explicitly radical nationalist aesthetics and discourse gain broader

acceptance and legitimacy in public discourse, especially through the use of positive affective imaginaries. Specifically, this thesis argues that what can be called 'mainstreaming from below' occurs on far-right social media, where users drive far-right logics upwards into the visual mainstream through everyday content creation and circulation. This reframing illuminates how ecofascism appeals to widespread anxieties regarding security, nature and purity by presenting itself as a natural and legitimate response.

To summarize, this section on visual communication and normalization has demonstrated how aesthetic and affective strategies make ecofascist discourse appear ordinary and appealing. The boundaries between wholesome domesticity and exclusionary radical nationalism become blurred through the employment of romanticized imagery and gendered symbols, moving this discourse from the margins into the mainstream.

4.4 Analytical synthesis

This chapter has presented the thesis' theoretical framework, which synthesizes gender, affect, communication and normalization to analyse how ecofascist propaganda operates. Gender is understood as inextricable from nationalist projects, with the concepts of hybrid masculinity and hegemonic femininity demonstrating how fascist discourse strategically incorporates typically feminized elements while maintaining patriarchal hierarchies. Ahmed's (2010a, 2014) framework depicting how emotions circulate and create subjects illuminates how positive affects like happiness, love and cuteness become attached to exclusionary politics, promising emotional fulfilment while concealing violence. This positive affective economy works through visual communication and propaganda, employing romanticized nature imagery and gendered symbols to seduce the reader and contribute to making extremist ideology appear natural and appealing.

Finally, normalization processes explain how these affective and visual strategies move ecofascist discourse from fringe to mainstream, blurring the boundaries between wholesome domesticity and radical nationalism. While affect and normalization are often understood as

sequential, in that ideology normalizes a symbol, and then positive feeling attaches to that symbol, I argue that these processes are mutually constitutive. Based on these theories, my study explores how positive affect also enables normalization. Taken together, the theoretical strands discussed above provide a framework for analysing how gendered nature imagery mobilizes positive affect in order to naturalize fascist politics and cultivate political attachments in digital spaces.

5 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter addresses the methodological orientation of the study. Undertaking an academic investigation into the affective and emotional dimensions of discourse is an endeavour of feminist research, because these bodily processes have been cast as 'irrational' and unscientific within a positivist science dominated by male normativity (Code, 2018; Harding, 2017). Critically researching emotions entails attending to aspects of social life that are not always explicitly articulated but are nonetheless expressed and negotiated through communication. Therefore, I have developed the methodology of this study to analyse negotiations of meanings and language. As established in chapter 4, I draw upon subject formation as a core analytical concept, understanding subjectivities as discursively and affectively produced (Westberg, 2021; Ahmed, 2014). In this context, I use the term 'subject positions' to describe the roles and figures that are made available in discourse (Fairclough, 2013b), understood as part of broader processes of subject formation. The analysis thus examines the affective production of subjects, grounding the study in discourse analysis as its core methodological framework.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by presenting my digital ethnography approach and the empirical material. The primary material consists of images collected from 41 Telegram channels across four sampling points. This is supplemented by contextualizing material – such as organizational documents, media texts and podcasts – that situates the visual content within the Nordic radical nationalist milieu. I then present my discourse analytical method, before turning to reflections upon positionality, ethical implications and the study's limitations.

5.1 Digital ethnography

I have employed tools borrowed from netnography (Kozinets, 2019) and digital ethnography (Hine, 2017) as my primary methodological approach, hereafter referred to as digital ethnography. This methodology requires prolonged researcher immersion within a community, or other 'digital socialites' (Postill & Pink, 2012, p. 127), to develop a

deep understanding of specific online cultures (Hine, 2017; Kozinets, 2019). It has seen widespread application in studies of online extremism and has proven invaluable for comprehensively understanding the diverse media practices that facilitate the formation of far-right communities on technology platforms (Askanius & Keller, 2021; Ebner, 2020; Farrell-Molloy & Leidig, 2025; Lundström & Poletti Lundström, 2021). Kozinets (2019) popularized the term 'community' in studies of online culture, and it is useful for assessing clearly defined groups of adherents. However, Postill and Pink (2012) suggest the term 'digital socialities' in order to address the social formations (in my case open Telegram channels) rather than the community as a unit. This more open approach suits my research into ecofascist digital environments better because I am focusing on discourse and visual communication rather than members or specific groups.

I have familiarized myself with contemporary ecofascist culture by way of immersion, which included frequenting Nordic radical nationalist (social) media outlets and listening to podcasts for four years. These outlets included the podcasts of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) and Nordic Strength, along with their websites and media output (see section 5.3). Initially, I consumed the podcasts weekly and read news sites daily (both during and outside of working hours) to familiarize myself with the discourse. I let the material lead me towards new accounts, texts and podcasts, in a process akin to the snowball technique (Silverman, 2022). The social media platform that I primarily engaged with was Telegram, due to its popularity from 2020 onwards (Guhl & Davey, 2020), as well as the richness of its network. I created an account on Telegram specifically for covert observation and systematically collected digital material and recorded my observations and emotional reactions in a research diary. Over the years, I transitioned from listening to podcasts unsystematically and frequently, actively checking Telegram on my phone every (working) day, to listening more systematically, and only using Telegram on my work computer. This gradually less immersive approach was partly due to my experience of becoming jaded, which comes with exposure to violent content (Conway, 2021; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009), and the need to maintain distance between the research practices and my

private life. Through this netnographic immersion, I developed a contextual understanding of the Nordic far-right ecological discourse.

I have certainly come to understand that the internet is a 'messy' fieldwork environment that cannot be studied in bounded, clearly distinguishable units (Hine, 2009; Postill & Pink, 2012). The digital fieldwork links online and offline worlds, and 'is connected and constituted through the ethnographer's narrative' (Postill & Pink, 2012, p. 126). This means that the analysis presented in this thesis is shaped by my particular pathways through these digital spaces and the connections I traced between different sites, actors and texts. The findings should therefore not be understood as an objective map of ecofascist communication, but rather as an ethnographically grounded account of how these discursive formations emerged through my sustained engagement with Nordic radical nationalist digital environments.

5.2 Primary empirical material: Telegram

The primary material examined in this study consists of visual data from the social media platform Telegram. Silverman (2022, p. 219) highlights the benefit of taking advantage of relatively understudied and naturally occurring material if it is assumed to answer the research questions. The sheer amount of visual media that is (likely) produced by radical nationalists themselves, or that circulates in ecofascist spaces, is understudied in relation to how it pertains to gender and (Nordic) far-right ecologism. Moreover, this visual media provides suitable material for investigating affect in discourse. Visual semiotics, such as images, can communicate values without signifying distinctive meanings; hence, they can evoke unarticulated feelings and ideological orientations in viewers without prescribing a single, stable interpretation (Westberg, 2021). This affective, open-ended quality makes them particularly fertile ground for analysis and effective as communication. The primary source of data for this thesis is therefore visual media as memes and images taken from ecofascist social media. I chose the social media platform Telegram as the main medium of study because it has served as a popular far-right platform, and hosts several so-called 'Terrorgrams' and 'Ecograms' (Farrell-

Molloy, 2022; Macklin, 2022), meaning far-right extremist and ecofascist Telegram channels.

During the overall project, I have collected videos, posts and images uploaded to Telegram. However, I chose to focus the sub-studies on images for four reasons: First, earlier research has shown that Telegram channels rely heavily on visual media, and that images are often posted without text (Guhl & Davey, 2020, p. 2), and this is also the case for ecofascist Telegram channels (Kaati et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2022). Second, many of the images are memes, which are circulated across highly networked Telegram channels with different or no accompanying texts. Third, images hold specific affective appeal due to their rapid, wordless transmission (Joffe, 2008). Fourth, a focus on the visual ultimately addresses the documented need for more research on far-right visual environmental communication (Forchtner, 2023a). Hence, I have combined visual analysis with multimodal discourse analysis to facilitate an analysis of this affective visual transmission (see section 5.4). While audio-visual material, such as videos, is also common on these platforms, I have prioritized still images due to their capacity for rapid circulation independent of context, especially in meme culture. However, the analysis is not limited exclusively to static images as Articles 2 and 3 each include the analysis of a video.

Studying only public-facing material from far-right groups poses certain limitations in that the administrators and organizations can strategically curate their public image and control the impressions they project to outsiders. Researchers have called for methods that access 'backstage' far-right spaces, meaning the internal and unfiltered communications within these groups (e.g. Fielitz & Thurston, 2019). Accessing such spaces is challenging, however, given their exclusive and secretive nature. The open Telegram channels analysed here are public in a technical sense, but function primarily as internal community communication directed at adherents. Given the study's attention to construction and representation, I consider the material to be appropriate for analysis.

5.2.1 Telegram platform characteristics and channel selection

Telegram facilitates private chats, open chatrooms and administrator-run channels. This study focuses on the open channels that distribute ecofascist material. Only a channel administrator can post content, while any Telegram user can find and subscribe to the channels, and then react (with emojis) and share the content. The images are posted publicly on open forums by channel administrators. As noted above, Telegram's growing popularity with the far right followed a wave of bans on other platforms (Urman & Katz, 2020). Drawing on Guhl and Davey (2020), Hughes et al. (2022) claim that ecofascist channels serve as '"content-banks" for niche content that can be shared & [sic] socialised within the broader far-right ecosystem on Telegram' (Hughes et al., 2022, p. 7). As articles 1–3 demonstrate, the channel content is a mixture of text and visual artefacts: memes, photographs and animations depicting striking landscapes, utopian scenery, 'traditional' lifestyles and historical references to glorified pasts of militancy and European heritage, some featuring slogans like 'Nature is fascist' or 'Feed your soul with positive content'. Reflecting the motley of ideological imaginaries, one finds references to Nazism, Odinism and various forms of esotericism. When humans are depicted, the images often depict fit male soldiers, or conventionally attractive women in traditional garb posing in natural landscapes.

