Autocommunicative meaning-making in online communication of the Estonian extreme right

Mari-Liis Madisson

Institute of Social Studies, Chair of Media and Communication /
Department of Semiotics
University of Tartu
Jakobi 2, Tartu 50114
Estonia
e-mail: ml.madisson@ut.ee

Andreas Ventsel

Department of Semiotics
University of Tartu
Jakobi 2, Tartu 50114
Estonia
e-mail: andreas.ventsel@ut.ee

Abstract. This article analyses the online communication of the Estonian extreme right that appears to be characterized by an echo-chamber effect as well as enclosed and hermetic meaning-making. The discussion mainly relies on the theoretical frameworks offered by semiotics of culture.

One of the aims of the article is to widen the scope of understanding of autocommunicative processes that are usually related to learning, insight and innovation. The article shows the conditions in which autocommunicative processes result in closed interactions, based on reproducing stereotypes and redundant content. We detect antithetical meaning-making, an orientation towards normative ("correct") texts and the prevalence of phatic communication as the main dominants that guide closed autocommunication. Such communication leads to polarization of dissimilar views and hinders dialogue. Our case study focuses on the discussion that arose in the context of the European Refugee Crisis that started in spring 2015.

Keywords: autocommunication; phatic communication; echo-chamber effect; semiotics of culture; online communication of the Estonian extreme right; European Refugee Crisis

The World Wide Web has given individuals an unprecedented chance to choose between different resources of communication and information and to construct their own packages of meaning that meet their interests. The availability of various institutional, as well as vernacular and hybrid, sources has grown exponentially. On the one hand, such diversification makes it possible to approach different viewpoints and various ways of constructing a message (Downey, Fenston 2003: 194; Chadwick 2009), yet on the other hand it creates a breeding ground for quite homogeneous interaction. Several researchers have pointed out that in the context of contemporary grassroots media the phenomenon of selective exposure has emerged: the online sphere gives an individual the possibility to operate in a rather hermetic space of meaning that suits his/her previously existing viewpoints; contacts with information that may include ideas that cause feelings of reluctance and perplexity are kept to a minimum (Grömping 2014: 44; Stroud 2010: 556; Sunstein 2009: 80).

Folklorist and media researcher Robert Glenn Howard has elaborated the concept of 'vernacular web' in order to explain the grassroots networks that surround certain web pages. According to Howard, one important characteristic of the vernacular web is that it is dominated by ideas that reproduce continuities and consistencies with the already existing values of the participants. In time the shared values will become more coherent and persistent (Howard 2008; 2013: 82). It is quite likely that individuals whose views "would ordinarily dissolve" (Sunstein 2009: 81) due to being very different from the normative perspectives are finding like-minded vernacular communities on the Internet. All they have to do is just google the "correct" key-words (Sunstein 2009: 81; Wojcieszak 2010: 641). Many studies concentrating on the level of the deliberative discussions in vernacular communities (see Grömping 2014; Kushin, Kitchener 2009; Stroud 2010; Van Alstyne, Brynjolfsson 2005; Sunstein 2009) have reached the alarming conclusion that this kind of communication is dominated by the echo-chamber effect. The echo-chamber effect indicates that constant interaction with similar interlocutors leads to polarization of opinions and fixation of shared views and preconceptions. Individuals who navigate in the sphere of influence of the echo chambers tend to accept only the narrow chains of causalities that justify their already existing views. Information that is dissimilar or controversial in view with those explanations is ignored as irrelevant or dubious (Wojcieszak 2010: 649).

This article approaches the problem of echo chambers by analysing vernacular online communication of the Estonian extreme right. Hitherto, the Estonian example has been studied by relatively few authors (see Madisson, Ventsel 2015, 2016; Siibak 2012; 2014; Jakobson *et al.* 2012). Several studies concentrating on grassroots communities of the extreme right have indicated that the rise of enclosed and polarized interactions emerges as an important trend (see Askanius, Mylonas 2015; Hirvonen 2013; Wojcieszak 2010). This tendency has been referred to as an "informational

cocoon that precludes all kind of reality checks" (Griffin 2003: 45); "communities of closure or anti-public" (Cammaerts 2009: 556–558) and "filter bubbles that are amplifying the extreme right ideology" (O'Callaghan *et al.* 2013, 2015[1]). Studies also outline that, paradoxically, extreme-right echo-chamber communication is growing in an international dimension. Different extreme-right communities have become informed about one another's activities and developed a common identity discourse that is rhetorically anchored in the framework of *translocal whiteness*[2] (Daniels 2009, 2012; Caiani, Kröll 2014; Grumke 2013).

The researchers mentioned above have conducted quantitative and qualitative inquiries into mapping the most widespread topics in the vernacular webs of the extreme right, and analysed how the communication of the extreme right has become adapted to particular social networking sites such as YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, various forums, etc. However, the current research has not concentrated on explaining the specifics of meaning-making characteristic of these kinds of communities. One of the aims of this article is filling in this gap and explicating the semiotic mechanisms upon which such hermetic communication is built. Primarily, we are relying on Juri Lotman's framework of autocommunication[3] and concentrate on identifying the dominants which rule, transform and determine the meaning-making and guarantee "the integrity of the structures" (Jakobson 1971a: 82). In our case study we analyse the discussion that emerged in the context of the European Refugee Crisis that escalated in April 2015.[4] The topic became very urgent after the European Union introduced a quota system of distributing the migrants across the member states.[5] We

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[1]   O'Callaghan, Derek; Greene, Derek; Conway, Maura; Carthy, Joe; Cunningham, Padraig 2013. The Extreme Right Filter Bubble has been accessed at *http://arxiv.org/abs/1308.6149.*

[2]   Global online-communication facilitates the formation of a transnational and explicitly racist white identity, i.e. "translocal whiteness" (Daniels 2009: 43). Besides identifying with translocal whiteness, the network of the European extreme right usually shares a strong Euro-skepticism (Caiani, Kröll 2015: 344–345) and Islamophobia (Askanius, Mylonas 2015) as common umbrella topics.

[3]   We have very briefly introduced the autocommunicative aspect of extreme-right online communication in previous articles (see Madisson, Ventsel 2015, 2016).

[4]   In Estonia, the public discussion of the Refugee Crisis was accompanied with public demonstrations and other manifestations that indicated dissent from the official statements of the European Union (e.g. a motorcycle hike to the Vao Refugee Centre). The most serious case was probably an arson attempt on the Refugee Centre in Vao on 3 September 2015.

[5]   Usually, the beginning of the European Refugee Crisis is associated with April 2015 when more than a thousand asylum seekers were drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. Since then, European countries have tried to use various ways of action to get the crisis under control, e. g. a system of quotas has been created for distributing the refugees and migrants among different member-states, many countries have been fortifying their borders, various programmes have been organized against human trafficking etc.

focus on the Estonian extreme right blogs (*Rahvuslane*, *Koobas*, *EESTI RAHVUSLIK BLOG* and *BH RuZZland*)[6] that have covered the topic of the European Refugee Crisis in the most explicit and radical manner. These blogs function as important nodes of the Estonian extreme-right network: they share numerous links to various secondary sources such as web-pages, forums, social networking sites, etc., that share predominantly extreme-right or nationalistic content. It is important to note that the radicalism of the observed blog postings varies greatly and not all of the content of the blogs contains explicitly radical and xenophobic implications. However, the general tonality of the meaning-making of this vernacular web recognizably belongs to the extreme right.

