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'ALEXEI NAVALNY' AS A FLOATING SIGNIFIER

Domesticating Navalny in Finnish, German and Russian news reporting

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ABSTRACT

Oona Ala-Koivula: 'Alexei Navalny' as a floating signifier: Domesticating Navalny in Finnish, German and Russian news reporting
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Due to modern information technology, news topics easily circulate around the world. However, they tend to turn into very different news stories when being made relevant to local audiences. In this study, this process called domestication is analyzed through the news coverage of Alexei Navalny. My aim is to study if and how 'Alexei Navalny' as a discursive person reference serves as a floating signifier that is characterized by highly different processes of normative local meaning-making. Drawing from neoinstitutionalist framework, these processes are examined through the analytical approach of epistemic governance, according to which power and governance operate through rhetorical means of influencing people's conceptions of reality.

My empirical data consists of Finnish, German and Russian news articles on Alexei Navalny that were published in early February 2021. Applying the research method of membership categorization analysis, I analyzed how news stories on Alexei Navalny are constructed by invoking different actor categories. More specifically, I focused on the perspective of moral casting, in other words how the invoked actor categories are put into moral relations with each other.

I identified two different moral storylines, both of which operate through the morally charged categories of 'victim' and 'aggressor'. In the Finnish and German news coverage, members of Russian civil society, including Navalny and his supporters, are represented as victims of the repressive Russian state. In the Russian news coverage, in turn, Russia and its loyal citizens are represented as being under threat of foreign interference and criminal behavior represented by Navalny, his supporters and the West. In addition, the analyzed news reporting strongly represents "us" as defenders of the victims, strictly condemning the actions of aggressors. In this way, my findings are in line with earlier research arguing that normative news coverage tends to attach positive qualities to "us" and negative qualities to "them".

The identified storylines indicate that 'Alexei Navalny' has become a floating signifier that discursively mediates the political struggle between Russia and the West. Since person references have not been approached as floating signifiers prior to my study, I have outlined a novel approach to the study of moral order in transnational political meaning-making. After all, different political figures and actors play the major role in our understanding of different political processes.

Keywords: Alexei Navalny, domestication, epistemic governance, membership categorization analysis, moral casting, moral order

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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Keir Simmons (British journalist, NBC correspondent): Can I just ask you a direct question? Did you order Alexei Navalny's assassination?

Vladimir Putin: Of course not. We don't have this kind of habit, of assassinating anybody.

(NBC News, interview in Moscow on June 11, 2021)

1. Introduction

International media events do not travel across the globe without acquiring some local flavors, in other words without being domesticated. Although this can result in significant international, even global awareness of a given event, it can turn into very different news stories when reported to different local audiences. For this reason, domestication has been even characterized as a "countervailing force to the pull of globalization " (Gurevitch et al., 1991, p. 206). It can be expected to be frequently encountered by people around the world in their everyday media consumption.

The central logic and reason behind domestication is that news events are made relevant to the presumed audience, the addressed "us". Furthermore, earlier research has shown that in domesticated news discourses "we" tend to be represented through positive qualities, and in relation to "them", the negative counterpart of "us" (e.g., Liebes, 1992; Nossek, 2004; Tanikawa, 2021). This indicates that domestication does not only add local flavors but also turns global news events into deeply normative stories. Thus far scholars have mainly focused on describing different domesticated news stories and identifying the logic behind domestication, for example factors determining whether a news event is domesticated or not. However, scholars have not paid sufficiently attention to domesticated media discourses as an interface of constructing moral orders with political consequentiality. This study aims to address the existing gap in research by analyzing the moral order in domesticated news stories on Alexei Navalny's trial and imprisonment which became an international news event in early February 2021.

In this study, the political consequentiality is operationalized through the concept of a floating signifier and is thus understood as political consequentiality of discursive signification. According to Ernesto Laclau, floating signifiers are characterized by multiple meanings emerging from different political contexts but also by their nature of embodying political struggles between these contexts.

More exactly, a floating signifier comes to be adopted as a part of each political project (or hegemonic project in Laclau's words) as opposed to another. In this way, floating signifiers are rhetorically made "ours" and represent "us" as opposed to "others" in a way or another which also makes them deeply normative. (Laclau, 1996; 2005.) In this study I examine if domestication of news events could be considered to represent a domain in which such "making ours" takes place with the outcome of emerging floating signifiers. In the context of my case study, the person reference 'Alexei Navalny' serves as the potential emerging floating signifier and thus the broad research aim is to examine if and how his hypothesized status as a floating signifier can be observed in domesticated news stories on him. In earlier research it has already been observed that Navalny has been covered rather positively in international, especially Western media (Patalakh, 2018) whereas the majority of his media coverage in Russia tends to be critical of him (Kazun, 2019). These observations give reason to approach him as a potential floating signifier and as a fruitful case for the aim of my study.

My empirical data comprises news articles on Navalny's trial and imprisonment which can be assumed to have likely been encountered by Finnish, German and Russian audiences in their online news consumption during the event and on the following day, possibly even a bit longer depending on how the news articles continued reaching their audiences after the original day of their publication. The data is analyzed from the analytical approach of epistemic governance according to which social actors are engaged in processes of power and governance when – whether purposefully or not – influencing other people's conceptions of reality (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014a; 2019). Media texts are involved in this kind of process by providing their audiences with news stories to be adopted as a part of their broader conceptions of reality.

While adopting the broad analytical approach of epistemic governance, the empirical data is analyzed with the methodological toolkit of membership categorization analysis (MCA). In other words, in this study news stories are approached as stories involving different actor categories and the relations between them. Furthermore, I focus on the perspective of moral casting (Rautajoki, 2012) which suggests paying attention to how different social actors are rhetorically put into normative relations with each other by invoking normatively charged categorizations. In this way, moral casting contributes to the construction of a moral order in which social actors are located either on the "good" or on the "bad" side. I suggest this perspective to be fruitful in making sense of Alexei Navalny as a potential floating signifier for the reason that it specifically focuses on the aspects of normativity which, according to Laclau's theory, can be found at the core of political struggles embodied by floating signifiers. In my empirical analysis I focus on examining the various actor categories ascribed

to Navalny and other social actors who appear in news reporting related to his case, and moral storylines that emerge as a result.

I approach my research problem from a deeply constructionist and strictly descriptive perspective, which means that I consciously attempt to avoid my own personal understandings and values from influencing how I discuss and approach the chosen topic, as far as this is possible. I argue that only in this way I can truly make sense of epistemic governance and moral casting in my data without being involved in such rhetorical moves myself. Even if this kind of approach based on the ideal of neutrality might, understandably, seem controversial for some readers due to the general international unpopularity of Vladimir Putin's Russia especially since February 2022, I am convinced that there still is and should be room for this kind of analytical distance and the choice to examine Navalny's case as a fruitful case for the sociological inquiry of politicized social reality.

In chapter 2, I start by first contextualizing Alexei Navalny as the empirical case for my study and by introducing the research problem to be addressed: 'Alexei Navalny' as a potential floating signifier. In chapter 3, I introduce my theoretical framework consisting of the neoinstitutionalist world society theory, the analytical approach of epistemic governance and the concept of domestication. In chapter 4, I describe my empirical data and introduce membership categorization analysis (MCA) as the methodological toolkit to be applied in my empirical analysis presented in chapter 5. Finally, in chapter 6, I summarize my main findings, discuss their relevance and provide suggestions for future research.

2. Background

2.1 Who is 'Alexei Navalny' in earlier research?

Before moving to the empirical research setting, in this chapter I first contextualize the empirical topic of my study – the case of Alexei Navalny. Given the fact that in this study I want to distance myself from defining who Alexei Navalny is and to leave this question to be answered by my data, the task of contextualizing him does not seem and is not unproblematic. However, it would be justified to argue that something should be said about him and his career after all, and for this task I give the voice to the academic community. While I acknowledge that academic literature on Navalny has not been immune to normative judgements and moral casting, it also provides valuable empirical evidence of the social impacts of his political actions. In the following sections, this evidence is discussed in dialogue with the main turning points of Navalny's political career.

During Navalny's two decades' long political career starting from the early 2000s, a relatively large body of research literature has emerged to examine his political actions and societal influence. This academic body of literature can be roughly divided into three different perspectives: (1) the mobilization of Navalny's political movement, (2) Navalny's political rhetoric and (3) the media coverage of Navalny. I start outlining Navalny's political career by discussing earlier research on the mobilization of his political movement which is by far the broadest and most popular perspective in the research literature. After that I discuss studies that focus on his political rhetoric and media coverage.

2.1.1 The mobilization of Navalny's political movement

Navalny's political career started in 2000 when he joined the liberal Russian United Democratic Party Yabloko, from which he was eventually expelled in 2007 due to his nationalist views. Overlapping with this period he also started his career as a blogger and online activist by launching his political LiveJournal blog in 2006. The blog quickly became his 'trademark' and soon reached the status of the most popular blog of the Russian-language Internet (Laruelle, 2014). Thus, from relatively early on Navalny has targeted his message at the Russian online audience, re-ordering the Russian media discourses by independently producing online media content and speaking with the voice of a civil

society actor as an alternative to traditional media content produced by professional journalists (Yagodin, 2014).