Memes are central to how this content circulates. DeCook (2018, p. 485) describes memes as intervisual 'bite-sized nuggets of political ideology and culture' that are easily consumed and shared on social media. This makes them particularly effective vehicles for far-right media communication. Building on Benjamin's (2008) theory of fascist aesthetics introduced in chapter 4, I argue that users become co-producers and reshape the ideological messages to fit local contexts. This is particularly visible in how ecofascist Telegram channels recontextualize other aesthetics, for instance the pastoral cottagecore trend (cf. Mayrand & Hunchak, 2025). Cottagecore is an aesthetic centred on rural domesticity, nature and traditional crafts. Büsken (2024) describes it as an escapist fantasy, which expresses a nostalgic yearning for an idealized past in harmony with nature. This aesthetic speaks to genuine anxieties about modern life and environmental loss, and

ecofascist discourse has appropriated it and loaded it with nationalist meaning while retaining its wholesome appeal. The positive affect attached to cottagecore makes it an effective bridge between mainstream culture and radical ideology, and this aesthetic blending is visible across the channels in my dataset, where cottagecore imagery circulates alongside explicit nationalist symbolism. I thus understand memes and the subsequent genre blends to be modern iterations of aestheticized political messaging. I employ affect theory to explain how uplifting emotions are mobilized through this visual discourse to make fascism appealing.

Telegram is a networked platform in which content is usually shared across channels (Walther & McCoy, 2021). This means that the dataset encompasses a broad range of content relating to ecofascism to different degrees and represents certain aspects of the discourse. Initially, I found channels by searching for different variants of the word 'ecofascism', as this term was used by the actors themselves (see section 1.2), and I chose those that were related to ecofascist symbolism through titles or descriptions that signalled affinity with far-right ecology, such as plants, pine trees or specific runes.

By following the reposting, I allowed the ecofascist channels to link me to other channels, which were then included in the dataset by employing a basic snowball method. I then scanned the content of the new channels, looking for signifiers of nature, health, ecology and environmentalism, in combination with far-right themes like references to Nazism, white supremacism or the demeaning of social justice and progressive culture. Channels reached through this snowballing are included because their content appeared as reposts within the ecofascist channels and I therefore treat them as part of the discourse in a peripheral sense. For instance, I have included some images from Generation Identity channels in my dataset because they are reposted in the channels. Generation Identity is a pan-European social and political movement that aims to preserve 'Western traditions and values', and create homogeneous societies where different races and cultures do not mix (Ebner, 2020; Wilhelmsen, 2021). This is not a typical 'ecofascist' movement, but I consider the material that is

reposted on ecofascist channels to be a part of the ecofascist discourse, in a more or less peripheral way.[14]

This channel snowballing led me to far-right fighting gyms, such as Active clubs. These channels post fitness and fighting content with an ethnonationalist framing (Gottzén & Switzer, 2026; Vingren, 2025). I also found channels that presented Norse pagan rituals alongside broader Nordic cultural content, featuring information about traditional cooking practices, rune mythology, midwinter ceremonies, national celebrations such as Norway's May 17th Constitution Day, and the promotion of folk costumes as expressions of ethnic heritage. Some channels referenced the 'Völkisch' tradition, which is connected to the predominantly German ethnonationalist movement built on romanticist and organicist principles inspired by Blood and Soil ideology (Dannemann, 2023; Varco, 2023)[15]. Völkisch settlers, many of them based in Germany, have attracted scholarly attention over the last few years. Völkisch media outlets produce a lot of material in the affective terrains of utopia, love and hope (Varco, 2023; Beyer & Weisskircher, 2024). Völkisch-inspired Telegram channels post content related to healthy living and folk traditions, rather than overt references to Nazism. Thus, my selection of channels reflects one part of the facets, or spectrum, of ecofascist discourse, where different elements from a broad radical nationalist spectrum circulate around a 'naturally ordered' Blood and Soil core.

Far-right Telegram is a volatile space, within which groups appear and disappear, change names and migrate to other platforms as Telegram has increasingly tightened its content policies. It truly represents

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[14] This way of understanding the positioning of elements draws on Michael Freeden's (2013) morphological approach to ideologies, in which ideological components occupy varying degrees of centrality in relation to the core. I was inspired by this framework when categorizing channels and their relationship to the ecofascist discourse, and it allowed me to distinguish between what is ideologically fundamental and what serves supporting or peripheral functions.

[15] See section 2.2.1.1 for a historical background.

a 'messy fieldwork environment' (Postill & Pink, 2012, p. 126), and several of the channels I visited regularly during the first year of the study (2020–21) disappeared or were banned due to Telegram's tightened guidelines, and I found other, newer channels. I documented 41 channels (see appendix) from which I collected data, including metrics such as follower counts and visual content. During the research period, some of these channels were removed from the platform. These disappearances constitute a potential limitation of the study, but I hold that the 41 documented channels provide sufficient material for identifying systematic patterns. While I browsed additional channels during the navigation process, the dataset primarily comprises materials downloaded from these 41 documented channels. However, I have included a small number of images collected prior to 2020 where they are particularly relevant to the argument.

Based on digital ethnographic practice as outlined in section 5.1, I familiarized myself with ecofascist Telegram by scrolling the channels, reading posts, looking at the images and exploring the connections within the platform. Based on a theoretical selection focused on 'positive affect' and a gender perspective, I manually downloaded relevant examples into thematizing folders. This involved noting patterns of interest and taking screenshots, akin to digital ethnography, whereby I followed digital traces within a specific online environment and immersed myself in it.

Additionally, I adapted the micro-mapping approach developed by McCrow-Young (2021) for analysing visual social media data. Micro mapping involves two processes. Firstly, I explored the profiles and connections within the platform itself, through which I identified initial examples as anchor points and manually noted recurring visual and textual patterns. Secondly, I identified repeated visual elements across the dataset, meaning images that match or are extremely similar, flagging examples that warranted closer analysis. Noting repeated visual elements is significant because they indicate shared visual conventions and symbols circulating within the milieu, suggestive of collective meaning-making practices. I also used reverse image search engines to trace similar images beyond the dataset, situating the material within a broader global context (see section 5.5).

5.2.2 Selection criteria for gender and positive affect

I developed criteria for selecting material that contained gendered content and material that expressed positive affect. My selection criteria for gender imaginaries were that the visual media should represent gender through references to men and masculinity or women and femininity. These references could be overt or covert. For instance, femininity could be represented in an image in the physical form of a woman (overt reference to femininity) or alluded to in a quote about a man 'fighting for what he loves', looking out over a landscape. Femininity can also be represented through bodies categorized as male, and masculinity through bodies categorized as female (Halberstam, 1998; Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005). For instance, men performing care or tenderness are 'doing' femininity, but in a masculinized way. Such expressions of softness construct men as protective rather than threatening, where the femininity they are performing produces goodness rather than undermining the masculine distinction (see Articles 1 and 2). I have therefore also been attentive to images where the boundaries between femininity and masculinity are blurred in various ways. In my interpretation, based on fascist discourse about nature–culture and feminist theory (see section 4.1), 'what he loves' comprises nature and the nation, including the family and thus women (covert reference to femininity). The selection criteria were designed to curate a corpus of material in which gendered imaginaries were salient enough to be analysed. While one could argue that, theoretically, every image contains a potentially gendered subtext, I prioritized materials where these references were either explicit or strongly implied by the context of fascist discourse. Images lacking even these subtle connections were excluded. While the selection criteria necessarily work with categories of masculinity and femininity, the analytical focus treats these as fluid and overlapping, rather than as fixed binary opposites.

The empirical search for positive affect was developed by synthesizing two factors. Firstly, as detailed in the theoretical chapter, affect in far-right spaces is usually masculinized and associated with emotions such as anger, hatred and fear. This contradicts the second factor, namely that earlier research on ecofascist propaganda produced by

the Swedish Defence Research Agency emphasized its uplifting inclinations (Kaati et al., 2020; see also Hughes et al., 2022b). I felt compelled to explore this utopian propaganda further. I wondered how the emotions communicated and highlighted in these utopian imaginaries formed ecofascism's affective structure, and how such affective propaganda functioned strategically. The significance of positive affect in this material lies in its function rather than its frequency. The militant/strong man trope remains the dominant narrative (just as in general far-right imagery) and probably remains the 'public face' of ecofascism. The positive affective tropes, like the contemplative man or the cute protector, works alongside the militant narrative as a complementary gateway that makes the ideology palatable to those who might otherwise reject overtly violent narratives. Positive affect expands the reach of the far right as discourse, ideology and movements by framing it in a positive light. As mentioned in chapter 4, the positive exists within the spectrum of, and in constant interplay with, other emotions (Leser & Spissinger, 2020; Ahmed, 2010). Rather than insisting upon dualistic understandings, I employ positive affect as an analytical lens to explore far-right affective communication beyond the 'negative' and to identify affective transmissions that are typically considered positive.