Another purpose of our article is to widen the common understanding of the scope of autocommunicative processes. Lotman (2000: 21) has pointed out that autocommunication refers to specific meaning-making processes in which the addresser and the addressee overlap. He notes that his framework of autocommunication has been developed in a heuristic and sketchy manner, and stresses that there is a long way to go to achieve a grounded comparison between systems that are oriented towards autocommunication and those oriented towards communication (see Lotman: 2010: 73–74; Lotman 2000: 35). This article tries to shed some light on polarized hermetic autocommunication as an extreme version of cultural I-I communication. Although Lotman (2000: 35) notes that in some cases autocommunicative processes can impede cultural dynamics and facilitate the re-production of cultural stereotypes, he never explicates this aspect more thoroughly, but rather focuses on the functions of autocommunicative processes that are related to learning, discovering and comprehending (Lotman 2000: 21–22, 24; see also Torop 2008: 729). Most of the authors who have developed Lotman's ideas further also seem to understand the autocommunication of semiotic unities as a mechanism which enables cultural innovation and allows subjects to establish their autonomy, e.g. the autonomy of the subject in relation to dominant discourses (see Ibrus 2010: 90; Ibrus, Torop 2015: 3; Schönle 2002: 432; Raudsepp, Ventsel 2015: 44–54). There are also several studies that view autocommunication as an identity-forming, auto-suggestive and/or therapeutic form of interaction which leads to the subject's self-organization and to clarification of essential objectives and values (Han 2014: 527; Hartley 2015: 83; Kallio, Sandström 2009: 84–85; Lindström 2010: 363). Those approaches see autocommunication through the prism of optimism – as something which may contribute to the development and well-being of an individual or a culture. As far as we know, only a few papers have described situations where autocommunicative processes result in enclosed interactions, based on reproducing stereotypes and redundant

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[6]   During the time of writing this article the blogs *Koobas* and *EESTI RAHVUSLIK BLOG* have been closed down.

content (Lepik 2007: 87–89; Madisson, Ventsel 2016; Ventsel 2016; Steedman 2006; Randviir in press)[7].

Extreme-right online communication as closed autocommunication

Culture can be treated as a sphere of organization (of information) in human society which, from an "inner" point of view, is opposed to the "outer" as disorganization (entropy) (Ivanov *et. al* 1998: 33–34). The ways in which relations are drawn with outer structures also significantly affect the specifics of intra-cultural meaning-making. Extreme-right communication forms a marginal part of cultural communication. Les Back (2002: 632) outlines the main traits of contemporary extreme right 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 world-view that aims to overthrow the existing order". In addition to these features, contemporary extreme-right meaning-making is also characterized by xenophobia, and by a strong opposition to political establishment and to the principles of pluralism and the fundamental equal rights between people (Rydgren 2010: 61–62).

According to Juri Lotman, cultural communication can, in general, be dominated by two basic tendencies. Firstly, there is outwardly directed communication which aims to transfer the sender's views (message) and to find the widest possible intersection with other semiotic unities (I-he/she type of communication). Secondly, there is inwardly oriented communication which can be treated as autocommunication (i.e. I-I type of communication) (Lotman 2000: 21). In actual communication situations these types appear as intermingled, but on an analytical level it is possible to distinguish the domination of either the former or the latter type (Lotman 2000: 35). Lotman stresses that autocommuniative processes can primarily be observed in larger socio-

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[7]   Our usage of the concept of 'autocommunication' partly overlaps with concepts used by other authors, e.g. 'self-communication' (Morris 1949) or 'intrapersonal communication' (Ruesch, Bateson 1951), etc. Although the distinction of those concepts would allow explicating analytical nuances, we have still decided to stick to Lotman's concept. We do it firstly because Lotman's theory presumes the homomorphism between various semiotic unities. Lotman has constantly emphasized that similar meaning-making processes are taking place on the level of the individual, but also on the level of broader dimensions (e.g. culture). Secondly, as one of our goals is to map the conceptual field associated with the framework of autocommunication, the introduction of new notions could be misleading. Developing that kind of distinction between the concepts of autocommunication and self-communication, intrapersonal communication could be the topic of another theoretical article.

cultural systems, e.g. at the level of a national community (Lotman 2010: 73). Thus, it is useful to analyse the categories of 'I' and 'he/she' also on a more abstract level than an individual.

According to Lotman (2000: 22), "[i]n the 'I-I' system the bearer of the information remains the same but the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning during the communication process. This is the result of introducing a supplementary, second, code; the original message is recoded into elements of its structure and thereby acquires features of a *new* message". The information is reformulated in new structural categories. In 'I-I' communication there is a qualitative transformation of the system, the restructuring of the 'I' itself (Lotman 2000: 22, 28–29). Thanks to the new code it is possible to understand the previously known information from a novel perspective. Lotman points out that "[a]lthough the secondary code aims to liberate the primary signifying elements from their normal semantic values, this does not happen. The normal semantic values remain but secondary meanings are imposed on them […]". Those secondary meanings are created by the semantic shifts that are caused when a new code is reformulating and renewing the status of the previously known message (Lotman 2000: 28). In autocommunicative meaning-making, the culture (i.e., the abstract 'me' – M.-L. M., A. V.) is trying to grow its internal information, to improve the quality of this information, and to transform itself through this information (Torop 2008: 729). Thus, cultural autocommunication comprises in itself the reflection of an immediate identity or the habitual level but it also comprises the instructions for interpreting it, so I-I communication facilitates the creation of metalanguages and metatexts (Torop 2013: 125). The process of organizing and interpreting immediate identifications takes place through developing different languages of description (codes). In case of this process, the culture is trying to explain some topical phenomenon for itself and by doing so it is looking for various languages of description, which is also the reason why autocommunication becomes very significant in times of social crisis and other sensitive periods (see Lotman 2009: 15; Ojamaa, Torop 2015: 64).

Chris Atton (2006: 286) has indicated that extreme-right online communication is not usually characterized by 'democratized creativity' which is common for alternative media[8] because it does not leave much room for critical argumentation

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8   According to Atton and Hamilton (2008: 1) "Alternative journalism proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also […] emphasizes alternatives to, *inter alia*, conventions of news sources and representations; the inverted pyramid of news texts; the hierarchical and capitalized economy of commercial journalism; the professional, elite basis of journalism as a practice; the professional norm of objectivity; and the subordinate role of audience as receiver. Alternative media, at least its ideal form, is produced outside mainstream media institutions and networks".

and deliberative discussions. The extreme-right (auto)communication is an ongoing process of interpretation, but the semantics of the messages is as if pre-given in a limited number of stereotypes and it does not allow exchange of new information. One pervasive theme in Estonian extreme-right online communication is the idea that the Estonian nation is facing existential dangers, and that national sovereignty and cultural identity are threatened by hostile foreign forces. An autocommunicative selection of information takes place, which is predominantly open to associations that the potential addressee already previously knows (Madisson, Ventsel 2016). Members of extreme-right communities do not tend to be immersed in fundamentally different lines of thought. This semantic shift becomes possible because a new code is added, and through that code the previously known information is given a new meaning. So for example, we can observe how those previously outlined themes are interpreted according to an economic code ("migrants are threatening the sustainability of our country because they are taking our jobs and they encumber economic growth"), a social code ("providing the social benefits to strangers is jeopardizing the social welfare of Estonians") or a cultural code ("they wear burqas and aggressively spread their religion and this is dangerous for Estonian culture"). If a new code is added, the autocommunicative framework of associations that organizes various extreme interpretations is confirmed once again. It widens and deepens the cluster of reasons why the national spirit and the white race can be presented as being under serious threat (Madisson, Ventsel 2015, 2016).