A few years later, in 2010, Navalny launched a website called RosPil which he used to expose corruption schemes that he argued to have had identified when working for a state-owned company based in Kirov. Through the launch of RosPil Navalny's activism shifted strongly towards anti-corruption activism and he "established a reputation as Russia's brightest anticorruption crusader who became a problem for Putin." (Weiss, 2013, p. 73). Navalny continued further developing this kind of activism and in 2011 he founded the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) that operated with the help of private donations and conducted investigations into corruption among Russian officials.

In the same year a criminal case was opened against Navalny and one of his colleagues, both of whom were eventually sentenced to prison in 2013 for embezzlement but soon released under a suspended sentence. Before his release, Navalny's prison sentence resulted in a large street protest in Moscow. In 2014 a new similar criminal case was opened against Alexei Navalny and his brother Oleg Navalny, who were accused of embezzlement in their businesses related to the Russian branch of the company Yves Rocher. As a result, Alexei Navalny received his second suspended sentence while his brother was imprisoned. The European Court of Human Rights has considered both sentences received by Navalny as politically motivated.

The developments in the early 2010s, including the criminal cases against Navalny, have been associated with a substantially larger phenomenon – the rebirth of the previously rather marginalized post-Soviet Russian opposition and the government's response to it (Gel'man, 2015). This rebirth was embodied, most notably, by nationwide 'For Fair Elections' (FFE) mass protests in Moscow in 2011–2012 led by Navalny and other oppositional figures. These mass protests emerged to protest the inauguration of President Vladimir Putin by accusing the Kremlin of electoral fraud in the presidential elections. By that time, the newly emerged opposition lacked clear strategies, structures, resources, and experience for effective political mobilization (ibid.). However, the FFE protests provided readily available resources for Navalny to emerge as the leader of the fragmented opposition and to develop strategies for more structured and effective mobilization (Smyth & Soboleva, 2016). Furthermore, the FFE protests boosted Navalny's recognizability among Russians and served as the first experience of political activism for many of Navalny's later core activists (Dollbaum, 2020).

Navalny's Moscow mayoral election campaign in 2013 marked the point at which Navalny managed to turn the societal dissatisfaction of his supporters and the legacy of street protests into an organized and relatively successful electoral campaign (Smyth & Soboleva, 2016). In his campaign, Navalny utilized innovative Western-style transmedia strategies involving both online digital campaigning and encouragement of volunteers to engage in face-to-face campaigning (Gambarato & Medvedev, 2018). In other words, Navalny combined his readily existing resources of online activism with the legacy of FEE protests and managed to turn his online activism into a full-fledged electoral campaign overcoming the limitations of mere online campaigns with limited audiences. It has been argued that Navalny's innovative campaign had a crucial structural impact on the electoral processes and their underlying mechanisms in Russia at large regardless of the outcome of elections, i.e., the fact that Navalny only managed to emerge as a powerful rival of the winner Sergey Sobyanin instead of winning the elections himself (Gambarato & Medvedv, 2018; Smyth & Soboleva, 2016).

In 2017–2019 Navalny managed to mobilize his supporters into a stable and organized nationwide political movement, the first of its kind in the history of modern Russia actively conducting information campaigns and organizing anti-corruption protests on a nationwide scale. The nationwide scale of the movement's network that was established mostly between December 2016 and June 2017 contributed to Navalny's image as the only opposition politician capable of challenging Putin's regime. (Savenkov, 2019.) After June 2017 the agenda of the movement shifted away from the protests towards Navalny's electoral campaign for the presidential elections that were held in March 2018 (ibid.).

Navalny had announced his candidacy in the elections already in September 2016 but in December 2017 it was withdrawn due to his earlier criminal convictions. As a result, Navalny's election campaign turned into an election boycott and even though Navalny was not allowed to run his campaign as a candidate, remained one of the central figures of the 2018 presidential elections not giving up with his campaign (Donaj & Kusa, 2018). After the elections the movement organized a large rally protesting Vladimir Putin's inauguration and later in 2018 nationwide rallies were also organized to protest the government's plans of increasing pension age. The movement continued utilizing and developing its online mobilization strategies; for example, the protest against the pension reform was based on efficient strategic utilization of the functions of different social media platforms (Dollbaum, 2021). Finally, later in the same year Navalny launched his Smart Voting project, the idea of which is to strategically concentrate the votes of opposition-minded voters to the most relevant candidates not representing the ruling party in order to increase their chances of becoming elected

thus to weaken the result and representation of the ruling party. According to Turchenko & Golosov (2021), municipal elections in Saint Petersburg in 2019 provide an example of successful implementation of Smart Voting that had an impact on the structural dynamics of the electoral process.

In the 2018 presidential campaign Navalny continued pursuing his Western-style campaigning that was unique in Russia and that included volunteers, permanent regional offices and face-to-face appearances in public (Dollbaum et al., 2018). Social media remained the main channel of campaigning and the campaign was significantly boosted by the publication of the documentary video "On vam ne Dimon" by the Anti-Corruption Foundation on YouTube in March 2017. The video was argued to expose corruption of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and had an enormous positive impact on Navalny's recognizability (Dollbaum, 2020). The presidential election campaign was crowd-funded and utilized crowd-sourcing techniques that Navalny had developed already during his 2013 mayoral election campaign (Dollbaum et al., 2018).

Navalny's campaign actively produced social media content and interactive forms of online communication (Donaj & Kusa, 2018). However, oppositional activists had to balance between the desire of engaging in online activism and the fear of state surveillance and its possible consequences (Lokot, 2018), the latter of which restricted opportunities for online activism. However, the activists also actively developed measures to improve their online security, for example through different kinds of security tools and protocols (ibid.). While being largely based on grass-roots activism and volunteering, the campaign was relatively top-down controlled and thus combined 'the working principles of institutional political action with structural elements of a social movement' (p. 623) which helped the campaign to successfully overcome the problem of political apathy afflicting the political participation of Russian voters (Dollbaum et al., 2018).

Navalny's electoral program was published in 2017 and targeted two distinct population segments, the liberal opposition (highly educated urban citizens with liberal-democratic values) and a broader segment subscribing to left-wing values. The interests of these two distinct segments were addressed through the fight against corruption. The election promises included goals such as increasing political competition and decentralizing administration on the one hand and directing more money to education and health care on the other hand. (Dollbaum et al., 2018.) In addition, the anti-corruption rhetoric focused on the country's wealth such as natural resources, manpower, industry, agriculture, and infrastructure and how they have been used to serve the interest of those in power instead of the

Russian people (Donaj & Kusa, 2018). In addition to strengthening the role of human capital as the foundation of Russia, in his electoral program Navalny also promoted cooperation with European countries (ibid.).

Dollbaum and Semenov (2022) analyzing the attitudes and demographics of Navalny's core supporter base on social media during the campaign discovered that on average the supporters were young, more likely men than women and more likely highly educated than the average population. In addition, their political values could be characterized as belonging to the category of social liberalism and thus matched well with the campaign's core message. In addition, Nikolayenko (2021) discovered that in March 2017 Navalny's movement managed to mobilize larger protests in cities with larger university student populations and that university students were more likely to take part in the protests compared to the rest of the population from the same age group. The majority of his supporters comes from the largest cities of the country, most importantly Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Myagkov et al., 2018; 2021).

In 2019 Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation was labelled with the status of 'a foreign agent' by the Russian Ministry of Justice. In August 2020 Navalny was hospitalized due to a sudden change in his health condition and transferred to the German hospital Charité located in Berlin where doctors declared to have found traces of a poison belonging to the Novichok group. This information was refuted by the doctors of the Russian hospital where Navalny spent the first days after the incident.

Immediately after returning from Germany to Russia on January 17, 2021, Navalny was arrested and accused of having violated the probation conditions of his suspended sentence in the Yves Rocher case of 2014. Two days later, the Anti-Corruption Foundation published a documentary video titled as 'Putin's Palace' on YouTube. In the video that quickly became extremely popular, Navalny presents a thorough investigation according to which there is a glorious palace being built for Vladimir Putin on the Black Sea near Gelendzhik at the cost of ordinary Russian citizens. On February 2, 2021, Navalny's suspended sentence was replaced with three and half years of imprisonment. Some months after Navalny's imprisonment the Anti-Corruption Foundation was given the official status of an extremist organization and criminalized by the Moscow city court.

2.1.2 Navalny's political rhetoric

In addition to the structural perspective of political mobilization, Navalny's political career has been studied from the perspective of his political rhetoric that naturally has also changed during his already relatively long political career. At the earlier stages scholars tended to pay attention to his nationalist rhetoric that was also an essential part of his political self-identification (Kolstø, 2014; Moen-Larsen, 2014). By analyzing Navalny's LiveJournal blog between 2006 and 2012, Moen-Larsen has shown that by that time Navalny promoted ideas of a Russian national identity based on Russian ethnicity and ideas of the historical greatness and victories of the country. Thus, in Navalny's thinking the opposition whose rights should be defended consisted of ethnic Russians and excluded other ethnicities in contrast with Putin's ideas of a multi-national Russian identity. However, nationalistic discourse was only found in 9 % of the blog entries and did not represent its major content. (Moen-Larsen, 2014.)