Kaati et al. (2020) identified seven themes that describe ecofascist propaganda and the messages it conveys: 'Utopia', 'Lifestyle', 'Violence', 'Peaceful action', 'Heroes', 'Role models' and 'Enemies'. This thematic framework was based on earlier analyses of the ISIS propaganda machinery (Winter, 2015a, 2015b), which found a large amount of so-called utopian propaganda, classified as 'every facet' of the convivial civil life within the caliphate (Winter, 2015a, p. 30).[16] The Utopia narratives featured flourishing religious and economic activity, joyous social gatherings with friends and children, civil safety, ever-swelling ranks of soldiers and local governance. This theme also included imaginaries of nature and landscapes that depicted 'things of beauty, predominantly natural but sometimes man-made: rare birds,

[16] The 'narratives' identified in Winter's (2015a) analysis were Utopia, Mercy, Belonging, Brutality, Victimhood and War.

wild camels, breaking dawn, brightly lit bridges, dust storms and lightning' (Winter, 2015a, p. 37). Winter claimed that such imaginaries were designed to romanticize life in the caliphate 'with promises of a bucolic, rural existence – not, contrary to the popular view, by promises of a "five star jihad"' (Winter, 2015a, p. 37). The findings of Kaati et al. (2020) offered a productive starting point for operationalizing positive affect as a selection criterion, particularly the prevalence of nature imagery, gender roles and symbolic references as carriers of utopian affect. Inspired by their utopian theme, I looked for material that conveyed a sense of the desirable and hopeful within a Nordic radical nationalist framework.

Moreover, I understand the report's (Kaati et al., 2020) categories of 'Lifestyle', 'Peaceful action', 'Heroes' and 'Role models', as well as Winter's (2015a) categories of 'Mercy' and 'Belonging', to also communicate some form of positive affect. War imaginaries can be awe-inspiring and invite a feeling of nostalgia – the affective response depends upon whether the reader is engaged, estranged or perhaps 'betwixt' – as in ignorant or unaware of the displayed symbols – as discussed in Article 1 (Darwish, 2024; Westberg, 2021). Moreover, Forchtner and Kølvraa (2017) illustrate how contemporary German extreme-right propaganda is moving towards a 'horizontal and intimate bond with Nazism' and a 'friendly emotionality', showing images dealing with:

> 'the private lives of soldiers'; kissing their girlfriends on leave, laughing and 'goofing around' with friends behind the lines, balancing on cannons, or making silly faces and postures for the camera. (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017, p. 274)

Humour can also be understood as a positive affect, but much of the humour that one finds in far-right propaganda exists within a tight-knit nexus with hate, or schadenfreude (gleeful contempt) (Askanius, 2021b; Sakki & Martikainen, 2021). This does not, however, exclude humour from positive affect. My mission is to analyse what kind of *social labour positive affect does* in communication. Hence the imaginary did not have to be 'fully positive' to be included, or 'fully negative' to be excluded. Indeed, the discursive layers of meaning and the many

interpretative opportunities make it almost impossible for anything to be 'fully positive' or 'fully negative' anyway.

Inspired by the above studies' classification of 'positive' themes in propaganda, as well as research and theory on fascism, I constructed a set of selection criteria for 'positive affect':

- *Civil life*
  Images depicting people engaging in activities of daily life, like cooking, socializing, spending time outside or relaxing. This could include friendship, camaraderie and family settings, people socializing or engaging in activities together.
- *Nature and lifestyle*
  Images showing natural landscapes, flora and fauna, as well as signifiers for food, farming and health.
- *Golden age*
  References to the 'glory days' or a 'golden age', like the Third Reich or other glorified time periods, or past civilizations, like Hyperborea and Thule. This could also include historical figures and hero-imaginaries.
- *Signifiers of contentment*
  Images showing people who are smiling, laughing or otherwise looking happy, or at peace. These images could include performances of, or quotes about, love, compassion, care and serenity.

These criteria informed my sampling of the ecofascist Telegram channels. I gathered images or texts that represented positive affect based on the above criteria, where at least one category should be present in each item of material selected.

5.2.3 Sampling points

My data collection consists of four distinct sampling points, or rounds, across different time periods, which helped to achieve saturation and served to demonstrate both sufficient variation and a continuum within the material. As stated above, I gathered images from 41 channels. The first round (October 2020 to June 2022) was an open exploration that aimed to map out the dynamic and content of the

channels. During this round, I browsed and joined[17] relevant channels and manually noted recurring patterns. I downloaded representative memes and images motivated by my theoretical interest in 'positive' affect and gendered representation. The selection criteria guided my sampling, but the material itself suggested different analytical categories. From the first round of data collection, seven themes emerged inductively: 'Animals and humans', 'Cartoons and the Moomins', 'Contemplation', 'Esotericism and spirituality', 'Femininity', 'Nature veneration' and 'Warriors and militancy'. Gender representation overlapped across categories. For instance, both men and women appeared in 'Contemplation', but male depictions diverged from standard far-right tropes, which created a notable tension. In contrast, representations of women were more conventional, aligning with established far-right norms. Images of women with (specifically charismatic) animals were also prevalent, often in mystical fantasy or Viking-inspired settings. Femininity was included as a specific theme to capture this consistency, separating the relatively stable role of women from the more varied portrayals of men. This round resulted in Article 1, focusing on masculinity and cuteness.

During the second round (January 2023–May 2023), I collected representative images depicting women and nature. I established a preliminary typology of femininity within 'positive' affective ecofascist discourse: 'Heterosexuality and complementarity', 'Vikings and fantasy', 'Retreat into nature' and 'The wheat girl'. This second round, along with the fourth (discussed below), resulted in Article 3, on the wheat girl.

The third round (June 2024–October 2024) focused on the theme I had earlier formulated as 'contemplation'. My co-author Lucas Gottzén and I selected images and a video from three channels that

[17] I joined the channels instead of keeping a list and simply visiting them as a non-member in order to facilitate easier access and to keep track of the channels I was monitoring. This was especially useful early in the project when I mostly used the Telegram app on a phone. While only channel administrators could see that I had joined, this decision meant that I became a nominal member of these spaces.

represented different themes of digital Nordic ecofascism, including dreamy utopia-like imaginaries, paganism, outdoor activities and terrorist accelerationism. This round resulted in Article 2, on the contemplative man. I downloaded complete archives from two channels. The third channel had been deleted by the time of analysis, but I had downloaded several representative images during the initial data collection that we used in the analysis.

During the fourth round (February 2025–May 2025), I collected images based on the wheat girl trope that I had thematized in round two. I reviewed four Nordic-identifying channels, downloading the full archives (two of which I knew from before and two of which were 'new'), where wheat girl images were likely to appear. From these, I selected images belonging to the wheat girl trope for analysis. This fourth round, along with the second, resulted in article 3, on the wheat girl.

During these rounds, I downloaded representative images from 41 channels, resulting in a set of 283 images. During rounds three and four, I also downloaded five full channel archives from these 41 channels (see Articles 2 and 3), resulting in 10,824 images. The total number of images in my dataset is thus 11,107.

5.3 Material used for contextualization

This section details my considerations regarding selecting and assessing the material for contextualization. While this thesis primarily takes the visual communication gathered from Telegram channels as its empirical material, it also includes organizational material and podcasts that I understand to be representative of Nordic far-right ecological discourse. All the materials constitute primary sources because they are naturally occurring political communication produced by these movements. However, I treat the visual material as the core analytical focus, while the manifestos, podcasts and organizational documents mainly provide a contextual frame for understanding the Nordic radical nationalist milieu.

I have gathered political material such as manifestos, propaganda, posters, videos, articles and commentaries published by the websites

of radical nationalist actors in the Nordic countries, including the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), Nordisk Styrka and the Swedish radical right party Alternativ för Sverige [Alternative for Sweden]. I selected these three organizations because they represent different but interconnected manifestations of radical nationalism in the Nordic context: the NRM as the most explicitly Nazi and transnational actor, Nordisk Styrka as an emerging militant nationalist network, and Alternativ för Sverige as an attempt to translate radical nationalist ideology into electoral politics. Taken together, they provide a spectrum of how radical nationalist discourse operates across different organizational forms and strategic approaches, while sharing underlying ideological commitments. I collected the material primarily with a focus on gender and nature as broad and open criteria. This material has contributed to culturally situating the visual material and communicating the social and political context in which the images are posted and can be understood.

The NRM and Nordisk Styrka are small political organizations, which may raise questions about their suitability as empirical cases. Despite the NRM's declining support since 2019 (Leman, 2021), the migration of members to other groups (Expo, 2025) and the heavy stigmatization of Nazism in the Nordic countries, I hold that the NRM remains analytically significant. Its value as a case lies in its discursive role. The NRM specifically functions as a node for the national socialists and the broader 'racial-ideological' environment in the Nordic countries (Expo, 2025). Furthermore, both the NRM and Nordisk Styrka demonstrate how Nordic far-right ecologism connects far-right movements across territories and contributes to normalizing fascism globally.

I have also collected podcast data produced by the Swedish branches of the NRM and Nordisk Styrka. I approached these podcasts as a 'window' into the Nordic radical nationalist milieu (Lundström & Poletti Lundström, 2021, p. 3), and more specifically its ecofascist tendencies. Adopting steps from the podcast ethnography method outlined by Lundström and Poletti Lundström (2021), I initially explored the podcast episodes without predetermined analytical categories. This inductive approach facilitated the identification of recurring

patterns, key talking points, and ideological framings within the material. Rather than producing full transcripts of every episode, I selectively recorded relevant passages during an initial listening, then transcribed sections that contained discussions relating to nature and/or gender. This iterative process of listening, noting and selective transcription required ongoing consideration of what constituted relevant material and how the analytical focus evolved through my engagement. A research diary served to document both substantive observations and my own reactions and responses to the material.