Unquestionably, such echo-chamber communication is not exclusively characteristic of supporters of the extreme-right world view. Camelia Gradinaru (2013: 101) has indicated that in some cases constant and intensive social media communication with homogeneous peers can lead to the construction of a deficient looking-glass self because the reflection does not take into consideration novel perspectives or true oppositions. Contrary to popular expectation, online communication very often does not facilitate deliberative discussions and it is important to note that if a persistent member of an echo chamber described above encounters opposing perspectives, his/her views will not become more moderate, but rather more radically polarized (Wojcieszak 2010: 645–647; Wojcieszak, Price 2010: 331).

We believe that this kind of enclosed meaning-making can be explained with the help of the concept of autocommunication. Firstly, we shall explicate antithetical modelling as one of the dominants of hermetic autocommunication.

Antithesis as the dominant of enclosing autocommunication

Permanent members of the extreme-right online communities usually cannot perceive the relative nature of values and norms, nor can they accept the plurality of different ways of interpretation and viewpoints. In those vernacular webs, information is frequently created according to an antithetical model that separates the world into two camps in a binary opposition: moral and immoral, beneficial and harmful, friends and enemies. According to Lotman, binary thinking does not even consider the relative equality of the concerned parties. Even if acknowledging such equality may not mean admitting the opponent's right to the truth, it would at least mean admitting his/her right to existence (Lotman 2007: 26). In the context of the European Refugee Crisis, such logic sticks out in a quite noticeable manner. To put it briefly, it contrasts *moral*, *righteous*, *principled*, *rational*, and *stable* indigenous Estonians (but also other defenders of, in general, the Nordic/white race and/or European nation states) with *decadent*, *deceitful*, *two-faced*, *greedy*, *unnatural* groups (e.g., the Estonian political establishment, the structures of the European Union, people who support liberal democracy and the rights of minorities, as well as the mainstream media and educational system) that use *hysterical* and *emotional rhetoric* and *slander* to ridicule nationalist views. That kind of antithetical logic is strongly expressed in the following quotation, where different groups who represent views dissimilar from "ours" are understood as enemies:

> […] it doesn't matter if this is done because people are brainwashed useful idiots, or because they are stupidly idealistic, or bribed, or because they have a mission to advocate their "progressive" ideology, or because of the clear and evil destructive hatred against their own nation and country – this kind of bollocks about the refugees, tolerance and openness and other such progressive phenomena is criminal and those who are talking about it are ENEMIES of the country and the nation, they are basically preparing the same for us that was done recently in Paris.[9]

To be sustainable, such antithetical modelling needs the presence of evil, and thus representations expressing the dangerousness of the enemy are constantly added (Lotman 2007: 40). It is quite common that postings talk about an ongoing violent stifling of conservative voices,[10] existential danger to nation-states[11] or even killing

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[9]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/mart-metsalalt-suureparane-raadiosaade. html; all translations from the Estonian-language blogs are ours, M.-L. M., A. V. The reference is to the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 November 2015.

[10]   http://koobas.net/2015/04/17/repressiivne-sundsallivus/; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/ 2015/04/matti-ilves-tulistamisest-rootsis-ja.html; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/10/ anti-poolamets-juku-kalle-raid-avaldas.html.

[11]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/raivo-orgusaar-vastuseis-eesti.html; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/matti-ilves-on-alustatud-eesti.html; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/04/helme-tegelikult-pole-eestis-mingit.html.

people whose opinions are opposed to the "blind toleration of everything";[12] talk of a white genocide is also widespread.[13] The expression of these threats can be illustrated by the following:

> In reality it functions as a gradual supersession of the local population and also helps to declare that all the people who criticize it are Nazis. It is a systematic destruction, not tolerance, when all kind of obsolete excuses are used as a basis for loosening the citizenship policy and rules regarding residence permits The tolerance is a code word for White genocide.[14]

It is important to emphasize that the antithetical enemy is often constructed as a symmetrical mirror image of one's *own* structures, yet carries a negative sign (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 220). It is quite typical that the projection precedes the mirror-projection, i.e., firstly *our* problems are ascribed to *them* and then a mirror-projective antithesis is created that opposes *their* problems to the 0-feature, i.e. the lack of problems in *our* structure (Lepik 2007: 82). That kind of signification is strongly present in the postings in our case study, and we noticed that the ideological opponents (i.e. the Estonian political and cultural elite and the EU) were blamed for intolerance, extremism, racism and Nazism, and also for the persecution of minorities.[15] E.g. one author writes:

> Heil, Sutrops[16]! Heil! Heil, Anti-fascists! Heil, our Nazi-hunters! Heil – aren't we efficient protectors of the rule of law! Heil to us! Heil – we denounce Nazism! But do you want to see extremists whose mouths are frothing with anger? Then look into the mirror! Of course, you have the power and the force to smash the

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[12]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/jaan-hatto-enesehavituse-ilu.html; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/07/juri-kukk-eestimaa-anno-domini-2030.html; http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/03/je-suis-ekre-sona-ja-mottevabaduse-ning.html.

[13]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/mis-sunnitab-breivikuid-dialoogi.html; http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com.ee/2015/09/peavooluajakirjandus-eriti-delfi-ohutab.html#more; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/09/peavooluajakirjandus-eriti-delfi-ohutab.html.

[14]   http://koobas.net/2015/04/03/teretulemast-rootsi/. Based on the same comment it appears that what is being criticized here is a vision of tolerance and cultural enrichment ascribed to communists and Marxists.

[15]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/04/mart-helme-vaadake-toele-silma-arge.html; http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/06/pole-vahet-kas-rahvas-havitatakse.html#more.

[16]   On 7 March 2015 Urmas Sutrop, the director of the Institute of the Estonian Language, published an opinion article that concentrated on the online sources of the Estonian extreme right and the Nazi mentality of the members of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE), see: http://epl.delfi.ee/news/arvamus/urmas-sutropi-uued-faktid-ekrest-salaparane-metapeedia-uhendab-valge-rassi-ulemvoimu-ja-aarmusparempoolsuse-eest-voitlejaid?id=70959527. He received furious feedback from EKRE but also from extreme-right bloggers.

mirror for you don't like the sickening Nazi face that is emerging from there. Yes, you have the power and the force. But what will it change? The new society that you are creating is a society of fear where dissidents can be labelled and beaten with impunity, eventually even killed. Is that what you are trying to achieve with your hysteria?[17]

Such rhetoric allows authors on the extreme right to position themselves as moral victims who are surrounded by hostile enemies (Madisson, Ventsel 2015, 2016; Madisson 2016). Also, it allows countering the potential accusations from the opponents even before they are articulated because the enemies are discredited by describing them as having typical characteristics that are usually attributed to far-right extremists.