In his early career, Navalny attempted to combine ideas of nationalism with ideas of democracy and pro-Western liberalism (Kolstø, 2014; Laruelle, 2014). However, according to Laruelle (2014) Navalny has not been successful in combining these political ideas into a consistent ideological constellation. According to Laruelle, instead of being a convincing political thinker in the theoretical sense, Navalny's strengths can be found in the practical mobilization of his opposition-minded supporters. Patalakh (2018), examining Navalny's foreign policy ideas, similarly argues that Navalny seems to lack a consistent approach to foreign policy issues and in some cases seems to choose his arguments to simply fit to the context even if they might contradict some of his earlier arguments.

Although the elements of nationalism disappeared from Navalny's rhetoric at the latest by the 2018 presidential election campaign (Dollbaum et al., 2018), ideas of pro-Western democracy and liberalism remained at the core of Navalny's political rhetoric (Dollbaum et al., 2018; Patalakh, 2018). This change was also reflected in academic research: Navalny was no longer considered a nationalist but a populist. However, Glazunova (2020) argues that in this context the term 'populist' should be understood from the perspective of the Russian society:

> Unlike Western countries, where populism is seen as an authoritarian phenomenon, in Russia, the populist project of Navalny seems to overcome authoritarian tendencies by

providing alternative narratives to the Russian establishment, fighting for freedom of speech, challenging the monopoly of Putin's power, and mobilising people for political action. (p. 233)

In disseminating these narratives Navalny utilizes the strategies of digital activism and investigative journalism (Glazunova, 2020). Thus, Navalny's present-day populistic rhetoric keeps leaning on online activism that Navalny has developed throughout his career.

According to Lassila (2016), Navalny's success as the leading figure of the Russian opposition can be explained through his populist rhetoric that re-orders "Putin's eclectic principles of people, patriotism and the rule of law" (p. 118). In other words, according to Lassila, Navalny challenges Putin's regime by attacking it with its own political values which helps him to turn the core principles underlying Putin's support upside-down, in his own favor. At the same time, this kind of view of Navalny as a populist provides a rather pessimistic view on Navalny's future career and opportunities as a political figure: according to Lassila, Navalny's rhetoric based on populist-style criticism of the political elite works only as long as there is an elite that can be criticized (ibid.).

2.1.3 Navalny's media coverage

While the perspective of a social movement is by far the most dominant perspective in research on Navalny followed by analyses of his political rhetoric, his media coverage has thus far received only little attention. Nevertheless, two earlier studies on Navalny's media coverage do exist, both focusing on the Russian domestic context.

Kazun (2019) has studied Navalny's media coverage in the Russian mediasphere at large and concluded that even in the Russian context there is significant variation between different types of media in their stance to Navalny: data collected in 2016 shows that while the federal TV keeps the coverage low and print media tend to cover him in a negative light, neutral reporting can be found in online media and outright positive reporting can be encountered in the Russian blogosphere. Despite this variation, Kazun emphasizes that the overall picture of Navalny's media coverage in Russia is rather neutral and that negative coverage tends to outweigh positive coverage. Although Kazun's data

from 2016 cannot be directly compared to more recent data due to subsequent developments in Navalny's political career and the Russian political context in general, Kazun's study provides valuable insights into the variations between different media types, none of which can be generalized to represent a dominant discourse of the Russian mediasphere at large.

In addition, Kazun and Semykina (2019) have compared the media profiles of Putin and Navalny in the context of the 2018 presidential elections across different types of Russian media (print media and online-only media). The study shows that across the data, Putin is more strongly associated with major pressing issues such as the economy, while Navalny is associated with more marginal questions, although the coverage of his anti-corruption agenda may resonate with an even relatively large audience.

From a more structural perspective, the main challenge for Navalny's movement is considered to be the lack of access to mainstream media, most importantly television (e.g., Donaj & Kusa, 2015), which still serves as the main information channel for the majority of Russians (Levada-Center, 2018). However, the phenomenon seems to be more complex. Despite Navalny's low coverage on Russian television channels, soon after its publication the documentary 'Putin's Palace' had reached 19 % of the Russian population that uses television as the main channel of news. By the day of his trial on February 2, 2021, 36 % of the adult population of the whole country had watched Navalny's video or was familiar with its content. However, this significant popularity of the video did not mean that its message would have been received successfully by its audience. Navalny's anti-corruption message convinced only 17 % of those who were aware of the documentary, while 38 % thought that its content seemed true but at the same time expressed skepticism towards the credibility of Navalny's arguments. 33 % of the audience considered the content outright false. (Levada-Center, 2021.) As Kazun (2019) emphasizes, Russian media except for television do cover Navalny and as the statistics of Levada-Center show, Navalny's message reaches even the so-called television Russia.

2.2 Research problem: 'Alexei Navalny' as a potential floating signifier

Floating signifiers refer to signifiers without a stable signified. Traditionally, these signifiers are defined as relatively abstract linguistic signs – terms and concepts – that are characterized by their multiple and even contradictory meanings that vary across different social contexts. Examples of this kind of linguistic terms and concepts discussed in earlier empirical literature include, for instance, radicalization (Schultz et al., 2021), global governance (Hofferberth, 2015), global citizenship (Moraes, 2014), trafficking (Grupo, 2015), employment (Serrano-Pascual & Jepsen, 2019), sanctions (Dellwing, 2008) and multiculturalism (Dudek, 2006). The idea of floating signifiers originates from the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987) and Ernesto Laclau (1996; 2005), whose theorization has inspired and keeps inspiring empirical research on floating signifiers as discursive elements without fixed referents, signified objects, in the reality beyond language.

Especially in recent years, some scholars have broadened the traditional perspective of research on floating signifiers as abstract linguistic elements. As Littlewood and Reynolds (2020) argue, despite their abstract linguistic nature, floating signifiers are materialized and embodied in human experience in multiple different ways. Thus, this approach does not challenge the traditional linguistic idea of floating signifiers but takes one step further by investigating the process of their transformation from linguistic ideas to material experiences. However, some scholars have also adopted a more radical shift away from the linguistic signifying system turned their attention to visual and material signifiers by studying GIFs (Gradinaru, 2018), photographs (Trivundza & Vezovnik, 2021) and face masks (Van Gorp, 2021) as floating signifiers. In this approach, the traditional understanding of floating signifiers as linguistic elements and signified objects as objects of human experience are turned upside down: the scholars investigate how certain visual elements of human experience are articulated in multiple different ways in linguistic discourses.

In the case of Alexei Navalny, I argue that the potential floating dimension can be observed on the level of Navalny's name as a discursive person reference. Acknowledging that this person reference refers to a living and material human being, as a media topic he appears through his name instead of his physical presence. In fact, there is no confusion about our understanding to which human being the name 'Alexei Navalny' refers to, and in this sense, as a material signifier he does not 'float'. However, his extensive media coverage makes him a target of cultural and political meaning-making,

a potential floating signifier worth studying as such. For this reason, in this study I approach the person reference 'Alexei Navalny' as a discursive construction. In the research field on floating signifiers this is a novel approach: there is no earlier research addressing person references as floating signifiers in political rhetoric. Earlier research has only discussed broader actor categories such as migrants and refugees as floating signifiers which can be attached to different social actors depending on the political discourse (Tošić, 2022). My study adopts the opposite approach by investigating what kind of broader social categories are attached to Alexei Navalny.

In research literature on floating signifiers, it has been common to define the phenomenon relatively broadly to address signifiers with multiple and not fixed meanings to illustrate how they can be understood and interpreted in even radically different ways. As an exception of this, Farkas and Schou (2018) provide a deeper theoretical understanding of floating signifiers based on Laclau's work in their study on fake news. In line with Laclau's (2005) arguments of the deeply political nature behind the emergence of floating signifiers, Farkas and Schou demonstrate how the term 'fake news' is not only used in increasingly plural contexts making its meaning increasingly vague, but how it has become "the articulation of fundamentally different hegemonic projects" that represent "a power struggle between the journalistic field and the political field" (p. 308). In the research setting of their study, these fields refer to mainstream media and U.S. President Donald Trump as political opponents struggling for political power and "what is ultimately at stake within this struggle is who obtains the power to define what is deemed truthful, who can portray social reality accurately and in what ways" (ibid.).

Based on close reading of Laclau's work, Farkas and Schou define floating signifiers as "signifiers lodged in-between different hegemonic projects seeking to provide an image of how society is and ought to be structured" (p. 298). However, as Farkas and Schou argue, this view is purely analytical and refers to an outside perspective on the relational dynamics between the hegemonic projects. From the perspective of the hegemonic projects themselves, in turn, floating signifiers such as the term 'fake news' do not float: members of each camp have attached certain meanings to them and firmly integrated these meanings into their own worldviews and political identities as distinct from the "others" who have adopted alternative meanings as a part of their identity. From this point of view, floating signifiers appear as deeply normative and politicized signifiers, the meanings of which would be rather problematic to question from within the hegemonic projects themselves.