Within the NRM's archives, I listened to a variety of published radio shows and podcasts. I mainly searched for shows that centred around gender- and/or nature-related topics among its extensive digital archives. Since 2016, the NRM has produced a large number of podcasts that were aired on the platform Spreaker before the organization was banned in 2021. The podcasts have since been available for downloading and streaming on its homepages and on the platform Peertube. The NRM produces both Swedish and English-language podcasts by and for members, as well as an international audience (Nordisk Radio, 2025). The NRM show I listened to most was the female-run radio show Radio Regeringen (active from 2017 to 2021). I focused on this show specifically because the presenters discussed several topics that related to them as women, and promoted the show as national socialist 'mysradio', a Swedish phrase for 'cosy radio', which I read as a signifier for positive affect. The show's hosts introduced national socialism to their audience through discussions about mundane topics like motherhood, food culture, traditions, health and their role as activists in the NMR. Their discussions illuminate how gendered media has contributed to dedramatizing Nazism through positive and ordinary affects.

Nordisk Styrka broadcast radio episodes between 2019 and 2024. I listened to the majority of these episodes (54 as of December 2025),[18] which I deemed relevant due to their substantial coverage of nature, climate and ecological issues (see for instance NS Radio, 2019). The

[18] Nordisk Styrka has released new radio episodes in spring 2026, but these are not included in the dataset.

organization's consistent engagement with environmental discourse in its podcast output supported my categorization of it as committed to ecofascist ideology or, in other words, a radical nationalist organization with a pronounced emphasis on nature and environmental issues. The podcasts remain available and can be streamed on the platform Spreaker, where they were never banned.

5.4 Multimodal discourse analysis

The primary method employed in this study is multimodal critical discourse analysis (MMCDA). This is due to my research interest in the semiotic construction and representation of subjectivities and values. In line with critical discourse studies, I see discourse as existing in a contextual and dialectical relationship with other social conditions, rather than being constitutive of reality by itself (Fairclough et al., 2004; Wodak et al., 2009). Discourse here implies the creation of social meaning through patterns of common knowledge and structures (Wodak et al., 2009), whereas a *text* – for instance, a meme – is a specific realization of a discourse. Multimodal discourse extends this to meaning-making across multiple modes of communication simultaneously, such as image, text and affect (Westberg, 2021, p. 21; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 4). I analyse ecofascist discourse, which signifies the making of social meaning in ecofascist ideology, language and communication. MMCDA offers analytical tools that enable the exploration of how semiotic modalities such as visuals, captions and affect together create meanings through intertextuality on the platform Telegram. Intertextuality refers to how texts relate to other texts through quotations, references, citations or stylistic borrowing (Idevall Hagren & Westberg, 2024).

Discourse analysis is well suited to studying visuals because political communication is multimodal, meaning that it is produced through combinations of images, text and other semiotic modes, such as affect (Doerr, 2017; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021; Richardson & Wodak, 2009; Westberg, 2021). Since I am interested in how subjectivities are discursively constructed and performed in ecofascist communication, discourse analysis allows me to examine images as active elements in producing social reality, rather than as neutral representations.

In applying discourse analysis, I draw upon Spitzmüller and Warnke's (2011) understanding of discursive layers (see also Idevall Hagren & Westberg, 2024, Chapter 2). The 'intratextual layer' focuses on a single text: its structure, linguistic choices and how meaning is built within that text, while the 'agent layer' considers the role of those who produce the discourse: their intentions, positions and how they use discourse to act in social contexts (Spitzmüller & Warnke, 2011). My overall study is based on the 'transtextual layer' of discourse, which refers to the level of analysis that extends beyond individual texts to uncover the patterns of collective social knowledge that shape discourse. Applying a multimodal critical discourse analysis framework, I have analysed the visual-textual data from Telegram channels in order to examine how radical nationalist ideas about gender and nature are constructed through recurring multimodal patterns. Through these multimodal patterns, I have examined how gendered subject positions are constructed and made available for identification within radical nationalist discourse. My focus is on how visual and textual elements interact to build meaning across the data corpus. Engagement metrics such as likes and views were excluded (it was not possible to comment on posts in the channels). Excluding such metrics means that the analysis cannot assess actual reach or impact. Rather, it centres on the discursive work of the memes themselves: their shared frames, compositional strategies and semiotic resources. This focus reflects my research interest in how visual-textual patterns construct and circulate ideological representations that connect to broader cultural and collective experiences (Idevall Hagren & Westberg, 2024, p. 51).

Within the discourse analytical approach, affect is understood as a relational concept that implies the formation of collective subjectivities through discourse (Wetherell, 2012). As addressed in the theoretical chapter, I focus on the *social labour* of emotions; how they are 'accomplished, circulated and semiotically materialised in affective-discursive practices' (Westberg, 2021, p. 24). I acknowledge multimodal critical discourse studies for its potential to analyse affective meaning-making (T. M. Milani & Richardson, 2021; Wetherell, 2012). Following Milani and Richardson (2021), I treat affective meaning-making as a matter of *practices*; what people do with semiotic resources, rather

than as fixed properties of texts or individuals. This allows me to trace how affect circulates through the visual-textual material and orients audiences towards ideological positions.

In Articles 1–3 I have employed a systematic three-step analytical procedure, drawing on Machin and van Leeuwen's (2016) framework for the multimodal analysis of semiotic resources, complementing it in article 3 with Doerr and Svatoňová's (2023; see also Doerr, 2021) methodology for analysing far-right imagery.

In step 1, I conducted a content analysis examining visual representation of subjects and activities, image composition and the applied visual technologies. In step 2, I deciphered the semiotic resources based on cultural provenance and visual iconography to interpret aesthetic messaging (Doerr, 2021; Müller, 2011; Panofsky, 1983). Iconographic analysis is a qualitative method positing that images communicate through symbolic association. By situating images within specific historical and geographical contexts and identifying their intertextual relations, the method helps to interpret their meanings (Müller & Özcan, 2007; Pietiläinen, 2023). I identified genres, symbols and their conventional historical and cultural meanings through theory and earlier research, and by using reverse image searches. Such image searches allowed me to identify the original sources for memes and images and track their modifications and appropriations across contexts. However, this method is limited due to its reliance upon images having been indexed by the search engine. Moreover, it may miss content on encrypted or private platforms and cannot always trace images that have been significantly altered. Despite these constraints, reverse image searching provided valuable insights into the global circulation patterns and cultural origins of visual content used in Nordic radical nationalist channels. In step 3, I examined the wider social significance of the semiotic resources and situated the visual materials within their social and historical discourse contexts (Richardson & Wodak, 2009).

Across all three articles, I examined semiotic resources such as colour symbolism, gaze, framing, setting and salience. The latter two refer to the context in which practices take place and make sense, and how

certain elements are made to stand out through size, colour, tone, focus and foregrounding, as well as the interplay between visual and textual elements (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2016; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2023). I analysed the elements for how they construct ideological meaning within ecofascist discourse. This approach enabled a systematic analysis of recurring visual patterns, symbols and multimodal strategies across the corpus of Telegram channels.

5.5 Positioning and reflexivity

This study has developed through my commitment to an ecofeminist standpoint: a progressive political philosophy centred on social justice and liberation for both humans and the non-human (Gaard, 2015; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Oksala, 2018). Specifically, this work aligns with a constructionist perspective on ecofeminism, which moves beyond essentialist views of an innate connection between women and nature, and instead argues that the link between women and nature is socially produced and historically contingent, rather than biological.[19] This standpoint informs my methodological and theoretical approach. Moreover, my position as a woman of partly Arab heritage raised in Norway has shaped the analysis, and familiarity with Nordic culture as well as my 'visceral emotions' have influenced my initial interpretation of the data (Tebaldi, 2023b, p. 4). This ethnographic approach means that I acknowledge my subjective experiences and emotional responses as informative aspects of how I make sense of the field (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). My initial emotional response has aided my understanding of what resonates, what feels familiar or alien and how the content might be landing with others who share aspects of my background. This emotional response is also the basis for my attempt to understand how different people's readings of the content might be. I have striven to maintain a position of 'empathic curiosity', as masterfully practised by journalist Deeyah Khan (2017) in her interviews with white supremacists who render her subhuman (see also Kimmel, 2013, 2018). Empathic curiosity means that I seek

[19] See Brodtmann (2026) for a discussion of the advantages of employing ecofeminism to counter far-right ecologisms.

to understand the human aspects in viewpoints and people I do not agree with, but without ever abandoning my feminist, anti-racist rationale. I intend my work to contribute to an 'anti-fascist semiotics', which in the words of Tebaldi (2023a), 'aims to understand the naturalization of the far right but also to counter it'. By mapping the semiotic strategies through which ecofascist ideology is aestheticized and normalized, particularly its gendered and affective dimensions, this study aims to build a 'critical visual literacy' (Doerr, 2021, p. 5) that researchers, educators and practitioners working against radicalization can draw upon to help them recognize and decode far-right visual communication.