Lotman and Uspensky (1978: 221) stress that semiotic unities, organized by antithetic modelling, may often be striving towards isolation from external impact. In a borderline situation, these kinds of semiotic unities may interpret all other unities that exhibit different associations and representations as dangerous structures of the enemy (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 220). We detected the belief that the undermining and devastating impact of the enemy can be avoided by ceasing all possible contact with it. This tendency towards enclosure is expressed in the following blog posting:

> If securing the borders and keeping the immigrants out of the country is a guarantee of security and wealth then we have to do it, and sacrifice the comfort of travelling without a passport. My point of view is that it's better to be closed than dead.[18]

In the context of online communication concentrating on the present refugee crisis, we can notice a rapid growth of Islamophobia.[19] Islam (in extreme-right representations it is frequently equated with Islamism) is very often understood as a barbaric and violent system of beliefs that tolerates slaughtering and raping of non-believers.[20] Also, people are worrying about the effective recruiting techniques and the propaganda of Islam. It is assumed that soon Europe and the whole Western world will be dominated by Islam, which is jeopardizing nation states and their traditions and values. For example, consider the following:

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[17] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/03/je-suis-ekre-sona-ja-mottevabaduse-ning.html.

[18] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/martin-helme-parem-suletud-kui-surnud.html.

[19] It is worth noting that our previous observations (2012–2014) indicated quite a low proportion of Islamophobic content but since 2015 it has become a rising dominant. We have noticed the process of importing the Islamophobic content form Scandinavian web-sites; among other issues there is also a tendency to draw parallels with the ideas presented in Breivik's Manifesto, e.g. the Eurabia conspiracy.

[20] http://bhruzzland.balanss.ee/toeline-islam (vt. ka. http://bhruzzland.balanss.ee/naabrid/891-luehidalt-07-12-2015-taeiendatav).

> There is nothing so disgusting as the fact that the patriots of our own country have to march under the protection of the police, while immigrants, Muslims and left-wing filth are howling. That filth is growing more and more daring in Estonia and it's publicly mocking nationalists and their ventures. ISLAM IS A PLAGUE WHICH DESTROYS EVERYTHING THAT IS DEAR TO AND INNATE FOR US.[21]

Peet Lepik (2007: 87, 91) has pointed out that antithesis can function as a trigger of autocommunication. In vernacular web of the extreme right it functions as an additional code, originating from cultural memory, that re-organizes the primary semantics of the message. The ordinary meaning of the message will become quite irrelevant in the light of the antithesis. The antithesis evokes the so-called wider or more significant dimension of meaningfulness, the single example of the dangerous acts of the enemy is less important than the fact that it confirms the cultural stereotype (Lepik 2007: 80; Madisson, Ventsel 2016): *their* wicked and immoral nature and *our* morality. The particular deviations from the norm (e.g. "Islamic propaganda", "howling immigrants, Muslims and left-wing filth") are not perceived as being as significant as the fact that the antithesis connects previously existing preconceptions and cultural frames with new contexts and associations. The aforementioned examples indicate that there is one cause of the processes/events that are threatening Estonia and European nations: Islam.

Orientation towards *normative* texts as a dominant of closed autocommunication

There are also other dominants that facilitate enclosing autocommunicative processes besides antithesis in the meaning-making of the extreme right. One important tendency is the emergence of hermetic strategies of association. Umberto Eco has pointed out that hermetic communication is directed by a powerful mechanism of analogy which is almost unstoppable once started. Every time when a new analogy is discovered, it, in turn, indicates a new analogy etc. In this kind of interpretation the criterion of similarity is established quite loosely and it is often assumed that the meaning of a sign is actually indicating a hidden meaning. Thus, in hermetic semiosis, the interpreter starts to look for secret motives behind all kinds of events and phenomena (Eco 1990: 163–166). One important principle of hermetic semiosis is that when two things are similar, the former is a sign of the latter and vice versa (Eco 1990: 164). That kind of modelling, based on the mechanism of analogy, has an important role in extreme-right echo-chamber communication. In the context of the European migration wave, the extreme-right vernacular web creates analogies between very dissimilar events and phenomena, for instance:

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[21]   http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/inglismaal-arreteeriti-mees-kes.html.

> Actually, such large-scale arrangements as the shootings in Paris, the blasting of the twin towers in New York and the explosion of bombs in London cannot be organized without the silent consent and/or contribution of the authorities and the secret services. *All of them are separate parts of one and the same plan.*[22]

Such a plan is understood to serve one main goal which one author describes as follows: "What starts to happen is Europe is a total madhouse. Actually, it is one part of the eradication of the white race and nation states [...]"[23], "[...] where the refugees that are predominantly Muslims, are flooding the European Union"[24]. The principle of analogy sees "the extreme liberals and extreme leftists: the Reform Party, the Social Democrats and the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union"[25] as promoters of this plan, but it also includes agents that, at first sight, seem incompatible in this context, e.g. ecofascists[26],

> [...] sexual Marxism and cultural Marxism didn't attack capital but they turned to soft values. According to Marcuse, gays, lesbians and radical feminists were supposed to be the avant-garde of the new social revolution. Those were the groups that the capitalists despised; and at a certain point also the mass of immigrants and other minorities that flowed into Europe was added to them. White traditional heterosexuals were declared evil.[27]

It is quite common to draw parallels with Soviet authorities, e.g. there are references to "KGB agents"[28], "new Chekists"[29], "new June communists and new deporters"[30]; "radical enemies of the people"[31]; "cultural communists"[32], etc. According to Lotman

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[22] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/pagulased-kui-terroristide-inimkilp.html. Our emphasis, M.-L. M., A. V.

[23] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/allan-sarri-mis-kuradi-transseksuaal.html.

[24] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/10/matti-ilves-euroopa-liit-peab-vastu.html.

[25] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/06/pole-vahet-kas-rahvas-havitatakse.html#more.

[26] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/03/je-suis-ekre-sona-ja-mottevabaduse-ning.html.

[27] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/05/kaasaegse-sotsiaaldemokraatia-hada-ja.html.

[28] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com.ee/2015/10/eesti-on-muudetud-politseiriigiks-kus.html.

[29]   Chekists were the members of Cheka i.e. the Emergency Committee, the first of a succession of Soviet state security organizations, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheka.

[30] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/06/pole-vahet-kas-rahvas-havitatakse.html#more. 'June communists' is a colloquial term that refers to the people who in June 1940 collaborated with the Estonian Communist Party and the authorities of the Soviet Union in organizing the coup that lead to the incorporation of Estonia in the Soviet Union on 6 August 1940. 'Deporters' refers to the people who conducted mass repressions – the largest deportations in Estonia took place on 14 June 1941 (ca 10,000 persons were deported) and on 25–29 March 1949 (more than 20,000 persons were deported).

[31] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/03/je-suis-ekre-sona-ja-mottevabaduse-ning.html.

[32] http://koobas.net/2015/04/03/teretulemast-rootsi/.

(2002a: 2647–2648) this structural relation, based on homomorphism, allows us to recognize the signs of one and the same phenomenon in different manifestations; and to see a unitary object instead of the different objects of the same class. In our case, an analogy is established between different actors and the unpleasant events that they seem to have caused in the past and will cause in the future.