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2.2.1 Research questions

As my broad research question, drawing from Laclau's theory on floating signifiers, I examine if and how Alexei Navalny can be considered a floating signifier based on my empirical data. This broad research question is divided into two sub-questions, the first one of which is aimed at mapping the different meanings attached to Alexei Navalny through moral storylines and investigating if the signifier 'Alexei Navalny' floats between the chosen national contexts, in other words if he is articulated through highly different storylines. The second sub-question, in turn, specifies how these storylines construct moral relations between "us" and "them" and if these moral relations can be considered as evidence of rival hegemonic projects in line with Laclau's theory on floating signifiers.

How does 'Alexei Navalny' serve as a floating signifier in transnational media coverage?

a) Through which kind of moral storylines are Alexei Navalny's trial and imprisonment domesticated in Finnish, German and Russian news reporting?

b) How are storylines in different national contexts structured to organize us-them relations?

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 World society theory

The broad theoretical framework of my study is based on the neoinstitutionalist world society theory that emphasizes cultural processes as driving forces of globalization and governance. These cultural processes are argued to be based on a globally shared world culture, which is embodied by global institutions and structures of governance (Meyer et al., 1997). This core argument of world society theory is based on empirical observations of surprising high level of global institutional isomorphism, initially identified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) who were the first scholars to argue that this isomorphism goes far beyond any functionalist explanation. According to world society theory, the explanation is cultural: global institutional isomorphism results from the enactment of world cultural scripts instead of being guided by rational actorhood. Enacting these cultural scripts legitimates social action, even though in reality their implementation may and most likely will remain incomplete (Meyer, 2010). In other words, world society theory considers globalization as a process of global institutional diffusion based on voluntary enactment of global models.

Whereas world society theory approaches actors including nation-states, organizations and individuals as deeply embedded in world culture rather than as rational actors, rather paradoxically, the modern world culture itself is considerably based on the idea of highly empowered and rational actorhood of nation-states, organizations, and individuals (Meyer, 2010.). This has given rise to human rights (of empowered individuals) and sovereignty of nation-states (as having a right to deal with their own issues by themselves) as powerful normative principles of world culture. (ibid.). In addition, this has given rise to the authority of science providing the empowered actors with required knowledge to make their choices (Drori & Meyer, 2006). According to world society theory, world culture serves as a worldwide recognized cultural resource, although at the same time leaving much room for variation in local practices. The idea of world culture also serves as inspiration for the analytical approach and theory of epistemic governance developed by Pertti Alasuutari and Ali Qadir (2014a; 2019) stressing processes of cultural meaning-making as the source of governance, power and social change in the modern world.

3.2 Epistemic governance

By introducing the idea of epistemic governance, Pertti Alasuutari and Ali Qadir (2014a; 2019) have combined the neoinstitutionalist tradition of world society theory with a Foucauldian understanding of power as primarily based on cultural knowledge instead of coercion through money or military force. Alasuutari and Qadir suggest that power and governance in the modern world are best understood as processes evolving through the so-called epistemic work that acts upon actor's conceptions of "what the world is, who we are, and what is good or desirable" and as a result, social change "boils down to [actors'] conceptions about the facts and about themselves as actors: what they are able or forced to do, and what their desires and obligations are." (p. 67).

By outlining the idea of epistemic work, Alasuutari and Qadir suggest that in order to analytically grasp the processes of power, governance and social change, the analytical focus should be directed towards processes of discursive meaning-making. In this sense, the ideas of epistemic governance and epistemic work are heavily based on the idea of social constructionism; power and governance that might end up materializing into military forces or monetary capital, after all, rely on how the social reality is constructed through language and other means of cultural meaning-making.

According to Alasuutari and Qadir, epistemic governance operates simultaneously on three different levels of epistemic work: (1) ontology of the environment, (2) actors and identifications, and (3) norms and ideals. Ontology of the environment refers to epistemic work that constructs an ontological understanding of a given situation and thus suggests what kind of ontological claims should be considered as "truths" about it. The dimension of actors and identifications, in turn, refers to epistemic work on how people identify themselves as belonging to different social communities in relation to other communities they are aware of. In other words, this dimension of epistemic work affects the way how actors identify themselves and, as a result, through which kind of identifications they make sense of who "we" and "they" are. Finally, epistemic work appeals to generally accepted normative ideals in suggesting what is the right thing to do in the situation at hand.

Epistemic governance as a process which involves "any agent engaged in attempts to effect or comment on policy making" (p. 72) denotes the extent to which Alasuutari and Qadir assume epistemic governance to influence political processes in the society at large. Although the analytical approach of epistemic governance has originally been developed for the study of parliamentary debates, Alasuutari and Qadir, referring to Hajer (2009) and Adut (2012), also emphasize the

importance of the media and the public sphere as an important arena of epistemic governance as well since in the mediatized contemporary societies the public view both offers resources for epistemic work but also constrains it.

I argue that the perspective of media is thus far not sufficiently studied in the research tradition of epistemic governance, given how significant role epistemic work can be assumed to play in media discourses on various topics in the modern deeply mediatized society (Hajer, 2009). However, a few studies on this topic already exist. Ojala (2017) has utilized the idea of epistemic work in making sense of transnational elite formation and the emergence of transnationally shared political ideas as the result of transnational elite communication in the media, while Pi Ferrer and Rautajoki (2020) have examined Portuguese national media discourses in the context of external political coercion due to the Troika intervention. Other existing studies on epistemic governance and media focus primarily on the perspective of public discourse and its interplay with concrete national-level policy reforms such as children's rights (Alasuutari et al., 2015), education (Rautalin, 2018) and forestry (Syväterä & Sivonen, 2022). Among many other possible approaches to epistemic governance and media, epistemic governance in domesticated news discourses on global news events has not been addressed in earlier research, which makes the study at hand a fresh contribution to the existing literature.

3.3 Domestication

In the context of this study, the concept of domestication is adopted as the key concept for the empirical study of epistemic governance in news media. Within the broader neoinstitutionalist framework, Alasuutari and Qadir (2014b) define domestication as the process through which something exogenous – whether a policy model, idea or news event – is adopted to a local context in unique ways by local actors. In this way, to counterbalance the traditional macro-level perspective of world society theory emphasizing global isomorphism and institutional diffusion, the concept of domestication encourages to pay attention to local actors at the receiving ends of diffusing global trends.

According to Alasuutari and Qadir, domestication unfolds in dialogue with local actors and even if different nation-states worldwide seem to adopt highly similar institutional structures, the process of local construction of their meanings as a part of "our" nation is unique in each context. Instead of

understanding globalization simply as a process of worldwide policy diffusion, Alasuutari (2016) suggests defining it as a process of synchronization of nation-states: although they become structurally increasingly similar to each other, they maintain their uniqueness through local meaning-making and national identities.

The concept of domestication has also been used by scholars beyond the research tradition of world society theory. Most notably, domestication research in the context of media was originally inspired by Michael Gurevitch, Mark Levy and Itzhak Roeh (1991) who observed that news events tend to be reported differently to different national audiences despite the contemporary information technology that makes it possible for news to quickly spread worldwide. In other words, although news events can turn into global news events in the modern world, it does not imply that news stories told about them would be similar everywhere. This argument has inspired several scholars to empirically examine the phenomenon of domestication in the context of news discourses.

Although the neoinstitutionalist approach has extended the definition of and empirical approach to domestication as institutionalization of policy-making structures, i.e., policy diffusion (e.g., Alasuutari & Qadir 2014b), the context of media remains one of the major empirical contexts for the study of domestication both within the neoinstitutionalist framework and beyond. In the context of news reporting, domestication has typically been associated with and measured through the presence of domestic actors in foreign news reporting. This can, for instance, refer to a direct linkage between a given event and compatriots, reporting the reactions of domestic actors or sending domestic journalist to interview eyewitnesses (Alasuutari et al., 2013; Joye, 2015). In other words, domestic actors – whether compatriots, journalists, celebrities, commentators, or other widely recognized domestic actors – are understood as the key actors who determine a news discourse as domesticated.

There are roughly four major approaches to domestication in media discourses that can be identified in earlier research literature. While some researchers tend to emphasize the role of journalists as active actors balancing between global and local (e.g., Clausen, 2004; Lee et al. 2011), others emphasize multiple actorhood behind the domesticated news discourses (e.g., Alasuutari et al., 2013; Qadir & Alasuutari, 2013), domestication as a process of social identity building (e.g., Liebes, 1992; Nossek, 2004; Tanikawa, 2021) or cross-national patterns (Castello et al., 2013; Krzyzanowski, 2019; Ojala, 2011; Ruigrok & Atteveldt, 2007). In the following sections I first outline the major debates emerging from this earlier literature, after which I introduce my novel approach to the phenomenon based on the analytical approach of epistemic governance.