Throughout this research, I have experienced a complex range of emotions that require acknowledgement and reflection. On the one hand, I felt drawn to certain aspects of the material: themes of freedom, peace, idyllic rural life and connection to forests and nature which resonate with my own experiences of spirituality and the natural world. I recognized a sense of understanding for the human desire to preserve one's own culture. These emotions feel immediate and genuine. Some radio shows were quite engaging: the hosts were entertaining and funny, all the while communicating basic ideas about environmentalism that I concur with on a personal and political level. On the other hand, I have experienced boredom and exasperation throughout my engagement with the material. Listening to certain radio shows, I felt annoyed and resentful, sometimes dragged down, surrounded by a murky, dark atmosphere, and experienced the content as stale and tedious to endure. I would get upset, and sometimes angry, by racist jokes. However, the radio shows I encountered were seldom explicitly hateful or loud, in the way that certain American radio hosts tend to be (Van den Bulck & Hyzen, 2020).

It is important to note this affective pull because it speaks to the seductive power of the ideological framings I encountered. The appeals to nature, tradition and cultural preservation are of course not inherently problematic sentiments; rather, it is their deployment within a far-right framework that makes them dangerous. Recognizing my own emotional responses to these topics has been a significant step

towards understanding how such discourse operates persuasively, even for those who fundamentally oppose the ideology it serves.

Over the years, my entries shifted from daily to weekly documentation of what I saw and felt, and I noticed myself becoming progressively more jaded. My emotional reactions to memes varied considerably. The ecofascist content was not as harsh as other far-right material I encountered; at least, it was not explicitly violent in the ways I had anticipated. This gradual desensitization and the range of negative emotions – from acute anger to numbing boredom – disclose the emotional labour involved in sustained engagement with extremist content and underscore the importance of reflexivity in research of this nature (Conway, 2021; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

5.6 Ethics

This section presents the ethical implications of this study. Ethical approval for the project was secured from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Etikprövningsmyndigheten) under the reference number 2022-06953-01. This approval authorizes the use of publicly accessible online material as data, including audio, text and visual content, and permits the analysis of sensitive personal data (e.g., political opinions) present in these materials without obtaining individual consent.

Researching radical nationalist aesthetics and discourse presents ethical issues regarding amplification. By downloading material and boosting internet traffic, researchers of violent extremism run the risk of reproducing these discourses by contributing to circulating them (Mondon & Winter, 2020; Milner, 2016; Phillips & Milner, 2017). This requires case sensitivity and has guided me in what material to include in my analysis. My focus on 'positive affect' has aided me in avoiding (what at first glance appears to be) the most brutal and overtly violent content. Amplification also concerns the possible exotification of these groups and their ideology. I have especially noticed this in regard to the term 'ecofascism', which has often been framed as something new, exciting and exotic in the media and public commentaries. This framing has garnered significant interest in ecofascism as a concept, which in turn has benefited me as a scholar because my work has received attention, and I have repeatedly been invited to

speak on ecofascism in different forums. In a sense, this has also allowed me to shape the public and media discourse on far-right ecologism and violent extremism. Hence, I might have contributed to amplifying the ideology of ecofascism and to the exotification of the concept itself. It is important to acknowledge this dynamic, which drives my commitment to framing these phenomena analytically rather than sensationally.

Scholarship on far-right research acknowledges the ethical complexities of including visual material, particularly regarding the risk of amplifying harmful messaging (McCrow-Young & Mortensen, 2021; Phillips & Milner, 2017; Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021). Including visual data in this study is methodologically necessary for three main reasons. First, the empirical focus – gendered positive affect – is inherently visual, and the affective effects of the visual communication cannot be conveyed by text alone. Second, the visual data reflects the positive affective selection, meaning that the images revolved around nature-related topics, rendering them (at a surface level) more harmless than other far-right visual material. Third, since symbols are multivocal, and online expressions are inherently ambiguous, the analysis ensures transparency by depicting the visual media (Miller-Idriss, 2017, pp. 11–12; Phillips & Milner, 2017). In article 2, Lucas Gottzén and I chose to include images from local Swedish channels which may be identifiable. We chose not to name the channels because we do not wish to give the actors behind them the 'fame to which they aspire' (Askanius, 2021b, p. 151; see also Farrell-Molloy & Leidig, 2025). Thus, showing the images is necessary for a clear analysis.

When reproducing visual data in articles 1 and 2, I selected images in which faces are masked, blurred or hidden. This was, firstly, due to the probability that the people depicted are not aware that they are featured in fascist propaganda (Hughes et al., 2022); secondly, to preserve personal privacy; and thirdly, to focus on the discourse rather than the actor. In Article 3, however, I selected several images where faces were visible as a side effect of proving my argument. Several of the model images originate from advertising and popular culture. However, there is a child portrayed in the collage, as well as a Swedish musical artist who is seemingly unaware of the appropriation of

her intellectual property, so I blurred all the faces using an appropriate digital tool.

Text and podcast material is treated as representative of Nordic far-right ecological discourse. None of the podcasts are kept behind paywalls and they are made for dissemination. However, some, like the Nordisk Styrka podcasts and the smaller local chapter podcasts of the NRM, are 'openly' available, rather than 'publicly' available. This distinction is defined as follows:

> …if the intention of a podcast is clearly to create public opinion, it should be considered *publicly available*. A podcast created for a specific, limited audience may be *openly available* but not necessarily intended for public consumption. (Lundström & Poletti Lundström, 2025, p. 6)

I have not included names or other identifying characteristics in my citations of the podcasts, despite the fact that nationalist organizations like the NRM are hierarchical structures where who says what carries significant weight.[20] Since the study is not actor focused, I also omitted names when discussing organizational material. In Article 3, I discuss an X post by a female Alternativ för Sverige politician. I excluded her name from the article, not to protect her privacy, because she is appearing in a public video from a political party, but to protect myself, because she and her team have previously pursued people who link her to the extreme right (Wilow & Oscarsson, 2023; Lundin, 2023). This precaution may be understood as an example of a 'strategy of fear' (Blee, 2018, p. 28), which has structured my behaviour and safety measures throughout the study. Blee (2018, p. 27) points out that the authenticity, empathy and trust that are prevalent in feminist qualitative research practice 'often assume a measure of ideological compatibility between scholar and those being studied'. She further describes how the interviews she has conducted with women in

[20] The use of podcasts as ethnographic material requires several ethical reflections (Lundström & Poletti Lundström, 2025). Since the podcasts are secondary rather than primary material in this thesis, I have refrained from longer ethical discussions on this matter.

organized racism were also structured by strategies of fear of retaliation or intimidation (Blee, 2018, p. 28). Although I have not conducted interviews, the abusive outing practices used by several far-right figures in Swedish media have made me careful about my digital practices and my representation of radical nationalism. This is exemplified by my decision not to name the Alternativ för Sverige politician.

I have ventured to study the 'positive' within what scholars Fielding (1990) and subsequently Blee (2018) refer to as 'unloved' groups. These scholars use this term to discuss the navigation of rapport and empathy when interviewing potentially hostile groups of people. However, the term 'unloved' in the current type of research carries several implications. White supremacists are constructed as 'extreme', hateful and evil others in mainstream liberal democratic discourse, and thus as individuals who do not deserve empathy. This is particularly true in the Nordic countries that were occupied by Nazi Germany (Fangen, 2001). As shown by earlier research, those who become involved with political extremism are often on the margins of society, and need social attention, community and purpose (e.g. Mattsson & Johansson, 2019; Fangen, 2001; Kimmel, 2018). A term like 'unloved' may evoke pity, which risks downplaying the ideological rigour and political seriousness of fascism. A more neutral term such as 'the publicly discarded' might be better able to capture this tension. Building on the ethical discussions presented in this chapter, I have sought to represent the opposing worldviews I encounter in a reasonable manner and subject this representation to feminist critique.

6 SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

6.1 Article 1: Fascism, nature and communication: A discursive-affective analysis of cuteness in ecofascist propaganda

(Submitted 16 Jan 2023, accepted 25 Jan 2024, published online 21 Feb 2024 in *Feminist Media Studies*,
DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2024.2313006)

The first article of this thesis examines cuteness as an affective communication strategy in ecofascist communication. The study analyses propaganda primarily in the form of memes collected from ecofascist Telegram channels between October 2020 and October 2021, with a particular focus on the Nordic context. The aim is to understand how cuteness, as a positively coded affect, is mobilized to attract readers and invite them into specific affective experiences.

The article draws on an affective-discursive analytical framework combined with multimodal critical discourse studies. Using the concepts of subject formation and strategic perspectivation, the analysis approaches the memes from three distinct positions: an engaged perspective (representing a proponent of fascist ideology), an estranged perspective (representing an opponent) and a betwixt perspective (representing an unaware or curious subject). The data consists of two primary categories of memes: visuals of militant men interacting with animals conventionally coded as cute, and appropriations of the Finnish cartoon series, the Moomins.

The findings identify two primary strategies. The first, 'Making the menacing cute', involves the softening of authoritarian or militant figures through the addition of innocent or endearing imagery. An example is a photograph of Adolf Hitler feeding deer, in which the tenderness of the animals is transferred onto Hitler, humanizing him and presenting Nazism as inherently compassionate and moral. The second strategy, 'Making the cute menacing', involves the recontextualization of familiar and innocent cultural symbols through the addition of fascist iconography. A meme depicting the Moomin character Snufkin beneath a Black sun illustrates how childhood nostalgia and

nature romanticism are appropriated to aestheticize and legitimize fascist ideology.

