

MARI-LIIS MADISSON

The Semiotic Construction
of Identities in Hypermedia Environments:
The Analysis of Online Communication of
the Estonian Extreme Right



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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- I Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel, Andreas 2015. Grupuskulaarne identiteedi-loome eesti paremäärmuslaste võrgusuhtluses. *Methis. Studia humaniora Estonica* 15, 8–27.
- II Madisson, Mari-Liis 2016a. NWO conspiracy theory: a key frame in online communication of the Estonian extreme right. *Lexia*, x–x [forthcoming].
- III Madisson, Mari-Liis 2014. The semiotic logic of signification of conspiracy theories. *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies* 202, 273–300.
- IV Madisson, Mari-Liis 2016b. Representation of the Snowden scandal in Estonian media: the construction of threats and fear. *Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore*, x–x [forthcoming].
- V Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel Andreas 2016a. ‘Freedom of speech’ in the self-descriptions of the Estonian extreme right groupuscules. *National Identities* 18/2, 89–104.
- VI Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel Andreas 2016b. Autocommunicative meaning-making in online communication of the Estonian extreme right. *Sign Systems Studies*, x–x [forthcoming].

INTRODUCTION

The main principle of democracy does not lie in the fact that one or hundred people can talk but rather in the fact that we can advance from undoubted, unquestionable, unconditional truth and arrive at our right to doubt; to the point where we understand the limitations of our knowledge, to the point where we realize how imperfect are the ideas that seem the truest for us. And we need another person. Not because she is cleverer but because she is different.
(Lotman 2010a: 242)

My dissertation consists of six articles and the framing chapter. The framing chapter begins with introducing the problem of online identity-creation and lays bare the tendency of the formation of vernacular webs, which are opposed to dominant media and state authorities. I point out the major reasons as to why it is relevant, and highly topical, to study the extreme right grass-roots communities and their prevalent ways of meaning-making. I also outline the main characteristics that need to be present for defining some content as being extreme right. The next sub-chapter gives a brief overview of the research, which has concentrated on the extreme right communication and identity-creation. I highlight the works of the critical discourse analysis, cultural studies and semiotics and bring focus on certain papers that have concentrated on the specifics of the extreme right online communication. Then I summarize the main purposes and research emphases of my dissertation. I also explicate the reasons as to why it is fruitful to apply the frameworks of cultural semiotics for comprehending the processes of identity-creation of the contemporary extreme right. The next sub-chapter introduces the sources that have been analyzed in my papers. I explain why I concentrated on the particular web pages and how the style and the content of the observed sources transformed during the years of my studies. Then I elucidate the reasons why I decided to use the non-participatory covert observation (as one of my research methods) and also unveil certain ethical dilemmas, which accompany my research. Finally, I present short summaries of the papers of this dissertation and envisage some possible future directions for my research.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND ITS IMPORTANCE

The thematic focus of the papers collected in this dissertation is set on processes of identity-creation formed in online communication. My articles rely on an assumption that the processes of identification have a discursive and context-specific nature. Identities are constructed in various socio-cultural interactions and they are constituted through opposing to *the other* (Hall 2000: 17). Considering that an increasing proportion of personal, communal and cultural communication is mediated through hypermedia, understanding the specifics of its impact on identity-creation is of upmost significance. It is important to note, that Internet is not offering us a mere communicational infrastructure, which can be used for expanding our formerly existing identities into *virtual* environments, but in online interaction several relevant meetings, negotiations, disputes and dialogues take place, through which contemporary identities are (re)articulated and (re)produced (Campbell 2006: 275).

At the same time, it must be emphasized, online communication is usually not functioning as a postmodern *laboratory* or a *playground* where the barriers of offline-reality (e.g. race, class and gender) are diminished and which provides fertile conditions for endless experimentation with identities¹ (see Davis 2012: 636, Gradinaru 2013: 103, Marwick 2013: 357). Online interactions, as well as many other communicational processes, are organized by our interpretational horizons, which include specific value dominants, opinions and prejudices. In the Internet, reaching out for particular contents and communicational situations depends remarkably on the choices of the individual. Several studies have indicated that it often leads to the formation of relatively homogeneous sphere of meaning. Namely, people seem to prefer the informational and communicational space which reaffirms their previously existing views, or which at least does not cause serious conflicts or misunderstandings with them (see Grömping 2014; Kushin, Kitchener 2009, Stroud 2010, Sunstein 2009, article VI of the present thesis). This tendency is supported by the fact that during the last dozen years the number of the people for whom the social media functions as a primary channel of the news and other public information, is significantly grown². The meaning-packages, provided by the social media, are rather motivated by the taste of user's network of contacts and not by the ideals of public sphere that imply the balanced, multi-perspective information that is supporting the social and cultural cohesion. What is more, the automated recommendation system of social media (e.g. YouTube's recommender algorithms, based on covisitation count and prior viewing history) is directing the interpreter towards

¹ The vision that online communication functions as postmodernist identity *laboratory* was popular in 1990s, especially among the researchers who were studying text-based communication that was taking place via relatively anonymous channels (e.g. in chat rooms or Multi-User Dungeons), see Turkle 1995, 1997, Stone 1991.

² See Estonian quantitative survey on media landscape Mina.Maailm.Meedia (MeeMa 2015).

content, which is aligned with his/her existing perspective and which is potentially leading to immersion within a bubble of ideologically unvaried content (O’Callaghan et. al 2015: 473, see Gillespie 2014, Pariser 2011).

It would be unbalanced to claim that today’s socio-cultural communication is necessarily moving towards isolated and incompatible spheres of information. The public communicational arenas, providing a space for deliberate discussions have not disappeared. Actually, several researchers have pointed out that the online interactions provide a ground for improving public sphere and cooperation between different interest groups (Chadwick 2009; Dahlberg 2011; Friedland, Hove, Rojas 2006). Nevertheless, previously indicated tendency of the creation of homogenous informational spheres is an influential trend of meaning-making in online culture, and the present study is concentrating on explaining some of its aspects. Namely, the papers of my dissertation are dealing with the so-called participatory or peer-to-peer webs, which are formed of online interactions of people with similar views and interests. Robert Glenn Howard has indicated that participatory online communication significantly converges the dimensions of alternative and institutional, public and personal, non-profit and commercial content, creating inextricable hybrid combinations. However, the individuals navigating in this informational sphere often tend to value it because its *grass-roots* or *vernacular* nature, or because it has *risen among the people themselves* (Howard 2008: 195). Thus, the intersection of different nodes of vernacular network lies on the level of self-description and self-understanding. These kinds of informational spheres are invoking trust and authority by way of “a suggestion that noninstitutional processes have participated in the emergence of conditions that support current beliefs, values, or practices” (Howard 2013: 76–77). My papers concentrate on the peripheral extremist sphere of the vernacular web, which opposes strongly to dominant culture, politics and media institutions.

Several studies have pointed out that extremist³ vernacular communities are the most likely source through which the people from developed democratic countries may come into contact with extremist views (see Castells 2009, Griffin 2003, Sunstein 2009). Tina Askanius and Yiannis Mylonas have pointed out that radical participatory online communities effectively fuel the spite and skeptical attitudes towards the mainstream media and political elite and amplify the general feeling of discontent and disempowerment. Those informational spheres are often tempting because they reify complex and fluid issues, structures and identities and offer simplistic and eschatological explanations to the intangible complex problems (Askanius, Mylonas 2015: 61). Vernacular webs of skeptical knowledge provide a permutation of so-called typical elements and key topics of conspiracy explanations, which are syncretically combined when some unpleasant events or tendencies occur (see Barkun 2003, p. 183, article II

³ Extremism refers to “an ideological and practical opposition to the values and practices of democracy, either as it exists in a particular system, or as a system, which may, but does not necessarily, involve a propensity to violence.” (March, Mudde 2005: 24)

of the present thesis). Extremist left-wing and right-wing vernacular webs are often functioning as a breeding-ground for surprisingly similar black and white schemes of explanation that do not leave any room for accidents and coincidences but recognize the covert malignant actions of ideological opponents behind any disturbing development. What is more, contemporary radical rightists and leftists often share enemies: globalization, capitalism and multinational corporations. It goes without saying, however, that the extreme right is not opposed to globalization and capitalism “because it produces economic inequality and poverty, but because it threatens their ethno-nationalist concept of a homogeneous society” (Sommer 2008: 312–313, article V).

My dissertation is predominantly focusing on the meaning-making of *the extreme right* online communication. In 2012, when I started my doctoral studies, the Estonian extreme right seemed to be rather a marginal socio-cultural force. The main reason, why I decided to dedicate my research on the extreme right communication and identity-creation, was connected to the massacre committed by Anders Behring Breivik in 2011. It demonstrated that relatively loosely organized network of the extreme right⁴ may be sufficient for the radicalization of the “lone wolves” and for translating the abstract resentment and hatred into a language of concrete violent actions. Now, four years later, multiple extreme right and right-wing populist parties, national and transnational organizations and grassroots-movements are proliferating in Europe, which is strained from the global economic depression and the ongoing refugee crisis. At the moment it seems that those developments are not showing any signs of de-escalation. As a rule, above-mentioned movements are distancing themselves from Breivik (at least on the level of official communication) and his brutal acts of violence in Oslo and on Utøya but, at the same time, they still frequently reproduce the explanations articulated in his manifesto “2083 – A European Declaration of Independence”⁵. It appears that European right-wing populists and extreme rightists are often fond of his Eurabia plot, which stresses that “Muslims, supported by liberals, cultural relativists and Marxists, are out to Islamicise Europe and that there is a conspiracy to impose multiculturalism on the continent and destroy western civilization” (Fekete 2011: 31, see Askanus, Mylonas 2015; Fekete 2012; Hirvonen 2013; Mares 2014; Turner-Graham 2014).

Within last four years, right-wing populist parties (EKRE⁶, RÜE⁷) and organizations (SAPTK⁸, Pegida Estonia, SA Euroopa Rahvusrinne⁹) – that have

⁴ Breivik radicalized in a small network of the white supremacists that held strong anti-Islamic views (Griffin 2011).

⁵ Breivik’s manifesto is not containing very unique and unprecedented extreme right ideas, it rather offers a syncretic set of the central topics of anti-Islamic subculture, neo-Nazi philosophy and neo-conservative discourse (see Griffin 2011, Turner-Graham 2014).

⁶ *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, [Conservative People’s Party of Estonia].

⁷ *Rahva Ühtsuse Erakond*, [Party of People’s Unity].

⁸ *SA Perekonna ja Traditsiooni Kaitseks*, [Foundation for Protecting Family and Tradition].

often gained public attention because of their homophobic, racist and xenophobic statements – have remarkably grown their significance in Estonia. Also, an anti-immigrant street patrol group Soldiers of Odin, organized in a form of grass-roots activism, has been registered in Estonia. However, the recent Annual Review of the Estonian Security Police points out that the most alarming factors in the context of the escalation of extremist ideas are connected with the social media communication: it has contributed to the spreading of general anxiety and the cultivation of aggressive attitudes (Puusepp 2015: 5). Estonian Security Police also emphasizes that people tend to express unreasonably serious worries about the jeopardizing of traditional families and nation states in Western countries, which leads to disproportionate fear of imagined dangers and, in turn, makes people vulnerable and responsive for the propaganda that has hostile attitudes towards Estonian state (Puusepp 2015: 6).

The above-mentioned tendencies certainly indicate the necessity and growing importance of studying vernacular extreme right online communication. Still, one may wonder, how direct, in fact, are the relations between the national-essentialist and xenophobic discourse, proliferating in *virtual* environments, and the offensive events that take place in *real world*. It is quite common to assume that in online communication the threshold of politeness and political-correctness is low and people use it as a channel for freely proliferating their insults and vituperation, after which they can leave to their peaceful *offline reality*. I concede that online communication (especially in its relatively anonymous forms) is not characterized by as deep level of human empathy and clear rules of politeness as in case of face-to-face interaction (see Davis 2012: 646), but I am definitely not supporting the dualistic separation of *online and offline realities*. Rather they should be understood as an intertwined realm because in online contacts there usually do not meet personas who are created for one-time identity-project (as indicated in the beginning) but subjects who have “histories, social-locatedness in various structures, demographics, epistemological standpoints, etc.” and what happens on the Internet significantly influences how people experience life when we are not online (Jurgenson 2012: 85). The frequent navigation and communication in the extreme right network significantly affects one’s views and attitudes and often it is also the primary channel calling for common meetings and actions (Caiani, Kröll 2014, Turner-Graham 2014, Wojcieszak 2010). For example, during the April Unrest in 2007, social media (Rate.ee) was actively used by both ethnic Russians and ethnic Estonians, for articulating narratives of hate and rebellion as well as for coordinating gatherings and confrontations (Siibak 2014). The more recent example is the organization of Soldiers Of Odin Estonia, which was predominantly formed via Facebook.