The perspective emphasizing the active role of journalists tends to treat domestication as a mode of journalistic work, as a choice whether to domesticate or not, and whether to use journalistic resources, for instance, to conduct interviews with local actors if their reactions are otherwise lacking (see Lee et al., 2011). This kind of perspective stressing journalistic choices is particularly dominating among scholars who investigate domestication of climate-related issues such as climate change itself or international climate summits. As choices imply responsibility, in this literature domestication gets a normative flavor as scholars express their worries about the state of climate journalism and, consequentially, the ability of the humankind to take action against global warming.

On the one hand, dominance of international politics in the media coverage of climate change has been considered as problematic from the perspective of local responsibility (Christensen & Wormbs, 2017; Horta et al., 2017) and domestication has argued to potentially reproduce harmful climate discourses on a cross-national level if journalists do not actively assess and take action against potential harmfulness of climate discourses that they domesticate (Berglez & Lindskog, 2019). On the other hand, excessive coverage of domestic actors in domesticated climate discourses as outright climate heroes has been argued to not to leave room for critical perspectives on domestic environmental policies (Eide & Ytterstad, 2011). Finally, there is also evidence of successfully linking climate change with local culture (Brown et al., 2011).

The active role of journalists has also been challenged by studies emphasizing the involvement of multiple actors in the process of domestication. According to Qadir and Alasuutari (2013), while "media professionals may have their own role to play, for instance in selecting 'relevant' international stories or framing their own reports in a national light" (p. 587), media should be considered primarily as a site in the public sphere that brings together a bunch of different societal actors. This kind of involvement of multiple actors is also supported by empirical evidence of how media framings of foreign events do not necessarily determine how they are adopted by the society at large (Alasuutari et al., 2013). Thus, these studies warn of considering journalists narrowly as the gatekeepers deciding how global ideas and events travel to national discourses.

From the perspective of social identity building, it has been argued that as a rule of thumb, "the more 'national' the report is, the less 'professional' it will be" (Nossek, 2004, p. 343). In other words, Nossek argues that if a news item is considered as "ours", journalists are prone to report it from a normative perspective at the cost of professional balance, which from the professional point of view leads to bias in news reporting. This argument was, among others, inspired by Liebes (1992) who

studied wartime journalism and defined "our war" as a situation in which the journalists' own country is at war and "their war" as a war in which the journalist's own country is not involved. According to her, "the luxury of the detachment offered by the ideology of 'objectivity', 'neutrality' and 'balance' is reserved for reporting other people's troubles, rather than one own's" (p. 44).

The citation from Liebes also brings up another central finding made by both Nossek and Liebes among other domestication scholars (see e.g., Ha, 2017; Horsti, 2018; Joye, 2015; Lee et al. 2011; Ojala, 2011; Ruigrok & Atteveldt, 2007): that positive qualities tend to be associated with "us" and negative qualities with "them". According to Tanikawa: "The 'We-They' distinction filters through to the framework within which media content production and content consumption take place: journalists and the audience are part and parcel of the 'We' who are complicit in viewing and interpreting the 'They,' the foreign societies" (Tanikawa, 2021, p.17). He further argues that the main function of the negative qualities attached to "others" is to strengthen "our" positive qualities and "our" shared identity.

Scholars who approach domestication through the 'we-they' dichotomy typically associate "us" and "them" with nation-states. For instance, Liebes (1992) strictly ties "us" to a certain nation-state with its geographical borders, Nossek (2004) refers to a national frame as opposed to a professional frame and Tanikawa (2021) investigates the role of national stereotypes in domestication. In addition, Alasuutari et al. (2013) assume "us" to represent a national identity that is closely connected to a particular national culture. The relation between "us" and geographical borders of nation-states has partly been challenged by Handley & Ismail (2010) who argue that news events in so-called third-party countries can become partly "ours both news" if "our" foreign policy interests are at stake in a way or another. Although this perspective distances "us" from geographic borders, a strong emphasis on the national perspective on "us" still remains.

Earlier research also gives reason to take a critical stance to the national perspective on "us" and "them" due to identified cross-national patterns in domesticated news stories. On the one hand, it has been shown that national newspapers can be approached from a transnational perspective, as embedded in a broader Western public sphere. According to Ojala (2011) President Obama's speech in June 2009 was represented highly similarly by Western European newspapers which framed it through the antagonism between the West and the Muslim world. Similarly, Ruigrok & Atteveldt (2007) have shown how the 9/11 terrorist attack has come to serve as a shared framework for the Western media in their coverage of later terrorist attacks.

On the other hand, national media can also be marked by a high level of variation in their news stories while patterns of similarities can be found in cross-national comparisons. Krzyzanowski (2019) has identified cross-national rather than national-specific patterns in foreign news reporting on Brexit between European liberal and conservative press representing different positions to the European union. Similarly, studying Spanish and Belgian news reporting on political developments in Flanders and Catalonia, Castello et al. (2013) have shown systematic differences among national newspapers characterized by transnational identifications rather than state borders. They further discuss the phenomenon as a transnational political struggle with a mirror effect, as a "particular communicative situation in which two symbolic communities take greater interest in each other by finding models or counter-models for their own social and political context" (p. 1635). These symbolic communities refer to transnational communities which utilize news events as sites of constructing their political identities. In national-level comparison this situation is described to resemble a mirror effect in which news reporting utilizes "'the other's case' as a model to learn from that may or may not be followed" (ibid., p. 1622).

In this study, my primary focus is not to contribute to debates on actorhood behind domestication. Instead, I argue that earlier literature has thus far paid too little attention to the political consequentiality of domesticated news discourses, especially to their potentiality in constructing floating signifiers as discursive resources of transnational political rhetoric. Conditions for the emerge of this kind of floating signifiers have already been indicated by Castello et al. (2013) whose finding of transnational symbolic communities I argue to match with Laclau's idea of hegemonic projects. Thus, the most important question in my study is not by whom news stories end up being domesticated but what is discursively being done in these stories, and what kind of conceptions of reality are being constructed as a result of this kind of epistemic work. As Syväterä and Sivonen (2022) point out, epistemic governance "is not so much focused on journalists' or media outlets' agency as on seeing how various societal actors succeed in using the public sphere to change the way a given issue or situation is perceived" (p. 4).

At the same time, my study strongly leans on earlier empirical evidence showing that domesticated news events tend to turn into normative or politicized news stories if they are somehow important for our understanding of who "we" are. However, my study acknowledges the cross-national domestication patterns identified in earlier studies and for this reason, who "we" and "they" are, or what is "ours" and "theirs", is not predetermined by any criteria such as cultural, geographical or ideological proximity, nor citizenship of a certain nation-state. In fact, the analytical approach of

epistemic governance allows and encourages me to analyze how news stories are discursively made "ours" and become "ours". From this perspective, the question of "who" we are is approached as one of the objects of epistemic work, as an empirical question that should be answered by the data itself.

In addition, as Alasuutari and Qadir argue, epistemic work always simultaneously operates on all three levels of epistemic work and for this reason the 'we-they' dichotomy is in fact accompanied by a much more pervasive conception of reality than earlier domestication research has addressed. I believe that unpacking this complex process of epistemic governance provides a fruitful contribution to existing domestication research that thus far has not unpacked the full picture of domesticated news discourses in which actors and identifications are inseparably interrelated with other dimensions of epistemic work.

4. Methodology

4.1 News articles on Navalny

The data was collected from three different news media outlets: Helsingin Sanomat (Finland), Der Spiegel (Germany) and Lenta.ru (Russia). It is important to note that as media outlets they are not directly comparable with each other: Helsingin Sanomat is a daily newspaper, Der Spiegel is a weekly publication and Lenta.ru is an exclusively online news media outlet. What they have in common, however, is their constantly updated news feed on their online platforms. Regardless of the differences between the chosen media outlets themselves, they were chosen from the perspective of the audience, i.e., how established sources of news they are among the national (online) audiences. I consider this as consisting of two aspects: spread (how effectively the news outlet reaches its audience) and trust (how the news reporting can be assumed to influence the perceptions of its audience).

Helsingin Sanomat is the most widely spread national quality newspaper in Finland. In 2020, it reached 18 % of the Finnish population in print and 31 % online. As 79 % of the population considered it as a trusted source of news, it can be concluded to enjoy significant trust among the Finnish audience. (Reuters Institute, 2020, p. 69.) In Germany, in 2020 Der Spiegel reached 10 % of the population in print and 17 % online being the most popular online source of news among the German audience. It was trusted by 57 % of the population and thus enjoys a relatively high level of trust. (ibid., p. 71.)

In Russia, in August 2018, online news publications served as the primary source of news for 37 % of the population and they were trusted by 24 % of the population. The most popular online news sources in March 2018 were Yandex Novosti (29 %) and Novosti Mail.ru (11 %), which serve as platforms bringing together news articles from different online media outlets. Lenta.ru was the most popular online media outlet, however only 6 % of the population visited the website regularly. (Levada-Center, 2018.)