The article argues that cuteness operates as a rhetorical device that reduces the need for ideological defence by framing fascism within a binary of good and evil. Drawing on Young (2005), the study finds that cuteness softens and humanizes fascism while simultaneously remasculinizing it, by constructing a masculinist protector figure who balances tenderness with the capacity for violence. This protector logic is racialized through the attribution of natural empathy and compassion to whiteness, weaponizing affect as a tool for othering. Furthermore, the appropriation of recognizable Nordic cultural symbols such as the Moomins functions to 'brand' a specifically Nordic ecofascism, infusing it with familiarity, nostalgia and legitimacy.

By evoking emotions such as tenderness, joy and nostalgia, cuteness serves several functions: humanizing and remasculinizing fascism through images of militant men caring for animals, connecting propaganda to Nordic cultural heritage via familiar symbols, and weaponizing empathy by racializing compassion. In this way, cuteness becomes a subtle yet powerful tool for normalizing and spreading ecofascist narratives. While the use of cuteness is not unique to ecofascism, the article argues that it is particularly effective in this context for linking esoteric ideas of natural 'Aryan' empathy to visual media, thereby serving as a case study for how cuteness functions across broader radical nationalist digital spaces. The article concludes that cuteness is a powerful political communication strategy, employing positive affect in a way that serves to mainstream fascist ideology by making it accessible, attractive and emotionally resonant. This is particularly consequential for young people and those on the margins of fascist culture, as the emotional appeal of such propaganda may lead them to downplay its violent and historically documented consequences.

6.2 Article 2: The contemplative man: 'Positive' affect and masculinity in ecofascist visual communication, with Lucas Gottzén.

(Submitted 28 Aug 2024, accepted 11 Mar 2025, published online 18 Mar 2025 in *Journal of Gender Studies*,
DOI: 10.1080/09589236.2025.2479797)

The second article of this thesis examines 'contemplative' masculine tropes in Nordic ecofascist visual communication. While existing research has primarily focused on militant and aggressive expressions of far-right masculinity, this article demonstrates that ecofascist social media also produces quieter, positively coded representations of men in nature. The study identifies and analyses a recurring discursive trope termed the contemplative man, which depicts white men alone or together in natural environments, engaged in meditative, reflective or outdoor activities. The empirical material consists of images and video posts collected from three Nordic ecofascist Telegram channels between October 2020 and August 2024. The analysis is informed by social semiotics and affect theory, examining how semiotic resources in visual media construct affective subject formations and invite gendered forms of identification.

The findings are organized around two subtypes of the contemplative man trope. The first, solitary reverence, refers to depictions of individual men in still, often awe-inspiring natural settings. These images construct an intimate, sensorial relationship between white Nordic men and the land, drawing on nativist claims to territory associated with Nazism's Blood and Soil complex. Fascist symbols such as the Othala rune and the Black sun appear alongside seemingly apolitical imagery of forest fires, lakesides and hiking scenes, embedding ideological content within an affectively warm and familiar aesthetic. The second subtype, homosocial hiking, depicts groups of men engaged in outdoor activities together. These representations draw on traditions of male bonding in nature and invoke ideals of camaraderie, vitality and self-sufficiency, with implicit references to accelerationism and survivalism. The wilderness is constructed as a space for remasculinization, where men can restore masculine potency through physical

hardship and collective experience outside of what is framed as a feminized and degenerate modernity.

The article argues that the contemplative man broadens the range of available masculine subject positions within far-right discourse, complementing the militant masculine trope. Nature functions as an ideological and affective resource that naturalizes ecofascist ideology by making it appear apolitical, peaceful and spiritually grounded. The construction of a mystical, primordial connection between white Nordic men and the land serves to legitimize nativist claims to territory and assert racial supremacy through seemingly benign imagery. This process of naturalization is central to the mainstreaming potential of ecofascist communication, concealing the violent and exclusionary dimensions of the ideology beneath an aesthetics of calm, beauty and belonging.

The article concludes that ecofascism as an expression of far-right extremism should be understood affectively, and that positive affective draws, such as community, warmth and closeness to nature, play a significant role in attracting and retaining men within these movements. Focusing on positive affect thus contributes to a broader understanding of radicalization processes, suggesting that young men are drawn to far-right extremism not only through shared hatred and the promise of violence, but also through imaginaries of intimacy, meaning and rootedness.

6.3 Article 3: 'The wheat girl': Constructions of gender, nation and nature in Nordic far-right ecologism

(Submitted 15 Sept 2025, accepted 28 Dec 2025, published online 9 Feb 2026 in *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2026.2616488)

The third article of this thesis examines the discursive trope of 'the wheat girl' in Nordic far-right ecologist digital spaces, analysing how constructions of white femininity intersect with broader ideas of belonging and the natural environment. The wheat girl is typically depicted as a conventionally attractive young white woman with long hair located in a sunlit grain field or natural landscape. The article

explores how this trope operates as an affective ideological tool, demonstrating how gendered imagery shapes far-right ecologist, specifically ecofascist, imaginaries in the Nordic context.

The empirical material was collected across three rounds of data gathering between 2020 and 2025, drawing on digital ethnographic methods applied to open Telegram channels associated with Nordic ecofascism. The study focuses on visual communication, primarily through images, because they most clearly embody the central paradoxes of the trope. The analytical approach combines Ahmed's theorization of affect and emotions as social and political with multimodal visual analysis and discourse studies. The analysis identifies three thematic dimensions of the wheat girl trope, which structure the findings.

The first theme, Beauty and sexuality, examines how the wheat girl draws on advertising and editorial aesthetics to normalize associations between idealized white femininity, fertility and Blood and Soil ideology. The imagery deploys warm, pastoral compositions and coded sexuality to invite affective identification and desire while embedding references to conspiracy theories about racial replacement. The second theme, Cultural and spiritual heritage, shows how the wheat girl functions as a vessel for what the channels call 'ethnic spirituality', connecting white Nordic identity to a mythologized pre-Christian past through pagan symbols, traditional clothing and natural settings. This aesthetic strategy naturalizes exclusionary politics as sacred and inevitable, and bypasses critical engagement by generating affects of the sublime and spiritual fulfilment. The third theme, Tradition and power, analyses how the wheat girl embodies a form of hegemonic femininity that frames conservative gender roles as empowering and desirable. While often constructed as a passive object of the male gaze, the wheat girl is also constructed as a protector of tradition and a transmitter of cultural knowledge. The wheat girl thus challenges the progressive order through an aesthetic and discursive appeal to strength and joy.

The article argues that the wheat girl trope operates through positive affect, mobilizing beauty, serenity, nostalgia and belonging to make radical nationalist ideology appear natural, attractive and emotionally resonant. This affective strategy lessens the need for an explicit

ideological defence by condensing meaning into binaries of good and bad, natural and unnatural. The trope constructs a subject position organized around joy and fulfilment, while simultaneously othering everything coded as modern, feminist or racially impure.

The article concludes that the wheat girl illustrates how gendered imagery can serve as a gateway for ecofascist narratives, particularly during a period of ecological and political instability when calls to protect nature and tradition intensify. Understanding how positive affect and aestheticized femininity facilitate the circulation of radical nationalist ideas in digital spaces is therefore essential for both scholarly and democratic purposes.

6.4 Article 4: Fascist ecology and gender: An integrative literature review

The fourth article of this thesis presents a systematic integrative scoping review that maps existing scholarly literature on gender within studies of the far right's mobilization of the natural environment. The review addresses two research questions: What is known about gender from peer-reviewed scholarship on far-right ecologism? How is gender deployed to perform social and ideological work within this discourse?

The review draws on two complementary searches conducted between 2023 and 2025. The first involved searches across four academic databases, yielding 26 peer-reviewed articles after screening. The second involved a keyword search within ten selected edited volumes and monographs on the far right and ecology. The total corpus comprises 80 texts spanning the humanities and social sciences, with the majority published in the 2020s, reflecting the recent development of this research area. Studies focus predominantly on Europe and North America, with qualitative discourse and visual analysis as the dominant methods.

The findings are organized around three analytical sections. The first examines how gender is discussed across the reviewed literature. The studies show that far-right actors consistently frame gender norms as biologically and ecologically grounded, presenting them as pre-

political and timeless. Furthermore, progressive gender reforms and feminist politics are constructed as unnatural threats to both the nation and the environment. Men and masculinity receive substantially more analytical attention across the corpus than women and femininity, which reflects both the gendered composition of far-right movements and a gap in existing research.

The second section examines naturalized gender roles as they appear in the reviewed studies. Women are primarily represented as symbols of fertility, racial purity and the nation, and rarely appear as political agents. Nature itself is consistently feminized, rendering it available for either protection or exploitation depending on the ideological context. Masculinity is organized around narratives of environmental protection and territorial defence, with the ecological crisis functioning as a stage for performing militant masculinity. The review further identifies two broad masculine constructions in the literature: an 'anti-nature' stance associated with industrial and petro-masculinity, which rejects climate science in defence of fossil fuel dependency; and a 'pro-nature' stance associated with muscular environmentalism, which frames environmental protection as a racially motivated duty requiring authoritarian means. Both stances share a gendered binary logic in which the local, masculine and rooted are positioned against the global, feminine and unrooted.

The review concludes that gender performs three primary functions in far-right ecologism. Firstly, it legitimizes ideology by presenting political choices as natural facts, obscuring their constructed character. Secondly, it mobilizes action through a logic of masculine protection, turning environmental defence into a gendered duty and justifying exclusionary violence. Thirdly, it defines belonging by establishing rigid boundaries between those coded as natural and rooted and those coded as foreign and corrupting. Taken together, these functions show that gender is a structuring mechanism that organizes the relationship between bodies, land and power. The review identifies gaps in the literature regarding femininity, sexuality and non-Western contexts, and calls for future research that incorporates queer and ecofeminist frameworks alongside comparative perspectives on gender across different strands of far-right discourse.