One central characteristic of this kind of meaning-making is the tendency to identify with the *normative* text or an aggregate of normative texts (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 218). In meaning-making that is oriented towards texts, the self views itself as a sum of precedents, cases of use and texts (Lotman 2010: 61), and the *normative* ("the correct") is equated with the existence of that semiotic unity. In Estonian extreme-right online communication that is aggregated around mapping the refugee crisis (various threats that it is causing and possible solutions for softening its presumed devastating impacts) we can observe two types of normative texts that are organizing the interpretation.

(1) Firstly, there are texts that exist in a particular form and it is not difficult to ascertain their authorship. One of the most popular texts that is constantly referred to undoubtedly is the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia. For example, one author remarks: "Our nationalism is the nationalism of a small nation, it isn't directed against others (as is the chauvinism of big nations), but it rather aims for survival, and this is what our Constitution obliges us to do".[33] Extreme right-wing authors treat the Constitution as a prescriptive text that justifies certain actions, e.g.:

> [t]he Constitution states that Estonia is still an independent country, and an independent country does not follow the instructions from some foreign countries or private enterprises. There are no refugee quotas in our Constitution, thus there is nothing to talk about. [...] Those who have never supported Estonian culture should not start talking about multiculturalism[34].

Another author claims that „The Constitution states that the problems with national importance are: firstly, the extinction of the nation and its mass emigration into exile for survival; and secondly, cultural decadence."[35] Polarizing and closed autocommunication is also indicated by the dominance of the dimension of essentialist values that does not explicate the particularities of the ideas proposed. So Estonian culture is predominantly associated with skin colour and racial identity, e.g. one author points out:

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[33]   http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/03/je-suis-ekre-sona-ja-mottevabaduse-ning.html; http://bhruzzland.balanss.ee/isamaa/ensv-ev/437-euroopa-liitu-ei-huvita-tartu-rahuleping-ega-meie-riiklik-vaeaerikus).

[34]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/05/kivisildnik-valitsus-vahetab-rahva.html.

[35]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/05/kivisildnik-mis-on-meile-kasulikum-kas.html.

> Also, the Estonian Constitution considers the main purpose of the Estonian state to be the maintenance of the Estonian state, people, culture and language through the ages. Those who say that the nation doesn't have a skin colour unfortunately have inadequate knowledge. Any encyclopedia will clearly say that Estonians belong to the white, Caucasian race. [...] an Estonian with black skin is as impossible as a bearded woman.[36]

The endeavours of cultural self-description that articulate the positive features of Estonian culture are almost missing in these kinds of postings; they only occur as severe opposition to structures that are declared to be alien. If cultural identity is defined by skin colour, it remains unclear how Estonian culture differs from other "white" cultures.

There is also a tendency to refer to certain texts by certain authors, mostly anti-utopias (e.g. *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*[37] and *The Gulag Archipelago*[38]). Those texts function as cautionary examples of the socio-cultural decadence that will emerge soon because of political correctness and a senseless toleration of everything. For instance, one author notes: "You walk down the street and there are shootings and people are dropping down. You have to thank God for still being alive! Does it sound familiar? That kind of world was described in the book *1984* by George Orwell who was well informed about the secret plans of the self-appointed rulers of the world."[39]

(2) Secondly, the other widespread type of text is related to the layer of collective memory-texts of the community. This includes the general *text of victimhood* which in the Estonian context is often associated with the 700-years-long serfdom, deportations and the Soviet occupation. Extreme-right interpreters often stress that they see the signs of a continuation of such persecution in our daily politics. In order to map important phenomena, and to articulate future scenarios, the authors often turn to their own collective memory. Thus, previously existing associations, dominant in the vernacular web of the extreme right, tend to be amplified and the polarization in respect to the so-called outer world seems to be aggravating further. Extreme right-wing interpretations often see analogies between the European Union and the Soviet Union. For example, one author writes:

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36   http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/06/pole-vahet-kas-rahvas-havitatakse.html#more.

37   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/09/matti-ilves-laanes-levib-intellektaalne.html.

38   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/jaan-hatto-enesehavituse-ilu.html.

39   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/pagulased-kui-terroristide-inimkilp.html.

> At first they adopted in their PR-arsenal the Soviet Union's idea of an omnipotent empire; they also took over the model of the brotherly family where Germans, Greeks and Poles are equally important. The European Union was supposed to be the synonym of a fortunate super-empire.[40]

Another important frame, directing the generation of analogies, is the New World Order (NWO) conspiracy theory. It enables a connection between topical daily events and the spiteful global and local state authorities, the biased mainstream media and various education institutions that are said to be contributing to the brainwashing of ordinary citizens (see Madisson, Ventsel 2016; Madisson 2016). The NWO conspiracy is understood as a systemic plot against Estonian culture and the Estonian nation in general. For example, one author remarks:

> […] the deportation of Estonians with the trigger of poverty has been successful, it has created the preconditions for the mass immigration, the land is socially burned, the lebensraum[41] suits illegal immigrants and the new wave of colonists.[42]

The other outlines: "The deportation of Estonians based on the commands of Moscow or the importation of other nations on the conditions of Brussels both have a deleterious outcome – one nation is becoming an unsustainable minority in its homeland".[43]

Also, the second type includes the stereotypical memory-text of black men who are prone to commit crimes, including sexual assaults and rape. Different authors write of a massive wave of rapes that has taken place in the Nordic countries[44] and it is often argued that local people are afraid to move about in their neighbourhoods and that the police are unable to patrol in the districts of immigrants. It is relevant to note that the mechanism of homomorphism allows the interpretation of different expressions/texts as analogous with one another and so an analogy relation is created with Islamists who incite "people to holy violence – murder, rape, and slaughter".[45]

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[40]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/05/kaasaegse-sotsiaaldemokraatia-hada-ja.html. In this quote, 'they' refers to the European Union.

[41]   *Lebensraum* is a term, associated with the rhetoric of Nazi Germany, it refers to a territory believed to be "necessary for national existence or economic self-sufficiency"; see http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lebensraum.

[42]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/05/kivisildnik-valitsus-vahetab-rahva.html.

[43]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/05/toomas-roosileht-eesti-rahvusel-on.html; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/10/anti-poolamets-juku-kalle-raid-avaldas.html; http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com/2015/08/pagulasprobleemi-reaalne-lahendus.html#more.

[44]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/jaan-hatto-enesehavituse-ilu.html; http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/norras-ei-ole-koik-korras-97.html.

[45]   http://bhruzzland.balanss.ee/toeline-islam;   http://bhruzzland.balanss.ee/naabrid/891-luehidalt-07-12-2015-taeiendatav.

Culture that identifies itself as a collection of texts is guided by the idea that everything opposing its views also has specific expression – but a wrong (incorrect) expression (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 219). That kind of tendency is strongly present in the process of naming. The act of giving a name to a communication partner is equivalent with taking *him/her* to *my* world of meanings, it requires coding *him/her* with *my* code and it implies giving *him/her* a place in *my* worldview. In communication, dominated by antithetical modelling, the processes of naming acquire a specific form, i.e. the name of the objects must reflect their nature (see also Madisson, Ventsel 2012). In case of mapping the European refugee crisis, a significant problem of naming emerges because it is the first step that is directing the interpreter to a certain frame of meaning. We can repeatedly observe postings that advocate calling a spade a spade. For instance, one author writes: "Lately, the media has talked much about the so-called "refugees" and "emigrees", especially in the context of the crisis that is taking place on the Mediterranean [...]".[46] It is also pointed out: "The fact is that the majority of those immigrants are not refugees but *migrants for the social benefits,* whose main destinations are countries where it is easier to conduct living that is financed by social assistance."[47] Another posting states that:

> as most of the "refugees" are illegal aliens who have no documents, the majority of them are young and strong men, and the fees for a boat journey are rather high, there is reason to believe that actually we are facing economic migrants or undercover "ambassadors" of the Islamic State.[48]

The use of inverted commas is widespread and this is usually done in order to ridicule the phrasing used by the opponents or even to demonstrate the deceptiveness of the ideas that are spreading in the mainstream media. The strategy of naming is also a mechanism by which analogies are created between different events and actors (see the aforementioned 'occupation', 'migrant', 'colonizer' which all carry references to the Soviet past of Estonia).