It is important to note that in each country other sources of news scored over the chosen media outlets in both reach and trust. In Finland, the national public broadcasting company YLE reached 67 % of

the population and was trusted by 84 %. In Germany, the public broadcaster ARD reached 55 % of the population and was trusted by 70 %. In Russia, television reached 73 % of the population and was trusted by 49 %. However, while being conscious of these numbers, in this study I focus specifically on newspapers producing online news articles (exclusively or in addition to printed edition). The main reason for this is the accessibility of data and its availability in textual format enabling the usage of keywords in data collection. In any case, the selected news sources are among nationally spread and reasonably trusted ones.

As the statistical data shows, there are significant differences between the chosen news outlets in their reach of online audiences (Helsingin Sanomat 31 %, Der Spiegel 17 % and Lenta.ru 6%) and the audience's trust (Helsingin Sanomat 79%, Der Spiegel 57 % and Russian online publications in general 24 %). It is important to keep these differences in mind and to take into account that they reflect the broader unique contexts in which media operate in each country. Similarly, it is important to keep in mind that these news outlets do not represent the mediasphere of each country as a whole, but also alternative discourses can emerge for example on social media, TV, radio, or other newspapers. Despite these limitations, the most established online news outlets can be assumed to represent the mainstream discourses of online news journalism in each country which is the focus of this study.

Data was collected from the web pages of news outlets using basic search functions (Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel) and from the Integrum database (Lenta.ru), using Navalny's name as written in each language (Navalnyi in Finnish, Nawalny in German and Навальный in Russian) as the keyword. Data was collected from a time span of two days, February 2 and 3, 2021, thus including the day of Navalny's trial and imprisonment and the following day. The data comprises 88 news articles in total (Helsingin Sanomat 13, Der Spiegel 10 and Lenta.ru 65). From news items published by Der Spiegel, three items were excluded: two of them were published in video format and one of them was not accessible due to paywall. It can be pointed out that the event enjoyed high coverage in each chosen news outlet.

The significant coverage in Lenta.ru compared to the other news outlets can be explained by journalistic practices of the news outlet. Whereas Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel publish extensive news articles with a lot of background information, the articles published by Lenta.ru are significantly shorter and systematically tend to repeat parts of previous articles. The new information is in many cases a single new detail on the event (Navalny's answer to a question in the court, a

statement of a Russian authority etc.) and typically also mentioned in the headline of the news article. In this way, Lenta.ru actively constructs the event for its audience by building it piece by piece in real time, however so that a single news item is also understandable as such. The articles are clearly targeted at online audience that prefers quickly readable and understandable content, the main message of which can be understood even by reading only the headline.

4.2 Membership categorization analysis

As my research method I use membership categorization analysis (MCA), which focuses on analyzing how social and moral order is achieved and sustained in social interaction. MCA was initially inspired by the work of Harvey Sacks, who observed how everyday interaction is based on culturally shared social categories through which people make sense of interaction and take part in it. In the classical example phrase from a story told by a child "the baby cried, the mommy picked it up", Sacks observed that even small children very naturally deploy social categories such as "the baby" and "the mommy", and category devices such as "family" when making sense of and explaining the social world around them (Sacks, 1972.)

The focus on taken-for-granted aspects of interaction ties Sacks' work to the broader research tradition of ethnomethodology, which explores social interaction as a process largely based on culturally shared knowledge that does not even need to be articulated in order to be understood by the members of interaction (Heritage, 1984). This kind of ethnomethodological approach guided by the question of how social order is achieved by people in their everyday interactions provides a fresh perspective on domesticated news stories which allows defining domestication as a realm of achieving social order by making something "ours". In fact, the ethnomethodological view on social interaction fits well with the idea of epistemic governance because it similarly encourages to pay attention to how political rhetoric unfolds through mostly naturalized acts of interaction.

Membership categories are also deeply normative by their nature; they are saturated with social expectations that are expected to be fulfilled by the incumbents of the categories (Jayyusi, 1984). For example, a first aider is expected to give first aid, or otherwise he or she would be understood to have dismissed his or her duty as a first aider. In other words, depending on whether the expectation was fulfilled or not, a moral judgement of the person as a good or bad first aider follows. In this way, this

kind of category-bound expectations can be used as moral accounts in justifying a particular course of social action. (p. 35–37.)

As membership categories can be considered very fundamental elements of interaction, they are discoverable across all kinds of different settings of interaction, including political argumentation that attempts to influence people's conceptions of reality, in other words epistemic governance (see e.g., Rautajoki & Fitzgerald, 2022; Rautajoki & Pi Ferrer, 2022). According to Housley & Fitzgerald (2009), in the context of argumentation, categories serve as "…recognizable resources for members in their attempts to constitute opinion, make evaluations, promote specific world views, assess practices and thereby constitute local configurations of moral organization and sense." (p. 346). In order to do so, "…members orient towards a taken-for-granted, 'internal' logic of categorization where, flowing from some initial categorization, further category/predicate work is seen to logically or *normatively* follow." (ibid., p. 348). In other words, it would be justified to argue that membership categories can be considered to provide powerful argumentative resources.

Rautajoki (2012) has further specified the role of membership categories as resources of political rhetoric by introducing the concept of moral casting. Moral casting refers to how actors involved in a given event are put into moral relations with each other through morally charged membership categorizations. As its outcome, moral casting constructs a moral order – an understanding of who the "good" ones and who the "bad" ones are. Originally, Rautajoki examines moral casting in the context of television discussions from the perspective of journalists' strategic power in setting the normative framework for television interviews. The idea of moral casting is also applicable to written media content as well, such as news articles in the context of my study. Thus, in this study I apply the idea of moral casting to make sense of how the moral order regarding Alexei Navalny's trial and imprisonment is achieved in news stories; what kind of categories are invoked and how they construct the moral order around the case.

In my empirical analysis, I first read through my data carefully to get an impression of what kind of devices of moral casting seem to arise from it. What seemed particularly interesting and surprising at the same time was that Navalny seemed to be categorized as one of "us" and one of "them" in each context by invoking different highly moral membership categorizations. Thus, when reading through the data for the second time, I coded these membership categorizations according to the criteria how they categorize Navalny as one of "us" and one of "them". These empirical findings are presented in the next chapter.

5. Analysis

In this chapter I present my empirical analysis which is divided into two broad stories identified in the analyzed news reporting. These broad stories are further divided into two analytically distinguishable sub-stories. The broader stories represent the difference between Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel as compared to Lenta.ru, and the sub-stories represent the categorizations of Alexei Navalny as one of "us" and one of "them" within these stories. In other words, Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel are coupled together as one context due to the remarkable similarities in their moral storylines on Navalny, even though I also have identified differences between them. I start my analysis chapter by presenting my findings from Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel, after which I present the findings from Lenta.ru.

The data was not translated for the empirical analysis due to my sufficient Finnish, German and Russian language skills. However, I have translated several data extracts into English to illustrate my analysis in this chapter. A complete numbered list of the analyzed news articles is provided at the end of the thesis and translated data extracts in the analysis chapter are marked with footnote references to this list to ensure transparency, including the opportunity to find the original versions of the presented data extracts. Parts that I have cut off from the extracts are marked with three dots (…).

5.1 Stories of human rights (Helsingin Sanomat, Der Spiegel)

The story of human rights is strongly present in the news reporting of both Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel, and both share a moral categorization between Europe/the West protecting human rights and Russia violating them. In this analysis section I examine how this story is constructed through Navalny's membership categorizations. On the one hand, Navalny is frequently categorized as a Russian citizen and thus as a person who represents a different nationality than the Finnish and German target audience. On the other hand, however, he is also categorized as ideologically and legally belonging to the European/Western community, together with the expected readers. Empirically these categorizations are intertwined in the emerging broader story of human rights but for analytical purposes they are presented as two different sub-stories.

5.1.1 Story of Navalny as a member of the Russian civil society

In both Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel, Navalny is frequently introduced as a figure of the *Russian* political field and subject to the institutions of the *Russian* society. However, he is not merely categorized as a Russian citizen; in Helsingin Sanomat, most frequently he is referred to as *a Russian opposition politician* or *a Russian opposition leader* as in the following extract:

Data extract 1: Categorizing Navalny as an emerging opposition leader[1]

Navalny's latest revelations about President Vladimir Putin's palace on the Black Sea coast have led to demonstrations over the past two weeks. With these revelations and demonstrations, at the latest, Navalny has secured his role as a leading figure of the fragmented Russian opposition, who might be impossible to replace, at least in the short term.

(Helsingin Sanomat, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 1 Navalny is categorized as "a leading figure of the fragmented Russian opposition, who might be impossible to replace". In addition, the news article refers to "demonstrations over the past two weeks", through which "Navalny has secured his role". This further categorizes Navalny as an opposition leader, who has redeemed the full potential of this position only very recently, namely over the past two weeks, and is thus stronger than ever before in this position.

In Der Spiegel, he is similarly referred to as *an opposition politician* and *an opposition leader*, but also as a *Kremlin critic*, putting slightly more emphasis on Navalny's political anti-Kremlin rhetoric. Regardless of this difference in emphasis, in general both Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel clearly categorize Navalny as an influential rival of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his regime. At the same time, as *an opposition leader* he is categorized to represent *all* those *Russians* who oppose Putin's regime. In other words, through this kind of categorizations, the category of Russians is divided into two rival categories: the regime and the opposition (led by Navalny).