The other question, which is often raised in the context of my research topic, is what kind of features have to be present in case of identifying some dis-

⁹ [Foundation of European National Front].

courses or movements as extreme right¹⁰. I have addressed this issue in the papers, co-written with Andreas Ventsel (see articles I and V). There are not many movements which use the term “extreme-right” on the level of self-description. On the contrary, they usually try to fiercely dispute these kinds of designations. Also, there is not a fixed and widely accepted academic definition of extreme right. However, on the heuristic level, it is important to outline the sets of tendencies and features by which some movements can be identified as more extreme right than others. I rely on Cas Mudde’s definition which outlines five basic characteristics: nativism¹¹, xenophobia¹², racism¹³, anti-democratic sentiment¹⁴ and support for a strong state¹⁵ (Mudde, 1995: 206; Mudde 2000: 11), that are essential for identifying a party or a movement as ‘extreme right’ (article I, see Hainsworth 2008: 69). Predominantly it overlaps with the characteristics that Les Back (2002: 632) has outlined as the common features of cyber-racist movements: “1) a rhetoric of racial and/or national uniqueness and common destiny; 2) ideas of racial supremacy, superiority and separation; 3) a repertoire of conceptions of racial Otherness; 4) a utopian revolutionary worldview that aims to overthrow the existing order”. It is important to emphasize that the content of the sources, analyzed in my articles, is heterogeneous and surely not all the statements, expressed in those blogs, are not manifesting aforementioned extreme right features but their general tonality is extreme right. The most prevalent themes analyzed in case of the Estonian extreme right network were:

¹⁰ I use the term *extreme right* because it is common among European researchers; American scholars rather prefer to use *radical right* (Hainsworth 2008: 8).

¹¹ According to Cas Mudde, nativism can be identified „as an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state. The basis for defining (non) “nativeness” can be diverse, e.g. ethnic, racial or religious, but will always have a cultural component” (Mudde 2007: 19).

¹² Cas Mudde (2000: 188) has defined xenophobia as: “Fear, hate or hostility with regard to groups that are perceived as ‘alien’ or ‘strange’, such as foreigners, immigrants, asylum-seeker, etc. The idea that anything ‘alien’ is threatening.”

¹³ In my dissertation, racism is understood according to the definition given by Reisigl and Wodak, who state that: “Racism is based on the hierarchical construction of groups of persons who are characterised as communities of descent and to whom are attributed specific collective, naturalised or biologically labelled traits that are considered to be almost invariable. These traits are primarily related to biological features, appearance, cultural practices, customs, traditions, language, or socially stigmatised ancestors. As an ideological mix, racism combines different, and sometimes even contradictory, doctrines, religious beliefs and stereotypes, thereby constructing an almost invariable pseudocausal connection between – possibly fictitious – biological (genetic and phenotypic), and social, cultural and mental, traits”. (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 10)

¹⁴ Anti-democratic views are opposing to pluralism, parliamentarism, political equality, etc (see Mudde 2000: 188).

¹⁵ The strong state is associated with a demand for order and authority, accompanied by the demand for strong punishment of breach of the rules and a call for a strong army to protect the national interests (Mudde 2000: 188).

the need to preserve indigenous Estonian-ness; speculations on how a Zionist/Masonic cabal is jeopardizing the existing world order (Estonia and other nation-states included); the idea that cultural and racial mixing is essentially dangerous; a conviction that Estonia should withdraw from decadent international unions, e.g. the European Union, United Nations and NATO (articles V and VI).

A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE STUDIES OF THE EXTREME RIGHT IDENTITY-CREATION AND COMMUNICATION

The objective of the present sub-chapter is to highlight certain important qualitative studies that have focused on the topic of the extreme right identity-creation. I do not aim to give a profound and complete overview but rather an introduction to some existing scholarly works and conceptualizations that are closely linked with the cultural semiotic approach, developed in my thesis.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

One of the most thorough and oft-quoted studies on the articulation of the extreme right ideas is “Discourse and Discrimination. Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-semitism” (2001), written by Viennese critical discourse analysts Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl. This study offers a substantial overview of the academic works dedicated to the construction of xenophobic and racist discourse, and develops a systematic analytical framework (Discourse Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis) for researching discriminatory texts and signification practices. The authors’ methodology has been widely used in several studies conducted either by themselves or by various other authors (see Wodak 2003, Wodak, Forchtner 2014; Wodak, Richardson 2009 etc). In addition, Wodak and Reisigl are the editors of a compendium “The Semiotics of Racism: Approaches in Critical Discourse Analysis” (2001), which includes multiple case studies from different countries. Their approach is built on an assumption that racist, nationalist, ethnicist and sexist prejudices are formed, reproduced and legitimized by means of discourse (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 1). According to Viennese critical discourse analysts, the most important discursive strategies are: *nomination* (e.g. via explicit dissimulation, somatisation, cultururation, social problematisation); *predication* (the tropological construction and discrimination of in-groups and out-groups, e.g. via de-individualisation, anonymisation, generalizing selective foregrounding); *argumentation* (e.g. via different techniques of justification and legitimation); *perspectivisation* (e.g. via deixis, quotation marks, metaphors); and *intensifying/mitigation* (e.g. via modal verbs) (Wodak, Forchtner 2014: 235). Their methodology emphasizes studying texts by taking into account different layers – the sociopolitical/historical, situational, text-internal, inter-textual and inter-discursive – of their context (Reisigl, Wodak, 2001: 40, Wodak, Forchtner 2014: 235).

Very similar considerations have been central in Teun A. van Dijk’s studies, dedicated to racist and xenophobic discourse, where he draws a special attention to the cognitive dimension (van Dijk 1984, 1987, 2000). An important topic of his studies has been the role of the *symbolic elites* (politicians, journalists, scholars, writers) in constructing ethnic prejudices (van Dijk 1991, 1993). Theo

van Leeuwen synthesizes the frameworks of CDA with ideas from sociosemiotics and visual semiotics. Van Leeuwen concentrates predominantly on the exclusionary identity-strategies, used in visual racist texts (van Leeuwen 2000, van Leeuwen, Jaworski 2002).

A basic goal, shared by the authors relying on CDA, is to take a normative position towards their researched discursive practices and, ideally, also change the real political actions that constitute particular discriminatory articulations (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 35). In interview given to Merit Karise (2005) van Dijk pointed out that the aim of CDA is a completely democratic society, where the ethnic minorities are not marginalized or oppressed, where the diversity is a norm, and where differences in gender and nationality are not playing role anymore. CDA emphasizes that the agents, who articulate racist, xenophobic or in other ways discriminatory discourse, must bear responsibility for their reprehensible statements and researchers should not exculpate those agents by, for example, pathologizing their practices (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 6). It has been pointed out that the studies of CDA are based on

a conviction of the unrestricted validity of human rights and by the awareness of suffering, which both take sides against social discrimination, repression, domination, exclusion and exploitation and for emancipation, self-determination and social recognition. Further, it is motivated by the – perhaps in part utopian – conviction that unsatisfactory social conditions can, and therefore must, be subject to methodical transformation towards fewer social dysfunctions and unjustifiable inequalities (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 34).

The present dissertation differs from the works of CDA by avoiding this kind of normative dimension. My approach is, first and foremost, driven by an inclination to understand the extreme right practices of meaning-making and not judge them. It is important to note that several aforementioned discriminatory strategies and argumentative fallacies are characteristic to much wider realms of identity-creation than merely the racist, nationalist, sexist and xenophobic discourse. They also often appear in discourses that explicitly criticize racism and other discriminatory practices of identity-construction. The perspective of cultural semiotics does not imply the evaluation and judgment to the particular representations or trends of meaning-making. The competence of cultural semiotics just does not embrace making decisions about the reality, which stays out of the boundaries of modelling languages (Lotman 2001b: 36). Rather, it confines itself to studying interpretative frames that are mapping and simplifying the social reality in their own specific ways. It needs to be emphasized, that I do not approve the nativistic and xenophobic views, and I am convinced that in public affairs actions need to be taken against the proliferation of the extreme right ideas and polarizing exclusionary identification. In any case, I believe that the value of a semiotic study of the extreme right communication and identity-creation lies in opening the dynamics and dominant meaning-hierarchies, organizing those interactions, and not in introducing my political preferences and

worldview. At the same time, I acknowledge that in qualitative research the researcher is also the research instrument (Fielding 2004: 246) and my views and values are definitely reflected in the way I interpret my research material. Besides the normative dimension, my papers also differ from the outlined CDA studies for their research material. While I concentrate on the vernacular extreme right communication, the CDA based studies tend to focus on explication of the official discourse of certain extreme right institutions such as, for example, *Austrian Freedom Party* (FPÖ), *Alliance for the Future of Austria* (BZÖ and similar).

Cultural Studies

The research of the extreme right identity-creation is greatly influenced by the works of Stuart Hall and other authors of cultural studies (see e.g. Gilroy 1987, 1996). Hall's works have contributed to the development of contemporary understanding of identity-creation as discursive, heterogeneous and relational process, which is significantly shaped by context-specific and contingent factors. The majority of studies, tackling with various aspects of the topic of socio-cultural identities, cite his world-famous article "Who needs identity?" (2000). In addition to elaborating general theoretical tools for comprehending contemporary processes of identity-creation, Hall's works also highlight the specifics of racist and xenophobic meaning-making. He emphasizes that researchers should draw equal attention to racist discourse as a constitutive force of the identity-creation of the discriminators, but also to the way it impacts the self-understanding of the discriminated groups (Hall 1978, 1990). According to Hall, this type of discriminatory meaning-making is operating through the processes of racialization. Racialization fixates certain traits (criminality, violence, dissoluteness, lack of intelligence and self-control, tameless sexuality, etc.) to particular groups of people of color (see Hall 1986, 1996).

Hall's studies analyze racial discourse in the complexity of various socio-historical contexts in constellation with other constitutive articulations, for example, the categories of class and gender (Alexander 2009: 272). Since Hall was greatly influenced by ideas of Althusser and Gramsci, he emphasizes the role of competing ideologies in the constitution of racist discourse and its construction of normative and marginal groups (Hall 1980, 1986). He notes that in contemporary developed societies the xenophobic and racist discourse is constantly looking for new ideological expressions. It is not explicitly relying on brutal assumption of biological and cultural inferiority and superiority, but rather is articulated in complex and polysemic ways and often intermingled with discourses of social cohesion, nationalism, and patriotism (Rizvi 2015: 269, see Hall 1986, 1996). This tendency is also observed in article V, which concentrates on the issue of how the self-descriptions of Estonian extreme rightists mix the discourses of multiculturalism and cyber-democracy with racist values.

Hall's analyses focus predominantly on British racial discourse. He studies how politicians from various parties, different sectors of media, education and entertainment contribute to the articulation of racist and xenophobic understandings. Hall and his co-authors develop further sociologist Stanley Cohen's concept of moral panics and apply it in the analysis of discourse, which fixates strong relations between black community and the phenomenon of mugging. They point out that moral panics, usually amplified by media, tends to direct the public attention away from the complex social, economical and historical causes of certain problems, and construct a tangible group of scapegoats and simplified direct solutions (more active police-work, law and order politics, etc.) (Hall et al. 1978). Also, his works have explored the intricate diasporic identity of the British black communities (Hall 1990, see also Gilroy 1996). This dissertation does not focus on studying as multi-layered and vast racial discourse as Hall's works. It does not explicitly center on the processes of creating exclusionary and discriminatory identities in dominant culture and media. My papers only deal with its reflections in the extreme right informational sphere. However, Hall's ideas of processual and discursive identity-creation have significantly influenced my approach and his ideas fit very well together with Lotman's relational theory of semiosphere. The framework of moral panics has a crucial intersection with the tendency of constructing conspiracy theories (both, in dominant and alternative channels) in times of crisis (see articles II and III).

Semiotics

Unlike cases of cultural studies and CDA, there are no numerous major works, which extensively and explicitly concentrate on the extreme right identity-creation and communication by means of the meta-language of semiotics. However, there are some semiotic studies, which do touch upon the certain aspects of the extreme right meaning-making. Umberto Eco's essay, "Ur-Fascism" (1995), outlines the common features of various fascist movements and philosophical-ideological currents of the extreme right thought. Eco stresses that those features do not comprise of a rigid organized system. Indeed, many of them in fact contradict with each other, or are also central characteristics of certain other forms of fanaticism or despotism. He implicates that an important feature of contemporary xenophobic discourse lies in the cult of tradition, for example, a tendency to create coherence between contemporary socio-cultural developments or the ideas surrounding the legend of the Holy Grail, or as presented in "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion". Eco points out that the obsession with a conspiracy is also a core-feature that organizes fascist interpretations. It usually tends to map internal enemies absorbed into local state-institutions and intricate global conspiracy systems. Additionally, he outlines populism, a cult of heroes and a tendency to use Newspeak, based on impoverished and shortened vocabulary and simple syntax, as further significant features of fascist discourse (Eco 1995). Eco's short essay presents a quite sketchy over-

view of the aforementioned features but it still offers important heuristic insights for comprehending the extreme right meaning-making. This dissertation applies several features, pointed out by Eco, in a contemporary analysis of the extreme right communication and explains the dominant semiotic mechanisms on which those characteristics have been built upon (see papers II and III).