Robert Glenn Howard has elaborated the concept of vernacular authority that nowadays mainly emerges in the context of online communication. Although tradition is non-institutional, it always bears in itself a reference to authority as it determines a cluster of potential responses that permit individuals to make choices in everyday situations. Unlike institutional authority, however, vernacular authority is generally present when an individual trusts a statement precisely because it has not been brought to focus by an institutional authority, be it a formal institution such as the church, a media corporation, etc. In short, 'vernacular' can dialectically be defined as something

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[46] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/04/koobas-miks-nn-pogenikud-ei-lahe.html.

[47] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/08/pagulaste-monus-elu-saksamaal.html; our emphasis M.-L. M., A. V.

[48] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/rahvas-andis-roivase-kabinetile-selge.html.

distinct from 'institutional' (Howard 2011: 7–10). It is important to note that the opposition to the mainstream spheres of information and clear mapping of right and wrong are important constituents of extreme-right communication. We can note that kind of attitude in the following posting:

> It is becoming increasingly more evident that Estonian mainstream journalism has started to engage in brainwashing that is as disgusting as the brainwashing in the Soviet press, with the Pravda at its forefront. There was only one truth and those who were against it were called counter-revolutionaries, bourgeoisies, reactionaries, etc that meant unsuitable filth for the new authorities.[49]

So the web of extreme-right thinkers distrusts the mainstream media and rather values the so-called alternative sources. Dominant journalism is often associated with state authorities and it is believed that mainstream channels are intentionally spreading information that is existentially dangerous to the nation state and to traditional values (e.g. the propaganda of sexual minorities, the ideas of aggressive multiculturalism, etc.). The vernacular authority is based on collective memory-texts (e.g. the text of victimhood, the idea of a white Nordic race, the romantic narrative of being successors of the Vikings, etc) that are interpreted from a certain perspective. It is also influenced by authors who present ideas that are strongly opposed to the dominant discourses.

That kind of communication, oriented towards the "correct" texts, has a clearly autocommunicative nature because its meaning-making is encapsulated in formerly existing associations. It is looking for self-confirmation in normative texts, and in constant opposition to mainstream viewpoints. That kind of autocommunication may try to avoid interaction and dialogue with external spheres. Peet Lepik (2007: 89) has indicated that autocommunicative processes foster the transformation of texts into meta-texts. According to Lepik, autocommunication comprises in itself both a reflection of the object level as well as guidelines for interpreting it. Metatexts rise onto a higher level than object-level texts, thus functioning as examples of the rule (Lepik 2007: 91). As indicated above, the extreme-right webs tend to interpret the ongoing events in light of the texts of cultural memory (the text of victimhood, the NWO conspiracy theory, *1984*), and also rely on these texts in the articulation of their scenarios of a decadent future (fatal political correctness, a complete disappearance of the freedom of speech, cultural and physical extinction of Estonians, etc.). Some memory-texts (popular interpretations of anti-utopias) function as cautionary examples of a future which could be avoided only if radically new courses of action were to be chosen – the traitorous nature of the state authorities and the European Union publicly acknowledged, the flow of migrants strictly impeded, and the spread

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[49]   http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/09/peavooluajakirjandus-eriti-delfi-ohutab.html.

of Islam stopped in Western countries). Although Lotman (2010: 62) points out that the type of culture that is oriented towards texts does not actively strive towards self-descriptive processes, it is important to note that the aspect that texts are transformed into metatexts gives them a prescriptive and normative function. This function is connected with a mechanism of identification that eliminates differences and brings texts closer to standards and norms. These kinds of normative texts present and teach a certain behaviour and accepted values (Lotman 2010: 61).

The phatic dominant of closed autocommunication

As outlined above, extreme-right vernacular webs often function as autocommunicative echo chambers in which the receiver of the message in principle already knows its content. In many aspects, such communication is organized by meaning templates and stereotypes that exist in the communal memory of the extreme-right community. Even if the messages of this vernacular web comprise new pieces of information (e.g. new factors, daily events, formerly unknown agents), they usually become significant through relations with previously existing frameworks of interpretation. Thus we can say that the degree of new meanings of this communication is rather low. On the other hand, it is important to note that the low semantic value is often compensated for by a strong potential for creating communal ties. Continuous echo-chamber communication increases communal memory (including the repertoire of common references) and reinforces the rhetorical frames that enable justification of shared views. Also, it usually guarantees the feeling of security and motivation for future interactions because the messages, constructed in a "correct or right" manner, ensure a positive feedback loop (Jamieson, Cappella 2008: 77, 240). In such echo-chamber communication, it is worth distinguishing one more dominant, that is based on the phatic language function elaborated on by Roman Jakobson.

According to Jakobson (1976: 113) the phatic function is directed at contact, "a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication". A classic example of phatic communication is the situation in which somebody is checking if the telephone line is working. It is important to note that for Jakobson the contact is not only limited to physical channels but he also stresses the significance of establishing and maintaining a psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee. Examples of creating psychological contact are situations in which the interlocutors try to attract each other's attention or to check if the partner is generally focusing on the particular interaction (Jakobson 1976: 113). Our observation shows that there is a significant proportion of phatic messages in extreme-right vernacular web.

One important aspect of extreme-right communication is expressing being in the loop regarding the ideas and activities of like-minded thinkers. Zeynep Tufekci (2008: 556) has pointed out that unlike face-to-face communication, online communication allows one to maintain social ties with other members of the community even across vast differences in distance and time. The members of social networking sites employ a lot of phatic information in their semi-public messages: e.g. it is possible to identify the members who have the status of a friend; also, it is easy to detect patterns constituted by commenting, sharing and liking the content of certain users. That kind of phatic communication reflects clear communicational hierarchies and establishes the dominance of some contacts over others. Thus, the observation of phatic communication gives valuable information about group belonging and social status (Tufekci 2008: 547–548). In the extreme-right vernacular web we found a number of postings the main content of which included references to other sources, expressing radically nationalistic or anti-immigrant attitudes. The most popular sources were the Facebook groups "EI PAGULASMASSIDELE" ["NO TO THE REFUGEE MASSES"], "Ei pagulastele" ["No to refugees"], "Estonian Anonymous" (as well as its YouTube channel); the nationalist news portals "Uued uudised" ["New News"], "Objektiiv" ["Objective"] (as well as its YouTube channel); and the homepages of Nõmme Radio and the Club of Nationalists of Tallinn.