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[1] 3. Yves Rocher -vyyhti on kummitellut Aleksei Navalnin niskassa pitkään, ja tänään hän saattaa saada yli kolmen vuoden vankileirituomion (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)

The moral order between the regime and the opposition is accomplished through further categorizations. One of them is Navalny's categorization not only as a Russian opposition leader/politician/Kremlin critic but as *a poisoned Russian opposition leader/politician/Kremlin critic*, which strongly points towards the regime as guilty of Navalny's poisoning. This categorization is directly connected to Navalny's trial; as Der Spiegel sums it up in a headline, Navalny was "poisoned, busted and sentenced"[2]. This list of categorizations "poisoned", "busted" and "sentenced" clearly refers to the same actor behind all these deeds towards Navalny and in this way they supplement each other as moves of moral casting. As a result, the poisoner does not even need to be named and is not explicitly named in the data; reporting that the state sentenced a poisoned opposition politician tells enough.

The two events, poisoning and the trial, are frequently connected in news reporting in Helsingin Sanomat as well. They are, for instance, represented as calculated plans of Putin's regime which started "a year ago with the constitution amendments and continued in August with Navalny's poisoning"[3]. It is continued that "The trial itself was a pure show trial" and that it differs from those in Stalin's era only in the sense that "Stalin used to send invitations and free tickets to foreign representatives". In other words, through the categorization as a poisoned opposition politician who was sentenced to prison, Navalny is categorized as a political prison of the Russian state. It can be concluded that both poisoning and the trial, especially as connected to each other, are used as powerful moves of moral casting in both Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel.

In addition, both news outlets frequently bring up street demonstrations in support of Navalny and in this way associate Navalny himself and the opposition led by him with the broader Russian civil society and its activism against the regime. Both news outlets extensively describe how Russian authorities were massively prepared to respond to street demonstrations that Navalny's trial was expected to cause and that the police mercilessly used violence against protesters:

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[2] 17. Die Lage am Abend: Vergiftet, verknackt, verurteilt (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
[3] 5. Navalnyin näytösoikeudenkäynnistä tuli Putinin loppukauden merkkipaalu (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)

Data extract 2: Categorizing Navalny's supporters as victims of police violence[4]

The protesters shouted, "we are unarmed" and stood against a wall with raised hands – yet the OMON police officers brutally attacked them in the city center of Moscow.

…

On Tuesday evening, hundreds of people had peacefully gathered in the Russian capital to protest the sentence of the Kremlin critic Navalny. Among other things, the protesters, the majority of whom were young people, shouted "freedom".

(Der Spiegel, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 2 protesters are described as peaceful and cooperative, which does not seem to give any reason for the police officers to "brutally attack" them. This kind of representations of innocent civil society activist versus arbitrary and violent state authorities, an additional powerful move of moral casting, frequently appears especially in Der Spiegel. In Helsingin Sanomat, less attention is paid to the details of police violence and more emphasis is put on reporting numbers: those participating in demonstrations and those who have been detained due to their participation. In addition, it is frequently emphasized how protests emerged all over the country which contextualizes street demonstrations in the capital as a larger phenomenon of political dissatisfaction shared by the Russian civil society as a whole rather than as a mere local protest in the immediate proximity of Navalny's physical location.

The moves of moral casting represented above divide the category of Russians into two deeply moral categories: those being in power/those serving the regime and those being repressed, with inherently conflicting interests. This moral division is frequently made explicit in news reporting, as data extract 3 from Helsingin Sanomat illustrates. In this extract, it is argued that Russian state institutions do not serve the interests of the ordinary Russian citizens but the interests of those in power:

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[4] 20. Proteste gegen Nawalnys Verurteilung – Menschenrechtler berichten von mehr als tausend Festnahmen (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)

Data extract 3: Dividing the category of 'Russians' into those in power and those being repressed[5]

A country ruled by batons and electric paralyzers, impoverishing its citizens, and enriching its rulers is a failed state. Russians don't want to live in a weak country.

…

In Russia, the role of the judiciary is to protect the system, which is oligarchic just like the Soviet system was. The court protects the supreme oligarch, sometimes on his request but often without, and is in his service around the clock.

(Helsingin Sanomat, February 3, 2021)

In data extract 3 it is argued that the Russian state authorities do not hesitate using violence against its citizens to maintain "a failed state", which being "oligarchic" provides the rulers with economic wealth at the cost of the citizens, and resources to manipulate state institutions such as the judiciary according to one's will. The ordinary citizens are argued to be left without such resources and to be subject to arbitrariness since "the role of the judiciary" is argued "to protect the system" and not the citizens.

To sum up, in this story of Navalny as a member of the Russian civil society, he and the Russian civil society at large are represented as victims of harsh human rights violations. This constructs a clear narrative of morally unacceptable behavior from the side of the Russian state on the one hand and innocent victims of such behavior on the other hand.

5.1.2 Story of Navalny as ideologically and legally belonging to "us"

In this section I discuss how Navalny is categorized as one of "us" in the news reporting of Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel. Keeping in mind the categorizations of Navalny and his supporters as victims of political repression and the Russian state as the aggressor as discussed in the previous

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[5] 12. Kansan luottamusta menettäneen ja naurunalaiseksi joutuneen Putinin valta on enää kuorta (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)

section, this section shifts the attention to the role of "us" in the case of Navalny's trial. Thus, in this section I focus on discussing who "we" are in the news reporting and the rhetorical moves that attribute Navalny as one of "us". Mostly this is done through the presence of either domestic or other non-Russian actors in the news reporting.

In both Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel, reactions of non-Russian actors to Navalny's trial are widely covered, both before and especially after the final decision of the Moscow city court to sentence Navalny to prison. These actors are represented to categorically condemn the actions of Russian authorities and to take the morally favorable position of defending victims of political violence, i.e., both Navalny and his supporters. These actors include state leaders, other high political representatives, and both domestic and foreign media outlets that are considered as authoritative sources of information.

Not surprisingly, in both news outlets special attention is paid to the statements of domestic political actors. In Helsingin Sanomat, much space is devoted to the statements and assessments of the President Sauli Niinistö, and through this kind of coverage the standpoint of the Finnish state as a whole is clearly communicated to the readers. Niinistö's statements are further backed up with statements of Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin and Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, although getting far less attention in the news coverage compared to Niinistö himself.

Data extract 4: Categorizing Finnish state representatives as defenders of Navalny[6]

President Sauli Niinistö announced on Tuesday night that he considers the sentence of Alexei Navalny a harsh solution. "This kind of sentence is clearly not in accordance with our legal tradition or the Finnish legal system", Niinistö commented to YLE [The Finnish national public broadcasting company].

Prime Minister Sanna Marin announced on Twitter that she considers Navalny's sentence unacceptable. In her tweet written in the English language, she also reminded

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[6] 7. Merkel: Navalnyi vapautettava heti – Poliisi otti kiinni yli 1 400 mielenosoittajaa, Kremlin mukaan poliisilla oli oikeus käyttää kovia otteita (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)

that according to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Navalny's criminal conviction was arbitrary and unreasonable.

According to Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, Navalny's sentence contradicts justice. Like Sanna Marin, he reminded that according to ECHR Navalny's sentence was unfounded.

(Helsingin Sanomat, February 2, 2021)

Data extract 4 illustrates how Finnish state representatives led by President Sauli Niinistö are represented to clearly agree that Navalny's sentence was unjustified: it was a "harsh solution -- not in accordance with our legal tradition or the Finnish legal system", it was "unacceptable", and it "contradicts justice". Furthermore, Marin and Haavisto refer to the European Court of Human Rights and its decisions as an authoritative source that further legitimates their highly morally charged arguments.

Similarly, in Der Spiegel the statements of the state leader Angela Merkel reach the highest coverage and her standpoint is further supported by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. In addition to representing the state as a whole, they are explicitly categorized to represent domestic political parties as well:

Data extract 5: Categorizing German state representatives as defenders of Navalny[7]

Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) criticized the judge's verdict as "far from any rule of law". Navalny must "be released immediately," government spokesman Steffen Seibers quoted the Chancellor on Twitter. According to Merkel, violence against peaceful demonstrators must stop.

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[7] 18. Reaktionen auf Nawalny-Haftstrafe »Zynismus pur« (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)

The conviction of Alexei Navalny is a severe blow to firmly established freedoms and the rule of law in Russia, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) writes on Twitter. "Navalny must be released immediately." Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) called the actions of the Russian judiciary "pure cynicism" in a tweet. Using the hashtag "FreeNavalny", she demanded the Kremlin critic to be released.

(Der Spiegel, February 2, 2021)

Data extract 6 shows how German state representatives, very similarly compared to their Finnish counterparts, strictly judge the decision of the Moscow city court. Merkel's statement according to which Navalny's sentence was "far from any rule of law" is accompanied by similar statements by Heiko Maas in which he further defined it as a "severe blow to firmly established freedoms and the rule of law in Russia" and thus as a sign of overall deterioration of the Russian judicial system, and by Kramp-Karrenbauer who considers the actions of Russian state authorities "pure cynicism".