Susan Petrilli's study, "Whiteness matters: What lies in the future?" (2010), overlaps in its normativity with the approach developed by the critical discourse analysts. Namely, her article focuses on the problem of white identity as a sociosemiotic construction "elaborated by the social structures of white power and dominion, used by governments throughout history to establish hierarchies among peoples and to justify racial discrimination" (Petrilli 2010: 151). Her semioethical perspective¹⁶ stresses that the sign-processes that form the basis for identity-creation, are deeply intertwined with values and ideologies, and while studying them, one needs to bear in mind the aspect of critique and responsibility (Petrilli 2010: 149). Petrilli approaches the meaning-making that organizes the white identifications by relying on Bathin's notion of dialogue. Her distinction between the two types of dialogue is fruitful for analyzing contemporary communication practices of the extreme right. According to Petrilli, a dialogue may either be dominated by the logic of identity, or by the logic of alterity (2010: 152). I lay bare these opposing ways of communication in my article, which contrasts dialogically-oriented communication and enclosed extreme right autocommunication (see article VI).

Marek Steedman's study conceptualizes enclosed extreme right communication by building upon the frameworks of Gramsci and Lotman. He uses the concepts of autocommunication and self-description for analyzing how the Louisiana governor Newton C. Blanchard propagated the doctrine of white supremacy. Indeed, Steedman demonstrates that Blanchard's speeches developed exclusionary self-model, which declared black and lower class white Louisianans effectively "non-existent" (2006: 149). Steedman is one of the few authors who applies the framework of autocommunication in the context of political communication, based on redundant reproduction of social stereotypes. The article VI of this thesis focuses on a similar problem by explicating the specific dominants that guide the extreme right hermetic autocommunication.

Research on the extreme right online communication and identity-creation

A British historian and political scientist, Roger Griffin, has studied the formation and communicational peculiarities of the contemporary extreme right

¹⁶ Petrilli has developed (together with Augusto Ponzio) a thorough methodology of semioethics which focuses on much larger dimensions of identity-creation and communication than the problem of white identity, which is the topic of the particular study referred here (e.g. see Petrilli 2006; Petrilli, Ponzio 2007).

grass-roots networks, proliferating mainly in online environments, in most focused manner. In several articles, he has introduced the concept of groupuscule, which helps to understand the rhizomic communicational structure and the ideological grounds of the contemporary extreme right (see Griffin 1999, 2002, 2003). In my papers, I rely importantly on Griffin's theoretical insights and research-findings but I also develop his conception of groupuscule further by synthesizing it with the ideas from cultural semiotics (see articles I and V). Cultural semiotics helps to contribute in explicating inter-and intra-groupuscular communication and dominant meaning-making mechanisms.

The extreme right online communication has been systematically studied in the works of an American sociologist Jessie Daniels, who is the author of a monograph "Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights (Perspectives on a Multiracial America)" (2009). Daniels's works provide an extensive critical overview of the cultural and sociological studies that deal with various contemporary forms of the extreme right online interactions (see Daniels 2009, 2012, 2015). Her studies demonstrate that networked racism is often organized by a global identity-frame – trans-local whiteness¹⁷. According to Daniels, several (English-based) social networking sites, forums and newsletters function as international meeting-places for the extreme rightists from different countries. The regular visitors of those web sites identify themselves as a part of a rapidly growing global community, which is committed to spreading "white pride worldwide" (Daniels 2009: 46). Daniels's ideas on trans-local whiteness have been developed further by Manuela Caiani and Patricia Kröll (2014). Additionally, Daniels has emphasized that the contemporary extreme right discourse is remarkably spreading in public spaces of online-discussion (e.g. newspaper comment fields) via the usage of coded language that is based on hiding intended racial meanings (Daniels, Hughey 2013). The present dissertation builds upon Daniels's observations and applies several of her aforementioned ideas in an analysis of Estonian vernacular web of the extreme right.

The extreme right identification-processes are also addressed in the insightful studies of Alexandra Campbell (2006, 2008). She relies mostly on the identity-approaches of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Slavoj Žižek and applies those ideas in the analysis of interactions of various extreme right news groups (Skinhead online communities, nativistic discussion forums, etc.). Campbell's studies focus mainly on the construction of the exclusionary white British identity and her case studies show that the contemporary extreme right discourse does not usually exhibit an explicit preoccupation with the annihilation of *the other* but rather stresses the acute necessity of the preservation of *own* racial and ethnic identity. This tendency of the extreme right identity creation is also addressed in the article V of this dissertation.

¹⁷ This term is coined by sociologist Les Back (2002) and it refers to a form of contemporary white identity that is not connected with a particular regional/ national context but is rather attached to online community of the white supremacists.

In what follows, I would like to draw attention to certain authors, who have highlighted important aspects of the contemporary extreme right communication and identity-creation in single-article form. Chris Atton's paper, "Far-right media on the Internet: culture, discourse and power" (2006), raises a question of how the extreme right media sphere has adapted to the self-descriptions characteristic of citizen or grass-roots journalism and alternative media. Atton inaugurates a tendency to depict white and nativistic identity, by relying on a frame *othered by the other*, as something suppressed and threatened. Similar observations have been also outlined in Bart Cammaerts's study "Radical pluralism and free speech in online public spaces. The case of North Belgian extreme right discourses" (2009). He unveils that the extreme-right interactions often exhibit ideological double-standards: on one hand, they seem to eagerly promote the freedom of speech, but on the other hand, they try to eliminate, or ridicule, all the voices (e.g. mainstream media, minority groups, cultural elite, etc.) that do not agree with the extreme right ideology. The article V of my thesis analyzes a similar topic in the context of the Estonian extreme right. Atton's and Cammaerts's studies were very useful for mapping this research-problem.

Derek O'Callaghan and his research-team draw attention to another important aspect of the extreme right online communication. Namely, they stress that the specific algorithms (based on user's history of *likes* and searches), used in many social networking sites, foster the development of homogeneous extreme right communicational spheres i.e. echo chambers (O'Callaghan et. al 2013, 2015). The development of homogenous and polarized extreme right informational sphere is also a topic of a Magdalena Wojcieszak's study, where she concentrates on the echo-chamber effect in a neo-Nazi forum. Her article demonstrates that in homogeneous communicational sphere the formerly existing views tend to become more polarized. It is noteworthy, that the contacts with interlocutors, who have contrasting perspectives, do not have a mitigatory impact for the individuals, whose views are radicalized in online echo chambers: rather, it is quite the opposite (Wojcieszak 2010). In order to explain the wider social functions and meaning-making dominants of this kind of hermetic communication, my study synthesizes the ideas of those authors with the framework of autocommunication (see paper VI).

THE MAIN RESEARCH AIMS AND EMPHASES

The following sub-chapter establishes the primary goals that I have set myself in this dissertation by building upon the methodology of cultural semiotics. The main objective of this section is to give a brief overview of the major research emphases of this thesis and explain the need and benefits of approaching these research goals by means of the meta-languages of semiotics. I do not offer here definitions of the key-concepts that I use; they are provided in the articles, where the particular concepts are being employed.

All my articles draw upon an assumption that identities gain their meaning and value primarily through the relations with *the other*, that is, through construction of contrasts and oppositions. Semiotic approach follows an anti-essentialist perspective which treats identities as a matrix of difference. Identity is not characterized by a set of some unchanging authentic or primordial properties but, rather, defined through constantly developing processes of meaning-making, transformed in interplay with altering socio-cultural context (Campbell 2008: 410). Thus, the processes of identity-creation are not predetermined by certain essential factors but suggest of making semiotic choices, as well as a certain amount of contingency and unpredictability. The approach of cultural semiotics sees the processes of identity-creation as an integral part of communication. While studying communicative systems, it is important to note that they are modelling systems, too, and every time when a semiotic unity creates a model of the world, it is simultaneously building a model of itself; by accentuating some of its parts and missing the others as unimportant (Lotman 2010b: 37).

The metalanguage of cultural semiotics is well-applicable for researching processes of identification and meaning-making because it allows taking into account their dynamic and relational nature. Semiospherical analysis emphasizes that every semiotic unity is consisting of smaller integral wholes. Also, it acknowledges the fact that it is itself a sub-part of wider semiotic totalities. This kind of approach presumes an endless dialogue between a part and a whole; it allows studying every semiosphere as a separate totality, as well as to investigate its relations with other semiotic unities in a wider cultural context (Torop, 2003: 335–336). Semiosphere is a fruitful tool for cultural analysis because it is applicable for understanding both micro and macro scale interactions (Hartley 2014: 4, 7). Semiospherical approach enables to explicate how semiotic unites, that are understood to be identical in the point of view of some level, can be perceived as entirely different, or even opposite, from another perspective. **The first objective** of my thesis is explicating the interactions that take place in various dimensions of xenophobic and nativistic sphere of meaning, and to develop a multi-dimensional treatment of the construction of extreme right identities. The articles I and the V explicate the interactions that take place between the extreme right sphere of meaning and Estonian public discourse, official media sphere, the sphere of alternative media, and the like. Those

papers also concentrate on the communication between various nodes of the extreme right network and analyze the development of core-periphery relations in this sphere. The exploration of various processes of self-description, taking place at different levels of extreme right semiosphere, allows explaining how inconsistent and sometimes even controversial values are unified into a coherent identity-discourse (see article V). Semiospheric approach enables also to map the core values and key texts that organize multiple layers of the extreme right communication and recur in dissimilar interactions (see articles I and VI).

The usefulness of cultural semiotics lies in its applicability for analyzing the sign processes that form the basis of particular texts but also in its capacity for explaining the wider socio-communicative functions of certain types of texts and signification tendencies. Lotman has pointed out that semiotics is dealing with studying the structures of signs and the communication that is enabled by those signs. It is a study of: communication, exchange of messages, inter- and intrapersonal understanding/misunderstanding and of various forms of socio-cultural coding (Lotman 2006: 156). **The second wider aim** of this dissertation is explaining the relatively small semantic variability of the extreme right communication and to disclose its tendency to generate rather homogenous associations. In the articles II and VI I explicate how the co-presence of certain dominants of meaning-making (e.g. the orientation towards the normative (“right”) texts, a tendency to develop self-descriptions based on binary oppositions, constant relying on causality, motivated by evil intentions of a covert grouping, etc.) direct towards hermetic and enclosed communication. I also unfold various socio-cultural functions of this kind of communication, for example, mapping unpleasant and/or unintelligible events, demonizing ideological opponents, pahtic strengthening and reaffirming of communal relations and the like. Similar dominants of meaning-making are not only characteristic of the extreme right communication by they also organize general articulation of cultural threats and fears. They are quite likely to be activated in situations of conflicts and crises when normative frames of interaction and interpretation (orientation towards referential function, argumentation, considering the interests of various interest-groups) stop prevailing. I exemplify these kinds of communicational tendencies by analyzing the extreme right visions of conspiracies (see article II) as well explicating the discourse of fear that emerged in Estonian reception of Snowden’s leakages that started undermining techno-optimistic identity discourse (see article IV).

The third goal is to explore the logic of semiotic construction of conspiracy theory as one dominant framework of explanation, widespread in vernacular sphere¹⁸. It is important to note that cultural semiotics is not interested in reality in its entire diversity but rather in its sign-based models; and in most cases those models tend to be simplifying (M. Lotman 2001: 216–217). Thus, cultural semiotics offers an efficient metalanguage for studying conspiracy theory as a

¹⁸ The framework of conspiracy theory sometimes organizes also the communication of formal or institutional sphere but in vernacular interactions it is usually more prevalent.

specific way of interpreting and modelling the reality. It enables to systematically explicate how different modelling languages are combined in conspiracy theories without raising the question of adequacy or validity of a particular conspiracy theory¹⁹. The article III of my dissertation deals with the general semiotic mechanisms that guide the construction of conspiracy theories while the article II focuses on the role that NWO conspiracy theories have in organizing the self-descriptions of the extreme right interpreters. Also, the latter article explains how conspiracy narratives are constructed in multimodal and interactive online communication that usually tends to counteract mono-causal and linear text-creation.