The sources referred to often overlap (i.e. there emerge certain authoritative authors and quotations) and there is a trend of frequent cross-referencing between different extreme-right websites (Madisson, Ventsel 2015). Sometimes the postings consist of Estonian translations or summaries of texts first published in English,[50] Finnish[51] or Swedish[52]. In the context of the postings focusing on the European refugee crisis, we noticed a tendency to express support and approval of the activities of the extreme right and the right-wing populist parties, e.g. Estonian bloggers often refer to the web pages, YouTube channels and social media posts of the National Front (especially the activities of Marine Le Pen), the Finns Party, the Sweden Democrats, the UK Independence Party. They often share the content of international anti-Islam and/or extreme right movements like Pegida, the European National Front and Smash Cultural Marxism. Also, the extreme-right vernacular web presents an awareness of the actions of the right-wing populist anti-immigration parties: Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (the Conservative People's Party of Estonia), Eesti Iseseisvuspartei (the Estonian Independence Party), Rahva Ühtsuse Erakond (the Party of People's Unity). It is noteworthy that from time to time there are also references to the activities of Christian institutions, e.g. occasional posting of articles published in the web magazine

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[50] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/matti-ilves-legaliseeritakse-valgete.html.

[51] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/jaan-hatto-enesehavituse-ilu.html.

[52] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/10/lahendused-on-olemas-lahendused-on.html.

Meie Kirik [Our Church], the Facebook postings of some Estonian church figures and certain broadcasts of the Christian radio channel Kuressaare Pereraadio [Family Radio of Kuressaare].

The linguist John Laver, who has developed Jakobson's ideas further, stresses that in phatic communication the information is presented in an indexical rather than in a referential mode; primarily, it demonstrates the acceptance/non-acceptance of the communication partner (Laver 1975: 336). Creating reliable contact is often based on the activation of the associations of a common memory. Lotman (2002b: 171) has indicated that in order to establish an intimate atmosphere in communication, local semantics which is connected with the formation of a "local/domestic" lexicon, is heavily used. In some cases, the value of a certain message increases when it is incomprehensible to outsider groups. In our observation we noticed the expression '*pederallalla*'[53] as an example of this kind of intimate lexicon. It is common in extreme-right blogs, but also in Facebook postings and newspaper commentaries; one author even offers a definition – "fag-like thinking that stresses careless enjoyment of life that is free of responsibilities (faggots, you know, don't have children)"[54]. Another similar phrase, widely used in extreme-right circles is '*lilla-roosa udu*'[55], which signifies the liberal democratic or social democratic rhetoric that is dominant in mainstream media.

It is worth noting that if the same content is repeated via different sign systems it becomes more memorable and significant (Ojamaa, Torop 2015: 63), for the same text or text-element is not only actuating the coherence of the different versions of the same text but also the medium-specific features of the previous repetitions of the text (Ojamaa, Torop 2015: 73).[56] In the context of the postings concerning the European Refugee Crisis the most repeated text concerns the genocide of the white race and is mediated via diagrams,[57] films and YouTube videos,[58] opinion articles,[59] cartoons or photo collages,[60] and pictorial texts depicting explicit acts of violence[61].

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[53] The literal translation of '*pede*' is 'faggot' and '*rallallaa*' is a non-lexical vocable frequently used in Estonian children's songs.

[54] http://rahvuslik.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/mis-sunnitas-breiviku-dialoogi.html#more.

[55] The literal translation of '*lilla-roosa udu*' is '*purple-pink fog*', sometimes also just '*pink fog*' is used; see http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/09/kivisildnik-sotsialistliku.html.

[56] Jakobson mostly deals with linguistic examples, but he also emphasizes that "this pragmatic approach to language must lead *mutatis mutandis* to an analogous study of the other semiotic systems: with which of these or other functions are they endowed, in what combinations and in what hierarchical order" (Jakobson 1971b: 703).

[57] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/11/mis-sunnitab-breivikuid-dialoogi.html.

[58] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/10/white-race-genocide-valge-rassi.html.

[59] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/08/getter-suup-moslemipogenike-vastuvott.html.

[60] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/06/laupaevased-pildid_27.html.

[61] http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com.ee/2015/12/heldur-paulson-immigrantidest-ja_2.html.

Several studies focusing on extreme-right online communication have outlined that in order to avoid unwanted audiences and to establish a group feeling there is a tendency to use various kinds of secret codes of radical nationalists. For example, some numerical codes and acronyms are used (e.g. *88*,[62] *28*,[63] *RAHOWA*,[64] and *PWA*[65]) and occasional fragments of particular in-group texts (song lyrics, aphorisms, slogans etc.) are repeated (see Hale 2012: 349; Siibak 2012; Simi, Futrell 2006: 133–134; Madisson, Ventsel 2015: 12). Eco (1995: 74) has noted that extreme-right movements favour using shortened vocabulary and neologisms. Exchanging that kind of phatic information is significant because it indicates the potential acceptance of the interlocutor as a valuable communication partner (Radovanovic, Ragnedda 2012: 12).[66]

The tendency to reduce words, and the transformation of words into signs (i.e. indexes of the words) that are understandable only to a receiver who already knows the text is, according to Lotman (2000: 26), a special feature of the autocommunicative system. That tendency is present in the phatic communication of the extreme-right vernacular web described here. Such phatic communication may seem redundant at first because it is based on the repetition of the same content, but it is significant in establishing and affirming social ties.

Conclusion

This article focused on the specifics of meaning-making of polarized echo-chamber communication. The framework of semiotics of culture helped us to describe the central characteristics of hermetic communication and to explain its wider cultural function. Additionally, the paper demonstrated that the concept of autocommunication is useful in exploring meaning-making that is predominantly reproducing cultural stereotypes and has a generally closed nature. In the following we shall briefly compare enclosed communication of the extreme right with the main features of dialogic communication.

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[62]   '88' refers to the Nazi greeting "*Heil Hitler*" as H is the eighth letter of the alphabet

[63]   '28' refers to the international extreme-right movement *Blood and Honour*, as B is the second and H is the eighth letter of alphabet.

[64]   The phrase 'RAHOWA' is an abbreviation of 'Racial Holy War'.

[65]   'PWA' stands for the expression 'Preserve White Aryans'; P.W.A. is the name of a punk band of Estonian skinheads.

[66]   Radovanovic, Danica; Ragnedda, Massimo 2012. Small talk in the Digital Age: Making sense of phatic posts. *#MSM2012 2nd Workshop on Making Sense of Microposts*, 10–13. Workshop proceedings available online as CEUR Vol-838, at: http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-838 #MSM2012, April 16, 2012, Lyon, France.

Our case study concentrated on the example of extreme-right grassroots networks. Specifically, we analysed postings that focus on the Refugee Crisis that escalated in spring 2015. Our study indicated that extreme-right online communication is characterized by closed meaning-making that hinders dialogue. Such hermetic meaning-making is guided by antithetical modelling that constructs a strict binary opposition between 'one's own' and 'the alien'. For example, we noticed a strong opposition to Muslims, who were considered to be extremely violent and barbaric. However, there was also a general opposition to various kinds of social groups and institutions that are fitted under the all-encompassing and rather vague umbrella term of 'the organizers of the white genocide'. On the one hand, the antithesis allows locating particular events/agents on the grid of shared cultural memory. On the other hand, every single example helps to reinforce previously existing associations and thus contributes to the polarization of the oppositions.