7 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis has been to examine how ideas about nature and gender are affectively communicated in Nordic radical nationalism. Specifically, the study aimed to analyse the work of positive affect in ecofascist communication, with a particular focus on how gendered representations structure, shape and channel these affective processes. This section aims to synthesize the findings of the four articles and unify the discussion into a cohesive conclusion. The study advances understanding in three key areas: how positive affect operates as both a strategic communication tool and a mechanism of subject formation in ecofascist discourse; how positive affect functions as a vehicle of ideological normalization; and how gendered subject positions mediate the affective experience of nationalist imaginaries.

In this thesis, gender functions at several levels: as a site of ideological construction, as a vehicle for affect and as a lens through which society can be examined. The gendered imaginaries are exaggerations of norms that circulate more quietly in mainstream culture, but they also speak to the present moment. At a time of ecological collapse, political crisis and social fragmentation, these imaginaries offer a retreat to rural life, traditional roles and simple joys, and a return to a stable social order. Studying these gendered imaginaries therefore reveals something beyond the far right about the desires and anxieties that the current moment is producing, and the gendered forms through which they are expressed.

Articles 1–3 analyse gendered tropes in visual ecofascist discourse. Drawing on a shared theoretical framework of affect theory, social semiotics and feminist gender theory, the articles examine how positive affect operates ideologically. Article 1 shows how the 'cute masculine protector' contributes to humanizing militant masculinity and appropriates cultural symbols to soften fascist messaging. The second article identifies the 'Contemplative Man' trope, which uses warm and serene nature imagery to naturalize racial claims and reconstruct far-right masculinity. The third article argues that the 'Wheat Girl' acts as a gateway into extreme far-right content, using aestheticized femininity to make radical nationalism appear natural and desirable. Taken

together, these findings illustrate the ways in which visual affective communication often bypasses rational critique by framing exclusionary politics as natural, beautiful and emotionally fulfilling. Finally, the fourth article synthesizes the existing literature and confirms that gender acts as a core mechanism for legitimizing far-right ecologism and ecofascist worldviews as well as justifying violence. In the following, I present three contributions that trace how this process works. I then conclude the thesis.

7.1 Positive affect as strategy and as subjectification

The articles demonstrate how positive affect functions as both a strategy for communication and a tool for subjectification. As a strategy to communicate with outsiders and potential adherents, positive affective communication contributes to masking and softening far-right ideology. Violent messaging can be communicated in quieter, gentler and more subversive ways through positive affect. Nature as scenery and as a visual environment contributes to this process because it appears, and is easy to represent, as pure, innocent and apolitical – precisely as natural. But nature is also a setting that is semiotically loaded with meaning about territory, ethnos and community. Hence, this meaning can be implied and used to hook people into specific narratives. A beautiful pristine forest combined with an odal rune can signify a racial understanding of belonging, which in its fully formed ideological stance directs viewers towards Nazism. Hence, positive affective communication can attract both men and women to far-right beliefs and worldviews without any explicit mention of them.

The strategy also works as a subjectification process for internal communication, shaping the people who consume it. The positive affective imaginaries invite emotional states such as awe, tranquillity, compassion and love. By assuming these affective invitations, the gendered subject can identify with the emotions on offer and thereby *become* compassionate and loving themselves. The subject is invited into a reality where they are defined by *feeling* loving and morally good, because they 'have' symbols that are associated with innocence, purity and morals 'on their side': nature, animals, children, spirituality. In other words, the subject is offered an 'emotional you' (Westberg, 2021, p. 24) with which to align. These emotional

templates function as 'sticky' attachments in Ahmed's (2014) terms; as feelings that bind subjects to ideological positions without conscious alignment. This process invites identification while smoothing over any potential tensions, and mirrors what Benjamin (2008) identified as the aestheticization of politics: Ideology is rendered as beauty and, when something is experienced as beautiful, it becomes more difficult to examine politically. Hence, the use of positive affect offers a means to communicate between insiders as a way to (re)construct fascist subjects, and thereby fascism, as 'good'. This operates through a rehabilitation of its image: historical atrocities are smoothed over, and Nazism is reframed – as Nazis have done since 1945 – as true, beautiful and natural. The association with evil is rejected, and fascism is instead rendered morally desirable through nostalgic imagery of an idealized past defined by order, purity and an organic social structure. Gender is central to this process: feminine, family-centred, cute and contemplative imagery anchors the fascist subject to an affective vision of wholeness and natural order. In this sense, positive affect works towards 'making fascism good again' – to paraphrase the logic of the MAGA movement – by recoding it as something to be longed for rather than condemned. Moreover, the communication strategy and the subjectification process function together: Affective visual communication including cute, contemplative, traditional and nature-based imaginaries make the subjectification *feel* voluntary, natural and organic.

It is possible to analyse the affective subject formations and positions by assuming a gender perspective. The discursive tropes help us to understand how the offered subject positions allow men to *feel* noble as protectors and defenders, and women to *feel* sacred as guardians of the bloodline. Both positions are imbued with a higher purpose, interpellating men and women as white, gendered subjects with distinct yet complementary duties. This instils meaning into people's lives, and the discursive tropes contribute to framing political involvement as a sacred obligation: natural, necessary and morally elevated. Gender thus functions as an affective technology of recruitment, binding subjects through a sense of higher purpose and duty. Moreover, the gendered subjectification process functions by constructing both the self and the other within its gaze, revealing a specific power dynamic

in heterosexual relations. In line with typical far-right representations, women are subjected to a dual construction as passive objects that please the male gaze with their (conventional) beauty, but also as agentic subjects. The study shows that the agentic woman is defined by her rebellion against the liberal status quo. She opposes the gender-equal Nordic model, which in far-right discourse is framed as unnatural. Instead, she is represented as a 'traditional' woman, living by 'natural' laws. This dual construction has to exist, and it must somehow align with contemporary, modernized beliefs about female empowerment as based on liberation and gender equality. In far-right discourse, the modern idea of women's empowerment is reformulated and recontextualized as traditional roles that in practice submit women to men. This is how contemporary far-right movements update fascist gender ideology while remaining legible to modern audiences.

The man, in turn, is invited into an affective subject position as a compassionate, morally righteous protector. Moreover, this apparent 'softening' of fascist masculinity is itself a way to aestheticize domination, making it appear caring rather than coercive. But he is also constructed in the female gaze as a complement to the woman. For the woman, his erotic capital is retained, or perhaps even heightened, in his portrayal as a loving family man, the protector of the vulnerable, herself included. There is a trade-off here: feeling good and safe against being protected and thus dominated (Young, 2003). Moreover, this dynamic between the protector and the protected entails an eroticization, and invites positive affect through the domination that occurs.

Hence, these subject positions facilitate not only the subjects themselves but also the heterosexual relationship. This process makes visible the sexuality that usually underlies gendered fascist narratives: The man must be virile, and the woman must be fertile in order to ensure racial continuation. And there must be sexual tension present for that to work. This tension is again created through ideas about protection, domination and submission. This imagery is adapted to the contemporary moment, incorporating more sexually explicit content than in historical times, as demonstrated in the wheat girl imagery. Ranging

from seemingly innocent family photographs to women in revealing clothing and sexual poses, the images construct an aesthetic of implicit and suggestive sexuality.

The contemplative subject position discussed in Article 2 is less rigidly gendered than the cute protector or the wheat girl. Both men and women appear in these settings, but I (and Lucas Gottzèn) focused the analysis on the masculine contemplator. Nature, stillness and rootedness are offered as emotional rewards. The imagery presents serenity, purity and connection to land and folk tradition as something attainable: a way of life that can be chosen. While less rigidly gendered than the protector or the wheat girl, the masculine contemplator represents a specific form of solitary, rooted and stoic masculinity. At the same time, its relative openness serves a function: by softening explicit gender markers, the imaginary lowers the threshold for identification and broadens its reach across different audiences. The contemplative imaginary therefore functions as an effective entry point for outsiders, while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of ethnic and territorial belonging for insiders. By presenting this reality as both desirable and attainable, contemplative narratives construct utopian visions of what could be.

This analysis suggests a gender logic that extends beyond a binary. The study finds that femininity, as defined by softness, care and nurturing, is strategically performed by male subjects in order to generate moral legitimacy. Affects like the protector's cuteness or the contemplative man's serenity rely on these feminized traits to frame men as compassionate rather than threatening. Consequently, femininity serves as an affective resource that allows fascist masculinity to appear caring and rooted. While the masculine/feminine distinction remains structurally intact, its boundaries are flexible. This dynamic can be understood through the concept of hybrid masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), where the selective incorporation of feminized elements obscures underlying hierarchies rather than dismantling them. In ecofascist imagery, gender functions not just as a system of difference, but as a flexible resource providing affect that is used to construct specific moral identities.

Hence, affective communication maintains a dialogue with insiders as part of a subjectivation process, and with outsiders as part of a normalization process. Visual communication thus constructs masculinity through protection and contemplation, and femininity through pastoral beauty and reproductive symbolism, attaching to each a distinct but interconnected set of positive affects. The social labour performed by this gendered positive affect is therefore threefold: it recruits by making the ideology emotionally appealing; it subjectifies by offering gendered templates for identification; and it normalizes by embedding exclusionary politics within familiar affective frameworks.