The fourth aim of the present thesis is the diversification of the usage of the concepts of cultural semiotics by applying them in the field of vernacular meaning-making, which is spreading in online culture. I agree with the authors, who have pointed out that Lotman's frameworks have great potential for understanding and analyzing global digital cultures, especially the vibrant sphere of networked media (Ibrus, Torop 2015; Ibrus 2014; Hartley 2009, 2014), as well as various transmedia phenomena (Ojamaa, Torop 2015, Ojamaa 2015). My main contribution is the conceptualization of the vernacular sphere of online-communication, especially the layer, which opposes itself to the dominant culture. For the present, a few other studies have developed a similar approach (Leone 2015, Ventsel 2015, 2016). The article VI of my thesis deals with polarizing hermetic autocommunication as an extreme version of cultural I-I communication and it seeks to expand the common understanding of the scope of autocommunicative processes. Usually, academic works that rely on Lotman's concept of autocommunication utilize it for explaining cultural innovation, individual learning, the processes of discovering and comprehending (Hartley 2014; Ibrus, Torop 2015; Kallio, Sandström 2009; Raudsepp, Ventsel 2015). The article in question demonstrates that the framework of autocommunication is also valuable in the context of studying enclosing meaning-making that is predominantly reproducing cultural stereotypes. At the same time, the papers of the present dissertation (articles I, II, V, VI) aim to enrich the qualitative research frameworks for comprehending the extreme right online communication. The approach of the cultural semiotics helps to expand the analytical toolset for studying the contemporary extreme right, and provides a well-organized metalanguage for describing and understanding this phenomenon.

¹⁹ Several studies of conspiracy theories have been criticized for pathologizing their research object, see article II.

OVERVIEW OF THE ANALYZED SOURCES

The aim of this sub-chapter is to give a brief overview of the main sources of my case-studies. It also outlines certain important transformations that the Estonian extreme right underwent from September 2012 until the end of 2015.

The case study material for the paper, which unfolds the semiotic logic of conspiracy theories, (article III) originates from the online discussion-forum Para-Web. Para-Web is created for accommodating the exchange of ideas, which question the interpretations presented in official explanations and it is also valued for the reason that it covers topics that are ignored in dominant media channels. The general rules of the forum establish that postings should not include visual material (if not absolutely necessary) and that users should prefer textual modes and hyperlinks instead. My article concentrates on the 141 entries posted in 2010, under the topic of ‘The death of the Polish president and the rest of the elite’.

The studies on Para-Web postings²⁰ directed my interests towards the Estonian extreme right online sphere because the forum often referred to blogs such as *Rahvuslane* and *Vabamõtteleja* as important sources that help to reveal the manipulations of Estonian decadent elite and corrupted mainstream media. I had read several academic studies that pointed out that the non-institutionalized (i.e. not explicitly connected with certain political parties or organizations) extreme right web-pages function as a safe haven for the polarized xenophobic and racist communication, generally not tolerated in contemporary democratic countries (see Back 2002, Griffin 1999, Kaplan et al 2003). As the extreme right grassroots communication was not thoroughly examined in many academic studies, not to mention the absence of these kinds of studies focusing particularly on Estonian context, I decided to focus in my doctoral studies on the extreme-right vernacular online sphere. In autumn 2012, when I began systematic non-participatory observation of the Estonian extreme right network, my first goal was to identify its representative centers or nodes. By taking into account the number of visits, the frequency of quotations and the concentration of the extreme right content, I started analyzing the following blogs: *Rahvuslane* [The Nationalist]; *NS blogi* [NS blog], *EESTI RAHVUSLIK BLOG* [Estonian Nationalist Blog], *Vabamõtteleja* [The Freethinker] and *BH Ruzzland*. Later on, I also added the blog *Koobas* [The Cave], Facebook groups *Eesti Käkkikeerajate Liit* [The Union of Estonian Skulduggers], *Vabamõtteleja*²¹, and the web-page *Ole Teadlik* [Be Aware] to the list. It is important to note, however, that besides sharing ideas from other extreme-right channels, the blogs sometimes copied articles, published in the mainstream newspapers and journals. Thus, all the texts presented in the extreme right network did not explicitly reflect a clear extreme-right worldview (i.e. exhibit the classical features of the right-wing extremism:

²⁰ I analyzed 869 Para-Web postings that were created under a sub-topic “Estonian economy and its degeneration” in my master-thesis (see Madisson 2012).

²¹ In 2013 the blog *Vabamõtteleja* moved entirely to Facebook

nativism, xenophobia, anti-liberal democratic ideology). Regardless, all the aforementioned nodes generally exhibited an overall extreme-right focus (see articles I, V, VI). Analyzed extreme right centers directed me towards various secondary sources, which ranged from White Power music videos to shows of Christian Family Radio, from scanned version of war-photos from museum archives to Facebook screenshots.

As the active period of my non-participatory observation lasted until the end of 2015 (I observed the extreme right sources for three and a half years), the observed material went through several considerable transformations. For example, the blogs *NS*²² and *EESTI RAHVUSLIK BLOG*²³, which exhibited the most explicit and sinister xenophobic articulations, were closed down. Also, the overall tonality of the Estonian extreme right sphere changed remarkably during those years. Roughly speaking, in 2012–2013 the most prevalent topics of the extreme right online discussions were: the threats that the European Union and Russia pose to Estonia as an independent nation state; the NWO conspiracy which has corrupted local establishment but also various international organizations and the violation of information freedom (this topic arose in the context of the public discussions on ACTA). The basic frame of identification in that period was *othered by the other*. The extreme right sources did not regularly and explicitly articulate biological race hierarchies, or depict their adversaries (e.g. feminists, minority groups, social democrats) in a very threatening manner. The most fiercely articulated topics at the time were the crimes performed during the World War II and the Soviet occupation. The question of *right remembering* of murders, torturing and rapes committed by Soviet soldiers, constantly recurred and often they included detailed verbal and visual descriptions of those acts of violence. Since the second half of 2014, I started noticing the transformation of the dominant topics of the extreme right content as well as the change of the rhetoric. The depiction of the evil nature of the Soviet regime and contemporary Russia became rather marginal topics now. The main attention shifted to The Law of Recognition of same-sex unions²⁴, and ever since 2015, the main topic has been the European refugee crisis. The tonality of the presented ideas also turned more radical and explicit. Exclusionary identifications, based on race and/or sexual orientation, became rather frequent. The white genocide²⁵ emerged as an important umbrella-topic, which covered

²² The access to *NS* blog was restricted in the second half of 2013 but after some time the same authors started a similar blog *Koobas*, which continued presenting explicitly racist and homophobic content. This blog was closed down in 2015.

²³ It was deleted in autumn 2015.

²⁴ When The Law of Recognition of same-sex unions was adopted in Estonian Parliament on 9 October 2014, it raised a strong opposition among conservative circles.

²⁵ *White genocide* is designating a conspiracy theory, which is popular among the extreme rightists. It claims that the mass immigration of colored people to Europe and North America (low birth rates, contaminated food, poisoned vaccines, and the systematic propagating of decadent views e.g. feminism, hedonism) are orchestrated in order to weaken white race, or even lead it to the extinction.

various sub-themes, such as, for example: the rise of cultural-Marxism, moral corruption, the decline of traditional gender roles, Islamization of Western countries. The crimes, committed by Muslims, or by colored people, were depicted frequently and the hideousness of represented acts was effectively expressed via visual modes.

The article VI of the present thesis concentrated on a somewhat different study-material. Namely, I analyzed the reception of Edward Snowden's leakages in the biggest Estonian newspapers but also in newspaper comments and in two blogs, centering on information politics. The sphere of meanings that surrounded Snowden's leakages is relevant because it enables to exemplify the role that ICTs play in the identity-discourse of e-Estonia. The public self-descriptions of re-independent Estonia have strongly connected contemporary ICTs with various western values, for example: transparent governing, participatory democracy, civic activism and civic education. The public disclosure of the covert United States surveillance program PRISM, significantly questioned those cyber-optimistic self-models and, in some cases, even replaced them with visions of global totalitarian panopticon. The general identity-dominants of e-Estonia have impact on the extreme right self-descriptions. For example, in case of ratification of ACTA, the extreme right bloggers often presented themselves as defenders of the democratic Internet and the freedom of speech (see article V). More recently, the extreme right sphere tends to associate new ICTs with the cultivation and propagation of the direct democracy.

COVERT NON-PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION AND SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The case studies, presented in my dissertation, are based on covert, non-participatory observation of online communication. This method is covert because it does not disclose researcher's professional academic identity to the researched subjects, and non-participatory because it does not engage in any activity of the observed communities (Cowburn, Duggan, Pollock 2015). For example, during my observation-period, I did not post to Para-Web forum, comment on blog content, tag or like the scrutinized Facebook postings. By studying conspiracy theories and/or extreme right content, I apprehended my position as a researcher with opposing views, and tried to treat the observed materials and their authors with respect and understanding. Also, I followed a principle of not revealing confidential information about the authors. Several papers have pointed out that covert, non-participatory observation is a reasonable strategy in studies which are concerned with individuals who engage in activities which are "conventionally perceived to be morally contentious or illegal" (Lugosi 2008: 134), or with groups that are hostile towards a researcher and his/her academic institution (Fielding 2004: 237). Aforementioned key-words generally characterized the attitudes that the extreme right network or active members of Para-Web community had towards academic research, about their world-view and communication practices, so I decided that the covert observation is the best way for approaching the particular study-material.

Katherine M. Robinson has pointed out that Internet forums offer a productive material for qualitative studies because in relatively anonymous environments people tend to share unforced and immediate narratives. Forum posts often reflect the ideas that the informants may feel uncomfortable or improper to articulate in the situation of interviewing (Robinson 2001: 709, 712). Several studies indicate that conspiracy theorists are often very suspicious about potential interviewing because it implies the co-operation with university, which is usually perceived to be a part of a corrupted conspiracy system (Ballinger 2011: 54; Barkun 2003: 12; Fenster 2008: 162). On the other hand, the dismissive attitudes of academic research can be explained by a prevalent tendency to treat conspiracy theories as a stigmatized form of knowledge and the members of conspiracy communities may feel that studies will denigrate them as participants of a fringe sub-culture.

In the extreme right identity and communication studies, many authors have often also chosen a strategy of a non-participatory observation because the extreme right groups, or subjects, tend to be suspicious and dismissive towards academic research (see Fielding 2004: 237; Sanders-McDonagh 2014: 244; Sehgal 2007). Several authors have indicated that it may be ethically troubling to interview subjects with whom the researcher disagrees fundamentally (Daniels 2012: 9), and it may also cause high emotional pressure (Cowburn, Duggan, Pollock 2015). But what is even more important, the interview responses of

extremists have proven to be consistently misleading because respondents tend to deliberately obscure their dissent views (e.g. explicit racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia) and actions (using Nazi symbols, co-operation with paramilitary organizations, arranging meetings) (see Fielding 2004, Pollock 2009, Sanders-McDonagh 2014). Additionally, it has been pointed out that it is quite likely to get responses that mirror the slogans elaborated by the extreme right ideologists (Fielding 2004: 242). Those standard answers use more or less politically correct expressions and they are designed for being used in the interactions with outsiders. However, the main reason why I decided to use the non-participatory observation-method in my analyses is that this method enables to approach my research focus – the semiotic construction of the extreme right identities in online communication – the most direct way. As highlighted previously in the sub-chapter, “The main research focuses and aims”, the methodological basis of my dissertation emphasizes the relational and context-specific nature of identity-creation process. Non-participatory observation is valuable because it allows to center on unconstrained everyday interactions of the extreme right networks. I do believe that the constant perception of the presence of the researcher, and especially direct communication with him/her (in the situation of interview), would significantly narrow down the extreme right identifications, and incline them in accordance with socially accepted norms (see Lugosi 2008: 134).

For these reasons, I remained in the position of an academic lurker, while visiting the extreme right blogs and Facebook groups (Daniels 2012: 9), that is, I did not have an access to any closed forum and discussion-group, which needed previous registering. The public accessibility of the material was an important criterion for limiting the range of the sources of my research. When the access to particular blogs became restricted, I excluded them from my studies²⁶. Sometimes I found particular nodes of the extreme right network via search engines, where they emerged as first responses for particular key-words (e.g. genocide against white race or cultural Marxism): it also indicates the public availability of those sources. The authors of publicly accessible and widely archived online contents have to take into account that after sharing their ideas with potentially large auditorium, they should not expect that presented ideas carry a status of private information which is protected from monitoring and criticism (see Pollock 2009: 18, Wojcieszak 2010: 652). It is important to note that some members of the Estonian extreme right network were fully aware of being observed by journalists, police and academic researchers. Among other monitoring instances, one blogger also mentions a case-study of the present dissertation (article V), which he believes to be an attempt of “wannabe researchers, worshipping contemporary liberal-democratic ideology” to “stick the extremist and racist labels on all nationalistic blogs”²⁷. This interpretation

²⁶ For example, NS blog became accessible only for the users, registered by e-mail account

²⁷ <http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com/2015/10/matti-ilves-see-vastik-vastik-blogija.html>;
<http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com/2015/02/matti-ilves-rahvuslike-blogide-pidajad.html>

illustrates well the general attitude that the extreme right networks have towards studying their ideas and communicational trends.