Comparing closed communication with open communication presumes dialogic interactions between different social groups, and its potential outcome can be socio-cultural integration. Dialogic communication is framed by formal conditions that, ideally, should take into account the facts (versus ignoring them) and future scenarios (versus being short-sighted), and consider the interests of others (versus being biased) (Offe, Preuss 1991).[67] This model is based on the principle of reciprocity that accepts the independence of 'the other', its self-descriptions etc. By accepting that, 'the other' is brought into the inner sphere as a meaningful partner of the dialogue. In this case, the communication partner is perceived as a *cultural* other, and the semiotic unity itself is opened to changes that are manifested by entering into a dialogue with external structures. Mikhail Bakhtin emphasizes that the dialogue is led by the potential answer, by the principle of activation that creates a basis for an active response. Active understanding establishes a whole range of complex inter-relations, accordances and discordances, and comprehension is enriched with increasingly new elements (Bakhtin 2001: 282). The addressee is never just a passive receiver but the active constructor of the utterance of the addresser, i.e. they mutually constitute each other. In dialogic communication we see the integration of 'the I' and 'the other', the old and the new; it also favours adopting meta-positions, etc. (see also Raudsepp, Ventsel 2015). In the context of the European Migration Crisis it is possible to see the refugees as 'the other', as a potential source of enrichment of 'our own' culture.

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[67] In this article Offe and Preuss discuss these conditions in the context of deliberative democracy. As regards our article, it is not considered important to "measure" the democratic nature of particular types of communication; rather, it emeges as more significant to distinguish the conditions of opened or closed (autocommunicative) meaning-making.

Antithetical modelling is closely related to the other dominant of closed autocommunication – the orientation towards the *normative* ("correct") 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, e.g. the text of victimhood, popular dystopias (*1984*) and New World Order conspiracy theories.

Compared to closed communication, dialogic communication is directed outwards. Its meaning-making is characterized by an orientation towards the rules and it is predominantly focused on content (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 218). The norms of dialogic communication imply that for successful communication the interlocutors have to find a common metalanguage which can be used for discussing socially relevant topics. According to Roman Jakobson the metalingual function is characterized by the orientation towards the rules, the *code*.[68] For example, it is dominant in a situation when one communication partner asks the other to explain incomprehensible concepts or when interlocutors are trying to reach an agreement about the rules upon which the prospective dialogue will be built (Jakobson 1960: 356). In a dialogue, an interaction between different viewpoints, conceptual horizons and various social languages will occur.

The third dominant of echo-chamber communication is a high proportion of texts with a phatic orientation. In the extreme-right vernacular web the demonstration of being up-to-date with the activities of other extreme right nodes, e.g. via sharing links, copying or referring to texts from authoritative sources, etc., 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, e.g. by exchanging phrases such as '*pederallalla*' and 'purple-pink fog' or by using cryptic acronyms or numerical codes (Ventsel 2016). Phatic communication is characterized by a low semantic value and a significant potentiality of creating or maintaining social ties.

The opposite of phatic interactions is communication dominated by the referential function. According to Jakobson (1960: 353) the referential function is "an orientation toward the context". The precondition for a dialogue is that the interlocutors are familiar with the context that is referred to. The adjustment of the limits of an ongoing topic, the indication of the contradictions that occur in the partner's statements etc., help to move towards mutual understanding. Thus, open and dialogic communication can be defined as a form of meaning-making dominated by the referential and meta-lingual functions (see Selg 2013).

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[68]   Jakobson (1976: 115) distinguishes six general functions of language, while stressing that in actual communication situations it is possible to observe the co-presence of several functions and thus it is advisable to talk about the primary or dominant functions.

It is necessary to emphasize that the general characteristics of echo-chamber communication are not only limited to extreme-right online communities. Undoubtedly it arises to a greater or lesser extent in all kinds of vernacular communities. It is very common that people tend to aggregate around the information channels that justify and reproduce their views, and in the case of acute social problems there often arises polarized communication that hinders interaction with dissimilar horizons. The European Refugee Crisis is an intricate topic that raises rigid claims and oppositions, and it is clear that in this context we may observe the closed and hermetic communication of communities, aggregated around left-wing views: for example, in November 2015 a demonstration was organized in the city of Tartu that was called "Tartu - intolerant towards intolerance". Such a naming strategy seems to exclude dialogic attitudes and strengthen the formerly existing oppositions.

Through the co-existence of the three dominants of closed communication (the prevalence of the antithetical modelling, an orientation towards texts, and phatic communication) autocommunicative meaning-making loses its potential for innovation and starts to reproduce polarizing and hermetic meanings. Unlike creative autocommunication, closed autocommunication is not able to answer the challenges that come from the outside and thus it is trapped in re-affirming and reinforcing previously existing associations. The potential of reaching for random explosions of meaning as well as the possibility of learning and renewal is significantly reduced in hermetic communication. Exploration of that kind of echo-chamber communication can shed light on how different niche communities are formed, and it may also help to explain why, despite the various interaction possibilities on the World Wide Web, vernacular communities are very often characterized by a tendency towards echo-chamber communication and an inability to maintain dialogue.[69]

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Автокоммуникативное смыслопорождение в онлайн-коммуникации эстонских правых экстремистов

Статья рассматривает онлайн-коммуникацию эстонских правых экстремистов, которая характеризуется эффектом эхокамеры и ориентирована на закрытость герметического смыслопорождения (*meaning-making*). Теория опирается главным образом на идеи семиотики культуры Тартуско-московской школы.

Одна из целей статьи – расширить понимание автокоммуникативных процессов, которые обычно связываются с обучением, познанием и инновациями. В статье рассматриваются условия, при которых общение приводит к закрытой, репродуцирующей стереотипы и избыточной автокоммуникации. Этими условиями являются основанное на антитезах смыслопорождение, ориентация на нормативные («правильные») тексты, а также большая доля фатической функции в общении. Такая коммуникация часто приводит к поляризации публичной сферы коммуникационного пространства и к уменьшению возможностей для диалога. В статье анализируется дискуссия о беженцах, возникшая в правоэкстремистских блогах весной 2015 года.

Autokommunikatiivne tähendusloome Eesti paremäärmuslaste *online*-kommunikatsioonis

Artiklis analüüsitakse eesti paremäärmuslikku *online*-kommunikatsiooni, mida iseloomustab kajakambriefekt ja suletusele orienteeritud hermeetiline tähendusloome. Teoreetiline raamistik toetub ennekõike Tartu-Moskva kultuurisemiootika ideedele.

Artikli üks eesmärke on avardada arusaamist autokommunikatiivsetest protsessidest, mis tavaliselt seostuvad õppimise, taipamise ja uuendusega. Artiklis eristame tingimusi, mille esinemise korral suubub suhtlemine suletud, stereotüüpe taastootvasse ja liiase sisuga autokommunikatsiooni. Nendeks on antiteesile tuginev tähendusloome, normatiivsete ("õigete") tekstide kogumile suunatus ning faatilise funktsiooni suur osakaal suhtlemises. Niisuguse suhtlemisega kaasneb sageli ühiskondliku avaliku kommunikatsiooniruumi polariseerumine ja dialoogivõimaluste vähenemine. Juhtumiuuringus analüüsime eesti paremäärmuslike blogide vastukaja 2015. aasta kevadel eskaleerunud rändekriisile.