It is important to recognize this subjectivation strategy because it shows how contemporary far-right discourse has updated fascist gender ideology for a modern audience, making it aesthetically appealing, emotionally rewarding and harder to identify as political. This thesis demonstrates that radicalization does not always operate through explicit argument or violent rhetoric. It can instead function through beauty, affect and the quiet promise of belonging, drawing people in through feeling rather than persuasion. It is therefore essential to understand this mechanism if we are to recognize and counter the far right in its current form.

7.2 Positive affect as normalization

The study overall demonstrates how positive affect is used as a vehicle of ideological normalization. Articles 1–3 show that, within the visual media analysed, ecofascist ideology is communicated primarily through affect (as transposed through visual media) rather than explicit argument. The discourse works through cuteness (Article 1), contemplative calm (Article 2) and pastoral beauty and sexuality (Article 3). Taken together, the articles establish that positive affect is a significant, gendered rhetorical strategy employed in Nordic ecofascism. The articles show how ecofascist discourse is normalized through positive affect, which makes radical nationalism emotionally accessible and ideologically legible to contemporary audiences. This process thus increases its potential to travel beyond fringe spaces.

The normalization of ecofascism as understood through Rheindorf and Wodak (2019) is achieved through the deliberate planting of symbols and ideology in public spaces – digitally, but also physically, as in the example of the Snufkin sticker that opens Article 1. This is an attempt to move the Overton window: to make radical meanings legible and acceptable by placing them in shared public spaces with minimal pushback. Billig (1995), however, argues that the mainstream already contains the cultural raw material that makes such symbols legible in the first place. Familiar qualities already exist in the mainstream, and it is precisely this familiarity that makes the symbols powerful, by hooking people into *already existing affective patterns*. As argued in the theoretical framework, normalization thus operates on two levels: as the deliberate pushing of fringe ideology into public space, and as the activation of exclusionary logics that already exist within the mainstream. These processes reinforce one another, with gender acting as the core link. The symbols circulating in this discourse are legible precisely because they draw upon familiar mainstream norms, such as the nurturing mother, the protective man or the fertile woman. The political fringe intensifies these logics. Because this intensification feels like a natural extension of existing norms, rather than a rupture, the exclusionary logic it carries encounters less resistance.

Both levels of normalization operate through a mechanism I refer to as 'mainstreaming from below', in which ecofascist discourse appropriates symbols of cuteness, nature and femininity, along with other objects of love and care, and re-codes them as fascist symbols. The feeling attached to these symbols emerges *before* the conscious acceptance of the ideology. This process challenges the assumption that positive emotions are inherently benign. In this context, feminized symbols of love function as a mechanism for acceptance by reducing resistance to the underlying message, as the reader engages with familiar gendered symbols without immediate suspicion. Consequently, the ideology of exclusion becomes normalized. In other words, hate is reframed by shifting it from appearing as aggression to appearing as a loving, protective and righteous defence of women and children. The feminization of the symbol is what enables this reframing: care and protection are legible as 'good' precisely because they

draw upon deeply gendered cultural scripts in which femininity is associated with innocence and masculinity with righteous defence. The violence remains, but it is obscured by the positive affective appeal. This is supported empirically by the reverse image search conducted in this thesis, which shows that far-right utopian imagery is visually indistinguishable from that of mainstream aesthetic cultures. The ideology does not announce itself; rather, it borrows an already familiar visual language. The promises circulating in ecofascist discourse, such as unity, family, nature, purity and rural life, are of course broadly shared outside fascism. The ideology becomes effective because it attaches itself to widely felt longings, while the violence that underlies them remains implicit.

This dynamic builds ambivalence around certain symbols. When ecofascist discourse appropriates symbols of nature, cuteness or folk tradition, those symbols become destabilized, pulled between different meanings. The same rune, animal or landscape can carry multiple meanings simultaneously, and it is precisely this layering of seemingly innocent symbols that makes the ideological meaning effective. This is a battle of cultural hegemony: a contest over who 'owns' the good feelings. Far-right actors benefit from this ambivalence, with the symbol able to do its work precisely because it cannot be pinned down. Gendered symbols are particularly vulnerable to this ambivalence. Images of motherhood, feminine beauty and domestic care are already present in mainstream culture, which means that it is more difficult to identify their far-right reappropriation.

This raises a further question: what happens to these symbols once they have been appropriated? When far-right actors consistently attach themselves to symbols of innocence, nature and folk tradition, those symbols risk becoming associated with the ideology that has claimed them. The affect travels with the symbol, but the symbol also absorbs the ideology. This is visible, for instance, with the Tyr rune, appropriated by the Nordic Resistance Movement, or the cartoon Pepe the Frog, whose origins have been partially overwritten by far-right association. Appropriation thus works in two directions: the symbol lends legitimacy to the ideology, and the ideology leaves a residue on the symbol. The same applies to gendered symbols. When

images of the nurturing mother or the caring militant man are consistently used in far-right discourse, those figures gradually accumulate ideological associations that become more difficult to separate from their broader cultural meanings.

This thesis has demonstrated how the far right constructs a positive image of itself through multimodal affective communication, and specifically through nature, family, gender and contemplative imaginaries. This unveils the mechanism behind the construction. Noting that far-right communication has become softer and more aesthetic is important in itself, but the contribution of this thesis in this regard is to show *how that aesthetic works* – how it recruits, normalizes and forms subjects – and why it is therefore more difficult to recognize and counter. Crucially, this process works through feelings and symbols that are already familiar and loved, which is what makes it effective. This is partly because ecofascist discourse responds to real and widely felt anxieties such as environmental collapse, alienation and loss of community, and radical nationalism positions itself as a legitimate answer to these problems. This is important because it impacts upon how we understand radicalization. If far-right ideology travels through feeling rather than argument, and through symbols that are already familiar and loved, then recognizing it requires more than identifying explicit hate speech. It requires us to pay attention to aesthetics, affect and everyday visual culture, which is what this thesis contributes.

7.3 Positive affect as connecting gender and nation

While nationalist communities are sustained by shared imaginaries, this thesis shows that these imaginaries are affectively lived through gendered subject positions. The utopian visions that sustain nationalist communities rely on emotional templates that are deeply gendered, shaping both who one is invited to be and how that belonging is meant to feel. These gendered tropes are rearticulated to resonate with contemporary cultural conditions, including ideals of gender equality, emotional expression and self-realization. The coexistence of 'quieter' masculinities alongside dominant and protective forms, as well as the dual construction of femininity as both vulnerable and

agentic, allows these imaginaries to remain culturally legible and appealing in the present. These gendered narratives are crucial for that work.

The utopian imaginary is thus populated by complementary masculine and feminine figures that together render the imagined community both coherent and affectively compelling. The emotional templates aid in this work. Masculine figures articulate protection, contemplation and belonging, while feminine figures embody beauty, continuity and spirituality. Hence, the thesis argues that, while these gendered imaginaries illustrate nationalist ideology and visualize the imagined community, they also constitute its affective foundations. They do so by attaching ideology to emotions that feel personal and natural, such as belonging, protection, care and love. These emotions are deeply human, rather than political, which makes them effective. The ethnostate is presented as an emotional vision that not only makes radical nationalism *feel* natural and desirable, but legitimizes it, normalizing exclusion and violence by embedding them within familiar gendered and affective frameworks. This is important because it shows that gendered imaginaries are the affective infrastructure of radical nationalist discourse. This thesis has shown that gender makes radical nationalism feel natural and desirable by constructing affective subject positions that invite identification, instil purpose and normalize exclusion. This is how it recruits and sustains itself.

7.4 The stakes

Understanding how far-right ideology travels carries an importance that extends beyond academia. As far-right communication becomes more aesthetically sophisticated and harder to identify as political, recognizing its visual strategies requires more than familiarity with explicit symbols or hate speech; it requires attention to affect, aesthetics and the gendered emotional templates through which ideology is made to feel natural. This has concrete implications for educators, youth workers and practitioners working on early-stage radicalization, where the entry points are often aesthetic and emotional rather than explicitly ideological. Counter-radicalization efforts and digital literacy programmes that focus only on explicit content will miss the

quieter mechanisms this thesis has documented. If far-right ideology can travel through beauty, care and the promise of belonging, then identifying it requires the same critical attention to visual and affective culture that this thesis has documented.

While I was finalizing this thesis in May 2026, two teenage boys who had met and radicalized online attacked a mosque in San Diego, US, killing three older male community members, Amin Abdullah, Nadir Awad and Mansour Kaziha. One perpetrator identified as a 'Christian ecofascist'. The spiritual and esoteric dimensions of ecofascist discourse, such as ethnic spirituality, communion with nature and land and esoteric symbolism, are a consistent feature of this ideology, and the ways in which they attach to different religious frameworks over time warrants further scholarly attention. Moreover, the hatred directed against Muslims in contemporary far-right discourse follows a structure that is historically familiar: The racialized other is constructed as a biological and cultural threat to the nation, the soil and the bloodline. In interwar Europe, this logic was directed primarily against Jews. However, the affective and ideological infrastructure is largely the same. The love for one's imagined community, the naturalization of belonging and the aestheticization of exclusion always implies a corresponding hatred, even when that hatred remains implicit in the imagery. Understanding the 'softer' face of this ideology is therefore not separate from understanding its violence, but rather the condition for it. That is why scholars must continue to study the evolving aesthetic and affective forms of far-right violence.

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