Previous studies have indicated that working with the extreme right groups requires serious consideration of physical and emotional safety-issues of the researcher (Sanders-McDonagh 2014, Fekete 2012). For example, there have been cases when the researchers, studying the extreme right movements, have been threatened with death as well as incidents when dissertations about the extreme right have been destroyed in libraries (Fielding 2004: 244). With the radicalization of xenophobic and racist expressions of the Estonian extreme right, which intensified in the second half of 2014 (see previous sub-chapter), there have been announcements about direct threatening of people who have criticized the discriminatory discourse. For example, one extreme right blog, included in my studies, points out that the author of a particular posting had looked up the home address and cell phone number of an Estonian female journalist because she had expressed too friendly attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. In his post, the blogger described how he sent an SMS, which stated that this *cultural Marxist journalist* must take Muslims and black people into her home. He also mentioned close encounters with the police, which followed this harassment²⁸. At the beginning of 2016 several acts of threatening have been reported, made either via cell phones or social networking sites and which mainly targeted people who have made public statements against the extreme right hate speech (see Tagel, Kund 2016). Above mentioned incidents of threatening also confirm the appropriateness of choosing a research-strategy which avoids personal contacts with extreme rightists.

The studies of radical online communication have outlined yet another ethical dilemma that a researcher faces. Namely, academic case studies often reproduce the extreme right discourse by quoting analyzed sources and thus they inevitably give a voice to people with racist and xenophobic views and values (Cowburn, Duggan, Pollock 2015). Additionally, the studies may “unintentionally encourage the reader to visit these sites, driving additional traffic there and, thus, unintentionally bolstering the cause of white supremacy by increasing the hits at various sites” (Daniels 2009: 204). At the same time, those authors emphasize that the proficient critical analyzing of the extreme right content that takes into account various discursive contexts and interactions will outweigh the risk of making those sources even more popular (Cowburn, Duggan, Pollock 2015; Daniels 2009: 204). Hopefully, my study enables to understand the extreme right meaning-making and the value-dominants which organize it, while not popularizing the extreme right world-view.

²⁸ As the blog is closed for now then the initial link of this posting (<http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/10/eesti-on-muudetud-politseiriigiks-kus.html#more>) is not working but it is accessible because in another blog has replicated this content, see <http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com/2015/10/eesti-on-muudetud-politseiriigiks-kus.html>

OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE THESIS

The main body of this thesis is composed of six articles published in 2014–2016. These articles cover all the main aims of this research project (see “The main research aims and emphases” p. 16–18). The first aim – the explication of the interactions and identifications that take place in various dimensions of the extreme right sphere of meaning – is reached in the articles I, V and VI. The second goal – explaining the relatively small semantic variability of the extreme right communication and unveiling its tendency to generate rather homogenous association – is addressed in the articles II and VI, where I also explore various socio-cultural functions of the enclosing extreme right communication. The third objective – the explication of the logic of semiotic construction of a conspiracy theory as one dominant framework of explanation, prevalent in vernacular communication – is covered in the papers II, III and IV. The article III deals with explaining the general semiotic mechanisms that organize the construction of conspiracy theories. The article II unfolds the role that NWO conspiracy theories have in organizing the self-descriptions of the extreme right interpreters. Finally, the article IV demonstrates how in periods of confusion and crises the conspiracy-explanations migrate in the dominant sphere of meanings. The fourth aim – the diversification of the usage of the concepts of cultural semiotics by way of applying them in the field of vernacular meaning-making, is addressed in all the articles included in this dissertation. However, the article VI focuses on this aim most thorough goingly by expanding the common understanding of the scope of autocommunicative processes.

I „Groupuscular identity-creation in online communication of the Estonian extreme right“ („Grupuskulaarne identiteediloo eesti paremäärmuslaste võrgusuhtluses“, co-written with Andreas Ventsel). The goal of the article is to complement Roger Griffin’s concept of the *groupuscular right* with the notions of *semiosphere* and *code text*, deriving from the conceptual field of cultural semiotics. The synthesis of this kind, provides a unified conceptual framework that helps to understand the self-descriptions of particular nodes of extreme right network as well as to analyze their relations with other extreme right unities and radical online sphere as a whole. Although the overall aim of this article is geared towards the theoretical development of Griffin’s ideas; we also illustrate our insight with an analysis of Estonian extreme right web pages.

Griffin stresses that the groupuscular field is most accurately described as rhizomatic in nature. He defines groupuscules as leaderless and centreless cellular rhizomatic networks, which have ill-defined boundaries and lack of formal hierarchies or internal organizational structure. In some cases, Griffin is relying on technologically deterministic view that imputes technical features of the online environment (e.g. rhizomic and non-hierarchical nature, lack of center and periphery) in a one-to-one manner to the groupuscular meaning-making structure. Our analysis indicates that this kind of generalization is not justified

and the hierarchies that organize the meaning-making have to be taken into account also in the context of studying the online communication of the extreme right. The framework of semiosphere helps to complement Griffin's approach by allowing to explicate the communication between different nodes of the groupuscular network and its internal organizational hierarchies (core-periphery relations); as well as to study multi-layered interactions with the surrounding socio-cultural context. The concept of *code text* enables to explain the dominant framework of associations which organizes extreme right meaning-making and connects it with the communal memory. Our analysis demonstrates that the framework of NWO (New World Order) conspiracy theory functions as an important code-textual center that guides the mapping of social reality of individuals navigating the groupuscular network. NWO code-text guides interpreters to notice causal connections between events and phenomena that have taken place in different times and places which usually seem totally unconnected to bystanders. It promotes an understanding of being rounded by a secret decadent cabal that is systematically jeopardizing the white race, nation-states, traditional family models (and similar) and pushes alternative ways of interpreting the world to the periphery.

II „NWO conspiracy theory: a key frame in online communication of the Estonian extreme right”. The second article concentrates on a closer exploration of NWO conspiracy theories, articulated in extreme right online communication. The framework of NWO functions as an important frame of describing the world but also as a powerful tool of self-description of extreme right interpreters. It enables to depict their ideological opponents (e.g., political establishments, minority groups and mainstream media) as malevolent or, at least, as ignorant forces that are manipulated by conspirators. At the same time it allows extreme rightists to identify themselves as moral and sagacious. This article focuses on the semiotic mechanisms that function as a basis for constructing the NWO explanatory frame, which depicts the systematic eradication program of the white race, nation states, traditional family and the like. In addition, it also explains a somewhat paradoxical situation that in vernacular online communities, where text-creation is significantly influenced by the interactive participation of multiple authors and the plurality of different hypertextual threads, predictable and rigid NWO-interpretations still tend to dominate. Besides tackling those theoretical questions, it also introduces three central NWO frames proliferating in the online communication of the Estonian extreme right.

My article shows that the vast modelling capacity of NWO conspiracy theories is provided because it is based on the code-textual set of relational associations which originates in the collective memory of the extreme right network. The code-text of NWO conspiracy theories functions as a specific textual invariant, which maintains that behind all kinds of (unpleasant) events or phenomena there is a conspiracy: a set of covert activities organized by the malicious global elite. Those interpretations are driven by a causality that is reduced to intentionality. Namely, conspiracy theories depict a world where the

ultimate cause of almost every socially significant event is connected with the evil will of conspirators. Conspiracy theories also rely on descriptive or natural causality (e.g. natural laws and relations of logic) but it is usually assumed that the sinister elite is very capable of using those relations for their own benefit.

This study demonstrates that extreme right interpreters put the full NWO-picture together from informational pieces that they encounter in quite random order. Every fragment of information is correlated with the general NWO code-text that is already on the interpretational horizon of the members of the extreme right community. If those fragments seem relevant, that is, if they add some details about the sub-systems of the secret cabal, or confirm the decadent nature of the global elite, then they will be added to the previously existing frame. It is important to note that the process of re-appearance of the NWO interpretational frame is paralleled with the growing significance of the associations provided by this frame.

III “The semiotic logic of signification of conspiracy theories”. My third article is also dedicated to conspiracy theories but in this case I am not explaining them in the context of extreme right meaning making. I rather treat them as a specific way of modelling, which is characteristic to the counter-cultural sphere but which occasionally, especially in times of confusion and crisis, appears in dominant culture too. The main objective of this paper is to develop a theoretical framework which allows explaining the semiotic logic of signification of conspiracy theories. My theoretical arguments are illustrated with examples derived from the commentary posted at the Para-Web forum under the topic of “The death of the Polish president and the rest of the elite.”

My article shows that, on the one hand, conspiracy theories are dominated by the logic of mythological thinking, which essential organizing principle is homomorphic resemblance and identification. Mythological thinking transforms present events to the extent that the interpreter can recognize behind them ordinary forms of the metatext that has its source in cultural memory. Conspiracy theories model the world based on a binary logic, dividing it into *Good* and *Evil* agents. The more terrible the consequences of an event, the more brutal and inhuman are those who caused it. Conspiracy theories answer the question, why do bad things happen to good people; their mythological logic does not perceive events as a coincidence of tragic contingencies, but rather as being motivated by one and the same ordinary cause – the evil. On the other hand, non-mythological or descriptive type of signification has also a significant role in conspiracy theories. Conspirers are usually interpreted as an extremely organized group, divided into intricate sub-systems. Conspiracy theories usually tend to interpret social events in light of over deterministic models of causation; it is believed that by way of a conspiracy, everything is connected with everything.

The synthesis of these two tendencies in signification can be explicated with the concept of code-text, which represents a mediating link between the mythological and the descriptive logic of signification. Code-text can develop into various different variants, but always continues to include particular, specific

types of connections. Conspiracy theory functions as a code-text, which text (message) is: *this (whatever unpleasant event) is a conspiracy*. It narrates a story about evil lurking behind events (mythological type of signification), whereas its parts, such as outlining the specificity of the enemy, the connections of a particular event with other events, the specific group of victims, etc., can encompass very different paradigms (descriptive type of signification). The logic of the conspiracy theory code-text entails that the reference to the group of conspirers is relatively vague because the various paradigms contained within the conspiracy theory code-text are all subordinated to the one and the same idea of evil.

IV “Representation of the Snowden scandal in Estonian media: the construction of threats and fear“. My fourth article reveals how different identities and values are attached to contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs). Namely, I concentrate on the discourse of e-Estonia that is one of the most important corner-stones of contemporary Estonian identity. The discourse of e-Estonia is articulated in Estonian official self-descriptions but it also has a significant role in self-understanding of various peripheral spheres. The aim of this paper is to explain how the leakages concerning details of the top-secret United States government mass surveillance program PRISM were contextualized in various layers of Estonian public informational sphere and how it was related to techno-optimistic identity-discourse. In order to answer that question, I analyze 35 opinion pieces and 140 comments that are explicitly discussing leakages of Edward Snowden.

My analysis indicates that the reflection of Snowden’s leakages is dominated by the discourse of fear which connects PRISM to instant threats but also to some abstract dangers. I distinguish 3 dominant sub-types of that discourse: (1) Phobophobia – the fear of fear, (2) The fear that surveillance technology may directly cause harm: a) global democracy and/or b) human rights of individual citizens and (3) the fear that PRISM is a sign of NWO conspiracy. PRISM’s reception demonstrates that in many aspects, the techno-utopian sphere of meaning is inverted and replaced with a dystopian one. The perception of the significance of the social impacts of the ICTs remains relatively constant in both cases but the positive charge of meaning is transformed into a negative one. For example, the important keywords of the e-success story (e.g., NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre, e-healthcare system, paper-free bureaucracy) start to signify the hidden danger – a wolf in sheep's clothing. The constituent topics of the discourse of e-democracy e.g.: horizontal power-relations, freedom of expression and transparent governing are, in many cases, replaced with the images that are familiar from the description of totalitarian societies or NWO conspiracy theories.

V “‘Freedom of speech’ in the self-descriptions of the Estonian extreme right groupuscules” (co-written with Andreas Ventsel). The fifth article explicates how the self-descriptions of Estonian extreme rightists interact with

dominant identity-discourse of Estonia, particularly with the visions of e-democracy. The extreme-right media has assimilated the language of the discourse of liberal democracy and multiculturalism through its adoption of terms such as ‘equality’, ‘protection of minority rights’, ‘freedom of speech’ and similar. It has also well adapted to the techno-utopian identity discourse which depicts Estonians as ICT-savvy nation who is able to use Internet for forming an alternative public sphere, which is generally free of censorship of the state institutions or mainstream media and where the *true voice of the people* can be expressed and heard. Extreme right authors often identify themselves as radical citizen journalists that are contributing to a revolution of information freedom that is subverting the canons of objectivity and political correctness which are serving the interests of the corrupted establishment.

The first part of this article gives an overview about prevalent tendencies of self-descriptions of Estonian extreme-right movements. Our case study concentrates on the extreme right postings which emerged when the Estonian government was debating over the ratification project of ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement). Our analysis shows that this discourse is organized by two abstract and hierarchically structured self-models: (1) a self-model whose dominant is freedom of speech and (2) a self-model that relies mainly on the idea that in neoliberal world the nationalism is maliciously subordinated by the Jews. Those self-models carry contradictory value systems, but they are unified into a coherent whole at the level of the discourse of opposition to ACTA. We explain how an empty signifier – *NO to ACTA* – begins to constitute a discourse that unites two controversial self-models. *NO to ACTA* creates an inner-discourse hierarchy of elements of equivalence and allows the fragments from egalitarian discourse to be connected with a racist self-model. From one side the extreme right authors stress the freedom of speech endangered by ACTA, but they also express quite clearly that the freedom of speech is necessary mainly for the spreading of their own radical ideas.

VI “Autocommunicative meaning-making in online communication of the Estonian extreme right” (co-written with Andreas Ventsel). The sixth article concludes the topic of extreme right identity-creation and communication by explaining the specifics of hermetic and polarized meaning-making. We rely on Juri Lotman’s framework of autocommunication and concentrate on identifying the dominants which rule, transform and determine the meaning-making and guarantee the integrity of the structures of extreme right communication. Another aim of this article is to widen the common understanding of the scope of autocommunicative processes. We show that the concept of autocommunication is useful for exploring meaning-making that is reproducing cultural stereotypes and has a generally enclosing nature. We also conduct a thorough case study in the Estonian extreme right blogosphere, which concentrates on the discussion that emerged in the context of the European refugee crisis that escalated in April 2015.

Our study indicates that the first dominant, organizing enclosing extreme right communication, is antithetical modelling. It is based on constructing the strict binary opposition between one's own and the alien: for example a strong opposition to Muslims, who are understood to be extremely violent and barbaric. But it includes also a general contrasting with various kinds of social groups and institutions that fit under the all-encompassing and rather vague common denominator – *the organizers of the white genocide*. Antithesis allows locating particular events/agents in the coordinates of common cultural memory. On the other hand, every single example helps to fortify previously existing associations and thus it contributes to the polarization of the oppositions. The second dominant of the enclosing autocommunication is the orientation towards the normative (“right”) texts. This is expressed in the tendency of identifying with some texts (e.g., the Constitution, especially paragraphs that talk about the obligation of preserving the Estonian nation, culture and language) on the level of self-description. Also, it is quite common to draw parallels between daily events and/or future affairs and memory-texts; for example the texts of being a victim, popular dystopias and NWO conspiracy theories. The third dominant of hermetic communication is a high proportion of the texts having phatic orientation. Namely, in the extreme right vernacular web the presentation of being current with the activities of other extreme right nodes (via sharing links, coping or referring the text from authoritative sources) constitutes a high proportion of the content. Also, phatic communication is expressed in the so-called intimate lexicon that indicates the status of being an insider. This kind of communication is characterized by low semantic value and orientation towards creating or maintaining social ties.

Through the co-existence of the three dominants of enclosing communication, autocommunicative meaning-making is losing its potentiality of innovation and starts to reproduce polarizing and hermetic meanings. Unlike creative autocommunication, enclosed autocommunication is not able to provide answers to the challenges coming from outside and thus it is trapped into re-affirming and deepening previously existing associations.

THE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The papers included in the present dissertation (see articles I, II, V, VI) addressed the visual dimension of the Estonian extreme right communication in a relatively brief manner. Visual and audiovisual texts were included in the analyzed sources but they were primarily treated as texts, complementing the verbal (textual) discourse. During my observations, I noticed that visual representations were often used for ridiculing ideological opponents, or for accentuating their immoral and evil acts. I encountered relatively high proportion of pictorial material that illustrated various minority groups, Estonian political establishment or refugees in a mocking or ironical manner (e.g. via comics, photo collages or caricatures). Also, visual modes were used for demonstrating the brutal and criminal nature of the adversaries. For example, the extreme right sources frequently shared images of certain acts of violence, committed by the immigrants, and also repulsive and bloody photographs or videos of the alleged victims of *the white genocide*. Interestingly, the sketching of positive self-image was a rather marginal tendency, ever so often I noted the depictions of protagonists designed in accordance with the visual stereotypes of the Vikings or Kalevipoeg, and/or the depiction of harmonious society, consisting of smiling blond women and children. The visual representation of antagonists and their victims was more remarkable. In my future studies, I would like to apply van Leeuwen's (2000) and Richardson's and Wodak's (2009) analytical frameworks (e.g. distinguishing visual strategies of inclusion/exclusion, stereotyping, homogenization, disempowerment, criminalization, objectivation; the attribution of particular threats and dangers) for explaining the main rhetorical tools that are being used for visual construction of the relations of *the own* and *the alien*. It would be also interesting to map the topics in cases in which the visual representations most likely occur.

The other direction that I would like to develop in my future research, is to compare certain tendencies of identity-creation of the extreme right network with meaning-making dominants of some other vernacular webs, based on fundamentalist world-view. As conspiracy theories often function as an important frame of organizing extreme right but also the extreme left and religious fundamentalist interpretations, (see Ballinger 2011, Barkun 2003, Fenster 2008, Madisson 2016a), then it would be interesting to outline the main similarities and differences of those conspiracy theories. From the end of 2015, I am a member a research network that is dedicated to comparative analysis of conspiracy theories²⁹. I believe that it offers good possibilities for me to collaborate with experts from other disciplines (political science, sociology, anthropology of religion etc), who have more experiences with studying the left-wing extremism and religious fundamentalism.

²⁹ COST ACTION, CA15101 Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theories

I would also like to analyze how the Estonian nativist and xenophobic discourse is relying on the strategy of calculated ambivalence. Wodak and Forchtner have pointed out that the contemporary extreme right (online) communication applies various visual, linguistic and pragmatic techniques (e.g. using quotation marks, systematic reliance on intertextual indirect references and recognizable blending of fictional characters/settings with real personas and places) for protecting the their authors from accusations of explicit racism and hate-speech (Wodak, Forchtner 2014). I have also noticed the tendency of calculated ambivalence during my observation-period in the Estonian extreme right sphere. Sometimes, when authors were vilifying certain public figures, the strategy of bending certain letters of the actual names was used. In addition, the *fictionality* of the particular representations were indicated by using quotation marks or phrases like *once I saw in my dream* or *the following information is a pure fantasy*. The calculated ambivalence of this kind is probably more intensively present in the discourse of right-wing populist parties and institutions, which operate in the field of pressure of political correctness.

Additionally, my latest studies have been focusing on the wider identity-discourse of e-Estonia (see papers IV and V). One dominant topic of the self-descriptions of re-independent Estonia has been the positive social and cultural transformations, caused by new ICTs. It has been often indicated that e-solutions make Estonia more future-oriented, democratic, socially cohesive and economically effective country. On the other hand, sometimes there occur also pessimistic visions, which associate contemporary ICTs with serious safety risks and the threats of enabling totalitarian surveillance society. I would like to scrutinize, which value-dominants organize those visions of e-Estonia and how they are being articulated in various interactions. For example, in public texts provided by state institutions that are introducing techno-political decisions, in the discourse of education, in marketing-communication, which is oriented towards foreign investors and tourists, and also in the discourse of vernacular web communities. I do believe that the discourse of e-Estonia is a very topical and concentrated research material, and it would be of great interest to compare it with e-discourses of other countries. In conjunction with Andreas Ventsel's project application, "Identity-discourse of e-Estonia: the semiotical analysis of the main visions", we have already made some preliminary arrangements to that end with Georgian and Italian researchers.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Identiteetide semiootiline konstrueerimine hüpermeedia keskkonnas: Eesti paremäärmuslaste *online*-kommunikatsiooni analüüs

Käesoleva doktoritöö artikleid ühendavaks temaatiliseks keskmeks on võrgusuhtluses toimuv identiteediloome. Väga kokkuvõtlikult öeldes on minu tööd kantud ideest, et identiteediloomeprotsessid on diskursiivsed ja kontekstispetsiifilised. Identiteetid sünnivad mitmesuguste sotsiokultuuriliste interaktsioonide käigus ning nad on eelkõige konstrueeritud erinevuse kaudu või suhte kaudu *teise* ehk sellesse, mis ei olda (Hall 2000: 17). Kui võtta arvesse, et üha suurem osa isiklikust, kogukondlikust ja kultuurilisest kommunikatsioonist leiab aset hüpermeedia vahendusel, on selge, et võrgusuhtlus avaldab märkimisväärset mõju ka identiteediloomele. Oluline on märgata, et internet ei paku pelka kommunikatsioonilist infrastruktuuri, mille abil olemasolevaid identiteete *online*-keskkondadesse laiendada, vaid et seal toimuva suhtluse käigus leiavad aset olulised kokkusaamised, läbirääkimised, vaidlused, dialoogid jne, mille käigus identiteete (re)artikuleeritakse ja (re)produtseeritakse (Campbell 2006: 275).

Täpsemalt on dissertatsiooni fookus asetatud *online*-keskkondades aset leidvale *paremäärmuslikule* tähendusloomele. Üks põhjus, miks mulle tundus oluline 2012. aastal alustatud doktoriõpingud sel ajal üsna marginaalsena tundunud *paremäärmusluse*-temaatikale pühendada, seisnes selles, et aasta eest olid toimunud Anders Behring Breiviki veretööd, mis demonstreerisid kujukalt, et võrdlemisi lõdvalt organiseeritud perifeerne *paremäärmuslik* võrgustik võib olla piisav „üksikute huntide“ radikaliseerumiseks ning abstraktse viha tõlkimiseks konkreetsete sihtmärkide keelde. Nüüd, neli aastat hiljem, on majanduskriisist räsitud ning rändekriisi käes vaevlevas Euroopas mitmesugused *parempopulistlikud* ja *paremäärmuslikud* parteid, rahvuslikud aga ka rahvuseülesed organisatsioonid ning n-ö rohujuuretasandi liikumised peaaegu igal pool plahvatuslikult aktiveerunud. Seejuures tundub, et kõnealused arengud ei näita taandumise märke, pigem vastupidi. Reeglina distantseerivad need liikumised (vähe-masti tuumsed) end selgelt Breivikist ja tema jõhkratest vägivallaaktidest, kuid nad taastoodavad tihti tema manifestis välja arendatud ideid ning retoorilisi raamistikke. Euroopa *paremäärmuslased* ja *parempopulistid* võtavad sageli üle Breiviki Euraabia konspiratsiooniteooria, mis rõhutab moslemite, kultuurimarksistide ja liberaalide ühist salajast tegutsemist Euroopa islamiseerimise ja valge rassi väljasuretamise nimel.

Minu artiklid toetuvad kultuurisemiootilisele lähenemisele, mis rõhutab, et kommunikatiivseid süsteeme uurides on oluline tähele panna, et nad on samaaegselt ka modelleerivad süsteemid ja et semiootiline üksus, ehitades maailma mudelit, ehitab samaaegselt ka iseenda mudelit, tuues oma mingeid osiseid esile ja jättes teised ebaolulistena tagaplaanile (Lotman 2010b: 37). Kultuurisemiootika metakeele teeb tähendus- ja identiteediloomeprotsesside uurimisel

viljakaks asjaolu, et see võimaldab arvestada nende relatsioonilist ja dünaamilist iseloomu. Siinse doktoritöö esimeseks eesmärgiks on ksenofoobse ja rassistliku tähendusfääri erinevates kihistustes aset leidvate interaktsioonide eksplitsiivne ning sellest johtuv paremäärmslike identiteediprotsesside mitmetasandiline selgitamine. Teiseks laiemaks eesmärgiks on paremäärmsliku kommunikatsiooni võrdlemisi väikse semantilise variatiivsuse ehk homogeense seosteloomu selgitamine. Toon välja, kuidas teatud tähistamisdominantide koosmõjul hakkab valitsema võrdlemisi hermeetilise sisuplaaniga kommunikatsioon. Kolmandaks eesmärgiks on selgitada vandenõuteooria kui ühe olulise radikaalset võrgusuhtlust organiseeriva selgitusraamistiku semiootilise konstrueerimise loogikat. Neljandaks suuremaks eesmärgiks on kultuurisemiootika raamistike rakendamisala laiendamine võrgukultuuris võrsunud vernakulaarse tähendusloome mõtestamisele. Esitan alljärgnevalt doktoritöös sisalduvate artiklite eestikeelsed lühikokkuvõtted, mis annavad uuritud teemadest täpsema ülevaate.

Doktoritöö **I artikkel „Grupuskulaarne identiteediloomu eesti paremäärmslaste võrgusuhtluses“** (kaasautor Andreas Ventsel) keskendub Roger Griffini *grupuskuli* kontseptsiooni täiustamisele kultuurisemiootika mõiste *semiosfäär* ning *koodtekst* abil. Artikkel on küll eelkõige teoreetilise fookusega, kuid toome ka illustriivseid näiteid, mis põhinevad eesti paremäärmsliku *online*-sfääri mitteosaleval vaatlusel. Griffin mõtestab tänapäevast, suuresti veebikeskkondadesse laienenud paremäärmsliku välja ülesehitust risoomsena. Tema määratluse järgi moodustavad paremäärmsliku infovälja sõlmekesed ehk grupuskulid rakulise, mittehierarhilise võrgustiku, mil on hajusad piirid. Meie hinnangul iseloomustab Griffini väiteid mõningates punktides tehnoloogiline determinism. Nimelt kannab ta vahel tunnused, mida reeglina hüpermeedia keskkonnas ilmneva abstraktse tekstuaalsusega (nt mittehierarhiline ülesehitus, seesmine paljus, keskse organiseerimistele puudumine, fluüidsus) seostatakse, võrdlemisi üksüheselt üle paremäärmslike kogukondade struktuuri ning infoloomu selgitamise. Meie analüüs näitab, et niisugune üldistus ei ole põhjendatud ning tänapäevase paremäärmsluse mõtestamisel on oluline võtta arvesse tsentri–perifeeria opositsiooni suhtelist iseloomu ja tähistamisprotsesside kujundavat rolli grupuskulite organiseerimisel. *Semiosfääri* raamistik võimaldab uurida konkreetsete paremäärmslike sõlmekesete enesekirjeldusi, erinevate grupuskulite omavahelisi interaktsioone, kui ka selgitada paremäärmsliku sfääri suhestumist ümbritseva sotsiokultuurilise kontekstiga. *Koodteksti* kontseptsioon aitab eksplitsiivsete paremäärmslikku tähendusloomet organiseerivaid dominantseid seosteraamistikke, mis suunavad nii konkreetsete sündmuste tõlgendusi kui ka nende seostamist kogukondliku mälu. Meie analüüs näitas, et NWO (uue maailmakorra) vandenõuteooria toimib kui paremäärmslike tõlgendusi suunav koodtekstiline kese. Väga kokkuvõtlikult öeldes kinnistab uue maailmakorra vandenõuteooria arusaama, et nii globaalseid kui lokaalseid arenguid suunab varjatud pahatahtliku eliidi ümber koonduv võrgustik, mis ohustab süstemaatiliselt valget rassi, rahvusriike, traditsioonilisi perekumedeid jne. Sellisesse koodteksti mittesobituvad selgituskäigud ja nähtused kipuvad grupuskulite enesekirjeldustes peaaegu märkamatuks jääma.

II artikkel „NWO vandenõuteooria: eesti paremäärmusliku *online*-kommunikatsiooni võtmeraamistik“ („NWO conspiracy theory: a key frame in online communication of the Estonian extreme right“) keskendub paremäärmuslike uue maailmakorra visioonide põhjalikumale selgitamisele. NWO vandenõuteooria funktsioneerib paremäärmuslikus kommunikatsioonis kui oluline seosteraamistik, mis organiseerib nii ühiskondlike sündmuste ja nähtuste modelleerimist kui ka enesekirjeldusi. Muuhulgas võimaldab see ideoloogiliste vastaste (nt poliitiline eliit, vähemusgrupid, dominantne meedia) mõtestamist pahatahtliku või ignorantsena ning enese positsioneerimist moraalse ja teadlikuna. Selgitan kõnealuses artiklis NWO vandenõuteooria aluseks olevaid semiootilisi mehhanisme ning otsin vastust pealtnäha paradoksaalsele küsimusele: miks domineerivad interaktiivsetes, erinevaid vaatepunkte ja infosfääre hõlmavates *online*-aruteludes võrdlemisi ennustatavad ning jäigad NWO-tõlgendused. Teoreetiliste küsimuste kõrval tutvustab artikkel ka kolme eesti paremäärmuslikus *online*-sfääris enim levinud NWO-raamistikku.

Näitan artiklis, et NWO vandenõuteooriate suure modelleerimisvõimekuse tagab paremäärmusliku võrgustiku ühismälust pärinev koodtekstiline seosteraamistik. NWO vandenõuteooria koodtekst funktsioneerib kui teatav tekstiline invariant, mis näeb kõikvõimalike ebameeldivate sündmuste ja suundumuste taga vandenõud ehk kuritahtliku eliidi varjatud süsteemset tegutsemist. Selliseid tõlgendusi juhib suuresti vandenõulaste intentsionaalsusele taandatud kausaalsusmudel. Nimelt kujutavad vandenõuteooriad maailma, kus peaaegu iga ühiskondlikult oluline sündmus on seotud konspiraatorite kurjade kavatsustega. Paremäärmuslikud tõlgendajad panevad NWO tervikpildi kokku infokildudest, mis neile enam-vähem juhuslikus järjekorras ette juhtuvad. Iga infofragmenti suhestatakse üldise NWO seosteraamistikuga, mis juba varasemalt paremäärmuslikus infovõrgustikus navigeerija tõlgendushorisondil olemas on. Kui konkreetne infokild relevantne tundub, näiteks, kui see lisab midagi salajase vandenõusüsteemi mõne allharu kohta või kinnitab vandenõulaste dekadentlikku loomust, siis lisatakse ta olemasolevasse üldisesse vandenõuskeemi. On oluline märkida, et sage toetumine NWO koodtekstile toob kaasa ka seosteraamistiku autoriteetsuse kasvamise ning selle pakutud assotsiatsioonide kinnistumise.

III artikkel „Vandenõuteooriate semiootiline tähistamisloogika“ (“The semiotic logic of signification of conspiracy theories“) puudutab samuti konspiratsiooniteooriate tähendusloomelisi eripärasid, kuid erinevalt kahest eelnevat uurimusest ei seostata neid üksnes paremäärmuslike tõlgendustega, vaid keskendutakse konspiratsiooniteooriate kui eripärase modelleerimisviisi üldistele tunnustele. Artikli peamiseks sihiks on arendada välja teoreetiline raamistik, mis lubaks selgitada vandenõuteooriate semiootilist tähistamisloogikat. Illustreerin oma teoreetilisi argumente näidetega, mis pärinevad Para-Web foorumist ning puudutavad 2010. aasta aprillis juhtunud Smolenski lennuõnnetusega seonduvaid vandenõuteooriaid.

Näitan, et ühelt poolt suunab vandenõuteooriate konstrueerimist mütoloogiline modelleerimine, mille keskseks organiseerimisprintsipi on homomorfistlik samastamine. Mütoloogiline teadvus transformeerib olevikusündmusi niivõrd, et

nende tagant on võimalik ära tunda kultuurimälust pärineva metateksti algkujusid. Vandenõuteooriad modelleerivad maailma binaarsele loogikale toetudes, jagades selle *Headuse* ja *Kurjuse* agentideks. Mida kohutavamad on konkreetse sündmuse tagajärjed, seda jõhkrama ja ebainimlikumana kujutavad vandenõuteooriad ka seda põhjustanud jõude. Konspiratsiooniteooriad annavad vastuse küsimusele, *miks heade inimestega halbu asju juhtub*. Seal valitsev mütoloogiline loogika ei luba tõlgendada traagilisi sündmusi õnnetute juhuste kokkulangemise tulemusena, vaid pigem tajutakse neid motiveerituna *Kurjuse* kui paljude ebaseadlike arengute algpõhjuse poolt. Teisalt on mitte-mütoloogilisel või verbaal-diskreetsetel modelleerimistüübil vandenõuteooriates samuti oluline roll. Vandenõulasi kujutatakse reeglina äärmiselt organiseeritud põrandaaluse süsteemina, mis jaguneb paljudeks keerukateks allsüsteemideks. Väga sageli kipuvad vandenõuteooriad ühiskondlikke sündmusi ülideterministlike kausaalsusmudelite valguses tõlgendada; arvatakse, et vandenõu kaudu on kõikvõimalikud kõrvalisele pilgule täiesti ühildamatud asjaolud omavahel seotud.

Nende kahe tähistamisviisi eripärast sünteesi on võimalik eksplitseerida *koodteksti* mõistele toetudes. Koodtekst on mütoloogilise ja deskriptiivse teadvuse vahelüli, tegemist on kultuurimälust pärineva spetsiifilise tekstilise invariandiga, mis võib areneda väga mitmesugusteks variantideks, ent sisaldab alati kindlat tüüpi seoseid. Vandenõuteooria on koodtekst, mille tekstiks (sõnumiks) on: siin (mis tahes ebaseadlike asjaolu puhul) on tegemist vandenõuga. Vandenõuteooria koodtekst jutustab sündmuste taga peituvast *Kurjusest* (mütoloogiline tähistamistüüp), selle osad, nt vaenlase spetsiifika väljajoonistumine, konkreetse sündmuse seosed teiste sündmustega, kannatajategrupi visandamine jne, võivad hõlmata väga erinevaid paradigmasid (deskriptiivne tähistamistüüp). Vandenõuteooria koodteksti on vandenõulaste grupi võrdlemisi ähmane osutus n-õ sissekodeeritud, see tuleneb asjaolust, et tunnetuslikult on vandenõuteooria koodteksti kätketud mitmesugused paradigmad allutatud ühele ja samale *Kurjuse*-ideele.

Dissertatsiooni **IV artikkel „Snowdeni skandaali kujutamine eesti meedias: hirmu ja ohtude konstrueerimine“** (“Representation of the Snowden scandal in Estonian media: the construction of threats and fear”) selgitab, millised väärtused ning optimistlikud ja pessimistlikud ühiskonnavisioonid tänapäevase info- ja kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia külge põimitakse. Selgitan e-Eesti diskursust, mil on tähtis roll nii riigi ametlikes enesekirjeldustes kui ka mitmesuguste perifeersemate sfääride (sh paremäärmuslike võrgustike) identiteediloomes. Artikli eesmärgiks on avada, kuidas eesti dominantses, aga ka alternatiivses meedias PRISM-iga seotud infolekitusi kaardistatakse ning analüüsida, kuidas suhestub salajast jälgimisprogrammi ümbritsev tähendusruum tehnooptimistliku identiteedidiskursusega.

Minu analüüs toob välja, et Snowdeni lekituste eestikeelses retseptisoonis domineerib hirmudiskursus, mis seob salajase jälgimisprogrammi nii vahetute kui abstraktsete ohtudega. PRISM-iga seonduvas hirmudiskursuses võib tinglikult eristada kolme temaatilist keset: (1) fobofobiat ehk hirmu hirmu pärast, (2) hirmu, et jälgimistehnoloogiad seavad otseselt ohtu rahvusvahelise demokraatia või konkreetsete indiviidide inimõigused, (3) hirmu, et PRISM on kindel

märk NWO vandenõu olemasolust. PRISM-i retseptsioonis pöördub tehnoutopistlik tähendusfäär ümber ning asendub düstopistlikuga, kusjuures on tähelepanuväärne, et info-ja kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia ühiskondlike mõjude tajumine jääb mõlemal juhul väga ulatuslikuks, kuid varem positiivseid väärtuslaenguid kandnud tähistajad muutuvad negatiivseks. Näiteks hakkavad e-Eesti eduloo olulised tähistajad (*NATO küberkaitsekoostöö keskus, e-tervishoiusteem, riiklik paberivaba asjaajamine*) seostuma varjatud ohtudega. E-demokraatia diskursusest pärinevad teemad nagu horisontaalsed võimusuhted, väljendusvabadus ning läbipaistev riigivalitsemine asenduvad aga puhuti kujunditega, mis on tuttavad totalitaarsete ühiskondade kirjeldustest või uue maailmakorra vandenõuteooriate repertuaarist.

V artikkel „Sõnavabadus eesti paremäärmuslike grupuskulite enese kirjeldustes“ (“‘Freedom of speech’ in the self-descriptions of the Estonian extreme right groupuscules”) (kaasautor Andreas Ventsel) selgitab, kuidas eesti paremäärmuslaste enese kirjeldused dominantse identiteedidiskursusega, muuhulgas e-demokraatia visioonidega suhestuvad. Paremäärmuslik meedia kombineerib sageli rassistlike ja ksenofoobseid vaated ühiskonnas üldaktsepteeritud liberaaldemokraatia ja multikulturalismi diskursustesse kuuluvate tähistajatega, nagu *õigus võrdsele kohtlemisele, vähemuste kaitse, sõnavabadus* jne. Samuti on see kohandunud tehnoutopistliku e-Eesti identiteedidiskursusega, mis kujutab eestlasi haruldaselt IKT-teadliku rahvusena, kes rakendab internetti oskustlikult alternatiivse avaliku sfääri kehtestamiseks. *Online*-sfääri peetakse paremäärmuslikes tõlgendustes sageli võimueliidi manipulatsioonidest suhteliselt vabaks inforuumiks, kus *rahva tõeline hääl* end väljendada saab. Paremäärmuslikud autorid kirjeldavad ennast vahel kui radikaalseid kodanikuajakirjanikke, kes panustavad rahva äratamise ja inforevolutsiooni ning pakuvad alternatiivi korrumppeerunud meedia poliitkorrektsel väljendusviisile.

Artikli esimene osa annab ülevaate paremäärmuslike liikumiste enese kirjeldustest ning põhilisest ideoloogilistest tõekspidamistest. Juhtumiuuring keskendub paremäärmuslikele postitustele, mis puudutavad ACTA (võltsimisvastase kaubanduslepingu) ratifitseerimisläbirääkimistega kerkinud küsimusi. Analüüs toob välja, et ACTAga seonduvat diskursust korrastavad hierarhiliselt kaks abstraktset enesemudelit: (1) enesemudel, mille keskmeks on sõnavabadus ning (2) enesemudel, mis rõhutab juutide varjatud tegevust rahvusluse ja rahvusriikide õnestamise suunal. Need enesemudelid kannavad vastandlikke väärtussüsteeme, kuid nad ühendatakse ACTA-vastases diskursuses koherentseks tervikuks. *EI ACTA*-le funktsioneerib tühja tähistajana, mis võimaldab egalitaarse diskursuse fragmentide ja rassistlike enesemudelite koosinemist. *EI ACTA*-le ümber koondunud diskursus rajaneb sõnavabadust rõhutaval enesemudelil, mis ühtib olulisel määral e-Eesti enese kirjeldustes artikuleeritud väärtustega. *Sõnavabadus* kehtestas ACTA paremäärmuslikus retseptsioonis diskursusesisese hierarhia samaväärsuselementide (eraelu puutumatus, väljendusvabadus, kodanikuaktiivsus) vahele ning võimaldas nad siduda paremäärmusliku enesemudeli ja selle tähistajatega (juudivaenulikkus, sallimatus seksuaalvähemuste ja muude vähemusrühmade suhtes). Ühelt poolt rõhutavad paremäärmuslikud autorid sõnavabadust, mis ACTA tõttu ohtu sattuda

võib, ent teisalt väljendavad nad üsna selgelt, et sõnavabadus on vajalik eelkõige nende endi radikaalsete ideede segamatuks levitamiseks.

VI artikkel „Autokommunikatiivne tähendusloome eesti paremäärmuslaste veebisuhtluses“ (Autocommunicative meaning-making in online communication of the Estonian extreme right) (kaasautor Andreas Ventsel) võtab paremäärmusliku suhtlemise ja identiteediloome temaatika kokku ning selgitab hermeetilise ja polariseerunud tähendusloome spetsiifikat Juri Lotmani *autokommunikatsiooni* raamistiku abil. Keskendume paremäärmuslikku tähendusloomet määravate ja suunavate dominantide väljaselgitamisele ning nende peamiste funktsioonide avamisele. Artikli teine fookus on seatud autokommunikatiivsete protsesside mitmekülgsemale mõtestamisele. Demonstreerime, et autokommunikatsiooni kontsept on viljakas ka sulguva ning stampe taastootva tähendusloome kui ühe mina–mina-suhtluse piirjuhu uurimisel. Viime ka läbi põhjaliku juhtumiuuringu, mis keskendub 2015. aasta aprillis eskaleerunud Euroopa rändekriisi puudutavale paremäärmusliku suhtluse sfäärile.

Meie analüüs näitab, et paremäärmuslikku võrgusuhtlust iseloomustab dialoogile vastanduv ja sulguv autokommunikatiivne tähendusloome. Sellist hermeetilist kommunikatsiooni juhib antiteetiline vastandumine, mis konstrueerib ranged oma ja võõra binaarsused. Näiteks võib täheldada jõulist vastandumist äärmiselt vägivaldsete ja ebainimlikuna tajutud islamiusuliste ning kõikvõimalikele institutsioonidele ja sotsiaalsetele gruppidele, kes mahuvad ähmase ühishnimetaja *valge rassi vastase genotsiidi korraldajad* alla. Antiteetiline modelleerimine aitab ühelt poolt konkreetseid sündmusi või agente kogukonna ühismälu koordinaadistikku paigutada, kuid samas kinnistab iga üksiknäide omakorda ka olemasolevaid stereotüüpe ning aitab kaasa vastanduste polariseerumisele. Sellega on vahetult seotud sulguva autokommunikatsiooni teine dominant: “õigetele” tekstidele orienteeritus, mis avaldub näiteks suundumuses enesekirjelduse tasandil teatud tekstidega (nt Põhiseadusega, iseäranis punktiga, mis räägib rahva, kultuuri ja keele säilitamise kohustusest) samastuda. Olulisel kohal on ka analoogiate tõmbamine hetkeolukorra või alles saabuvate sündmuste ja mälu tekstide, nt ohvriteksti, romaani „1984“ või NWO vandenõuteooria, vahel. Kajakambrisuhtluse kolmandaks dominandiks on faatilise orientatsiooniga teadete suur osakaal. Nimelt moodustab paremäärmusliku võrgustiku teiste sõlmekeste tegevusega kursisoleku presenteerimine (nt linkide jagamine, autoriteetsete allikate kopeerimine või refereerimine jms) märkimisväärse osa infovahetusest. Lisaks sellele väljendub faatiline kommunikatsioon n-ö intiimse leksika kasutamises, mis võimaldab *insider*’i staatuse markeerimist. Sellist suhtlust iseloomustab sageli madal semantiline väärtus ning orienteeritus sotsiaalsete sidemete säilitamisele või tugevdamisele.

Märgitud kolme tunnuse kooseksisteerimisel kaotab autokommunikatiivne tähendusloome oma innovatsioonilise potentsiaali ja hakkab tootma polariseeruvat ja hermeetilist tähendust. Erinevalt kreatiivsest autokommunikatsioonist ei võimalda suletud autokommunikatsioon välisest keskkonnast tulenevatele väljakutsetele vastata ning kapseldub kommunikatsiooni edenedes üha enam olemasolevate seoste kinnistamisse.

PUBLICATIONS

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Mari-Liis Madisson
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Education:

2012–2016 University of Tartu, doctorate studies, Semiotics and Culture Studies
2010–2012 University of Tartu, master's studies, Semiotics and Culture Studies, MA *cum laude*
2007–2010 University of Tartu, bachelor's studies, Semiotics and Culture Studies, BA *cum laude*
2004–2007 Gymnasium named after Carl Robert Jakobson, secondary school

Further education and training:

2015 autumn semester Training “Peer-review: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” organized by Lifelong Learning Centre
2015 January Workshop of problem-based learning (PBL) in Vihula, organized by European College
2013 autumn semester Training of study assistants (P2AV.TK.615)
2012 September New Bulgarian University, Sozopol, Bulgaria; Early Fall School of Semiotics
2012 February–May University of Turin, Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca sulla Comunicazione (CIRCe), visiting student
2010 September New Bulgarian University, Sozopol, Bulgaria; Early Fall School of Semiotics
2008 September New Bulgarian University, Sozopol, Bulgaria; Early Fall School of Semiotics

Employment:

2015–... Tartu University, Institute of Social Studies, Chair of Media and Communication, Junior Research Fellow (0,25)
2014 Tartu University, Department of Semiotics, lecturer of FL.SE.00.072 Theories of Ordinary Behavior
2014–... Tartu University, Department of Semiotics FL.SE.00.224 Analysis of Culture
2013–... Tartu University, Department of Semiotics, study assistant of FLSE.00.216 Basics of semiotic

Administrative responsibilities:

- 2015–...** COST ACTION 15101 Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theories (COMPACT), member of management committee
- 2014–...** Member of Euroacademia (The Association for Dissemination and Valorization of Academic Research)
- 2013–...** Member of program committee of semiotics

Research topics:

Cultural semiotics, political semiotics, identity studies, media studies

Acknowledgements:

- 2016** Annual award of Estonian Semiotics Association “Semiootiline jälg”
- 2015** Juri Lotman stipend for publications on political extremism

Selected publications:

- Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel, Andreas 2018. Groupuscular identity-creation in online-communication of Estonian extreme right. *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, xx–xx [forthcoming].
- Madisson, Mari-Liis 2016. Self-description. *Tartu Semiotics Library*, xx–xx [forthcoming].
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- Madisson, Mari-Liis 2014. The semiotic logic of signification of conspiracy theories. *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, 202, 273–300.
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- Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel, Andreas 2012. Võõra semiootiline modelleerimine Eesti lähiajaloo. *Acta Semiotica Estica* IX, 144–172.

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Hariduskäik:

2012–2016 Tartu Ülikool, doktoriõpe, Semiootika ja kultuuriteooria
2010–2012 Tartu Ülikool, magistriõpe, Semiootika ja kultuuriteooria, MA *cum laude*
2007–2010 Tartu Ülikool, bakalaureuseõpe, Semiootika ja kultuuriteooria, BA *cum laude*
2004–2007 Carl Robert Jakobsoni nimeline Gümnaasium, keskkaridus, matemaatika-füüsika süvaõppe suund

Täiendavad koolitused:

2015 sügissemester Elukestva õppe keskuse korraldatud koolitus „Kollegiaalne tagasiside: oma õpetamise arendamine“ TÜs
2015 jaanuar TÜ Euroopa kolledži korraldatud probleempõhise õpetamise (problem-based learning, PBL) meetodit tutvustav koolitus Vihulas
2013 sügissemester Õppeassistentide koolitus TÜs (P2AV.TK.615)
2012 september Rahvusvaheline semiootika sügiskool Bulgaarias
2012 veebruar–mai Külalisüliõpilane Torino Ülikoolis (prof. Massimo Leone ja tema juhitud kommunikatsiooniuringute keskuse CIRCe juures)
2010 september Rahvusvaheline semiootika sügiskool Bulgaarias
2008 september Rahvusvaheline semiootika sügiskool Bulgaarias

Teenistuskäik:

2015–... Tartu Ülikool, Sotsiaal- ja haridusteaduskond, Ühiskonnateaduste instituut, Meediauuringute õppetool, kultuurikommunikatsiooni nooremteadur (0,25)
2014 Tartu Ülikool, Vastutav õppejõud FL.SE.00.072 Argikultuuri teooriad
2014–... Tartu Ülikool, Vastutav õppejõud FL.SE.00.224 Kultuurinähtuste analüüs
2013–... Tartu Ülikool, õppeassistent kursusel FLSE.00.216 Semiootika Alused

Muu teaduslik organisatsiooniline ja erialane tegevus:

- 2015**–... COST ACTION 15101 Vandenõuteooriate võrdlev analüüs, juhtkomitee liige
- 2014**–... “Euroacademia” (The Association for Dissemination and Valorization of Academic Research) liige
- 2014**–... Semiootika osakonna praktikakoordinaator
- 2013**–... Osalemine semiootika programminõukogus

Peamised uurimisvaldkonnad:

Kultuurisemiootika, poliitiline semiootika, identiteediuuringud, meediauuringud

Tunnustused:

- 2016** Eesti Semiootika Seltsi tunnustus „Semiootiline jälg“ 2015. aastal ilmunud publikatsioonide eest
- 2015** Juri Lotmani stipendium poliitilise äärmusluse semiootilise analüüsi eest

Olulisemad publikatsioonid:

- Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel Andreas 2018. Groupuscular identity-creation in online-communication of Estonian extreme right. *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, xx–xx [ilmumas].
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- Madisson, Mari-Liis; Ventsel, Andreas 2012. Võõra semiootiline modelleerimine Eesti lähiajaloos. *Acta Semiotica Estica* IX, 144–172.

DISSERTATIONES SEMIOTICAE UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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