However, while frequently covering the statements of domestic politicians and representing them as morally responsible actors in the realm of international politics, they are also criticized by some journalists and blamed for not acting morally responsibly *enough* while the actions of Russian authorities should be condemned even more forcefully:

Data extract 6: Criticizing the Finnish president[8]

Two weeks ago, President Sauli Niinistö demanded Navalny to be released, but called his sentence only "harsh", as if it was about the right number of years and months.

The sentence was simply wrong. This was the view of the European Court of Human Rights when it addressed Navalny's earlier sentence. The same suspended sentence is now replaced with imprisonment.

(Helsingin Sanomat, February 3, 2021)

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[8] 12. Kansan luottamusta menettäneen ja naurunalaiseksi joutuneen Putinin valta on enää kuorta (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)

In data extract 6, the journalist argues that Sauli Niinistö, although condemning Navalny's sentence, did not clearly enough state that it was "simply wrong" and not only "harsh". The latter formulation is argued to leave room for the interpretation that a less harsh sentence might have been even justified, which risks the strict moral evaluation of the event. In addition, as in data extract 4, the European Court of Human Rights is used as an authoritative source of moral casting.

Data extract 7: Criticizing the German government[9]

The French government has taken the imprisonment of Navalny and the regime's violence towards his supporters at demonstrations as an opportunity to call on Germany to stop the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. This was rejected by the government, which is a mistake.

The economic and ecological benefit of the project is questionable, while the political damage is clear.

…

[The pipeline project] should be stopped and that would also be a signal for Navalny and his supporters that their tormentor Putin can no longer do business with Germany so easily.

(Der Spiegel, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 7, a German journalist sees the French government's attempt to stop the Nord Stream 2 pipeline as an opportunity for the German government to prove its moral accountability in the name of defending the victims of the "tormentor Putin". However, the journalist argues, by continuing the pipeline project, Germany would support Putin's Russia instead of defending its victims. In other words, according to the journalist, the moral control against Russia should extend to the economic relations between Germany and Russia, which the German government has decided to continue as usual without a morally justified reason.

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[9] 14. Die Lage am Morgen – Nord Stream 2 und Nawalny: der Preis der Pipeline (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)

In Helsingin Sanomat the cited statements condemning Navalny's sentence, however, are not restricted to Finnish actors alone but news reporting also covers statements of foreign political actors who agree with the Finnish state representatives. These statements are mostly made by political actors from within the European Union. Although a few references to United States and the Western community are made as well, *EU member states* and *EU politicians* representing and defending *European values* are being extensively cited in addition to the domestic actors. Thus, in the coverage of Helsingin Sanomat, "we" are mainly associated within the broader political community of the European Union with its shared political values. Accordingly, Navalny's case is represented as causing a conflict in the relations between Russia and the EU.

In the coverage of Der Spiegel, on the contrary, while references to the EU are also made, the main emphasis is on the broader Western community, including, most importantly, the United States as well. While Helsingin Sanomat focus on discussing a collective response of the EU to the case of Alexei Navalny, in Der Spiegel the cited non-Russian actors who condemn Navalny's sentence tend to be categorized as *Western* politicians defending *Western* values and pondering a *Western* response. While these two collective identifications – the European and Western community – are not mutually exclusive and in fact to a large extent overlapping, it is remarkable how the moral casting identified in the moral storylines of both Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel are based on slightly different understandings of who "we" are.

Through the extensive coverage of the reactions of European/Western political actors it becomes clear that while Navalny is a Russian citizen, he enjoys high political support within the EU/the West and his belonging to "us" is, on the one hand, based on this kind of sympathy that I call ideological belonging. On the other hand, one central element of moral casting is the European Court of Human Rights that has already come up in some of the presented data extracts, according to which Navalny's original sentence and thus the new sentence as well are politically motivated. Since Russia has ratified the European Convention of Human Rights, Navalny as a Russian citizen is also legally subject to the European community. This legal belonging to "us" is frequently cited in the news coverage, both by journalists themselves and in the statements of the European/Western political actors who are selected to be cited.

In the news coverage of both news outlets, much space is devoted to Navalny's rhetoric and statements as well. The most extreme example of this is Navalny's speech that he delivered at the court in Moscow and that was translated and published in full length and without further journalistic

commentary by Helsingin Sanomat. Consequently, Navalny did not deliver his speech only to the initial target audience (those who were present at the court) but also to the readers of the leading Finnish newspaper. However, it is also important to note that in the sense of ideological belonging, Navalny is only indirectly categorized as one of "us", since the category of a "victim" is a rather passive actor category, someone who suffers from the actions of others but whose own actions are not particularly emphasized. However, by expressing support for a victim of political repression and human rights violations, it is possible to make clear the values that are important to "us", namely political freedom and human rights.

5.2 Stories of national sovereignty (Lenta.ru)

In the coverage of Lenta.ru, the overarching moral storyline on Alexei Navalny is a story of national sovereignty in which Russia and its citizens are seen as being under threat. On the one hand, Navalny is categorized as a Russian citizen, as one of "us" belonging to the Russian society with its national institutions. On the other hand, he is also categorized to present interests of "others". In this section I describe how this moral storyline emerges as a result of Navalny's membership categorizations. As the story of human rights discussed in the first half of the analysis chapter, for analytical purposes, the story of national sovereignty is similarly divided into two sub-stories representing Navalny's categorizations as one of "us" and one of "them".

5.2.1 Story of Navalny as a Western agent

With only a few exceptions, in the news articles published by Lenta.ru, when being mentioned for the first time Navalny is introduced as "the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent":

Data extract 8: Categorizing Navalny as a foreign agent[10]

Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent) said that he had notified the Federal Penitentiary Service of residing in a German clinic.

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

Although not directly categorizing Navalny himself as a foreign agent but as the founder of an organization categorized as a foreign agent, it goes without saying that his intentions and agency are assumed to coincide with those of his foundation and that the categorization refers to him personally as well, as someone who is loyal to "them" instead of "us", in other words as someone who is *a traitor*. This categorization can be considered to serve as a core device for moral casting in the storyline categorizing Navalny as one of "them".

Although Navalny's categorization as a foreign agent is left somewhat "open" (Nossek, 2004) by mentioning that the foreign agent status of his foundation is given by the Ministry of Justice (whose credibility depends on the personal views of the reader) instead of being represented as a fact, categorizing Navalny systematically through this definition that originates from a domestic state institution serves as a powerful move of moral casting. In several news articles published by Lenta.ru, this category serves as the primary device of moral casting, while the rest of the news article is written without strong normative categorizations that would further contribute to the construction of a moral storyline on Navalny. Voices of individual journalists taking a normative stance to the event are relatively rare as well.

The categorization of Navalny as a foreign agent implies that both Navalny and those who support him represent the interest of "others" that are in conflict with "our" interests. Furthermore, Navalny's categorization as a foreign agent is further refined by frequently emphasizing how Western actors have announced their support for him:

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[10] 46. Навальный уведомлял ФСИН о нахождении в клинике в Германии (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

Data extract 9: Categorizing Navalny as a Western agent[11]

French President Emmanuel Macron commented on the sentence against Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent) in the Yves Rocher case. He wrote about this on his Twitter page.

In his tweet, Macron called on Russia to immediately release Navalny.

He wrote that "political disagreements are under no circumstances a crime" and added that respecting human rights and democratic freedoms cannot be a subject of negotiation.

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 9 it is made clear that French President Emmanuel Macron strongly supports Navalny and wants him to be released. However, important to note in this extract is Navalny's categorization as a foreign agent and the resulting logical interpretation that Macron in fact announces his support for a foreign agent and thus openly reveals himself as one of those "others" who are on the same side with Navalny. The coverage of Lenta.ru contains several similar articles about the statements of other Western representatives. On the one hand, by invoking the category of a foreign agent in these contexts serves as a delegitimizing device of moral casting that makes Western actors' moral judgements such as "respecting human rights and democratic freedoms" in data extract 9 seem rather hypocritical. The categorization of Navalny as a foreign agent also implies that his and his supporters' real intentions are hidden and even threatening towards Russia's national sovereignty. On the other hand, statements of Western representatives that are associated with Navalny and openly express support for him further specify Navalny's foreign agent categorization as a *Western* foreign agent.

While Navalny's categorization as a foreign agent is used as an indirect device of moral casting to delegitimize Western statements and to question the moral grounds of the intentions behind them as described above, there are also very direct and explicit categorizations of Navalny as a Western project and the West's interests involved in it. In the following data extract 10, Sergey Lavrov

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[11] 69. Макрон прокомментировал приговор Навальному (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

explicitly argues that the West is not defending Navalny in the name of the moral principle of human rights but only to hide its own societal problems originating from the liberal model of development. Statements such as Lavrov's statement in data extract 10 clearly address the West as the primary actor to be morally judged since the West is argued to simply pursue its interests by strategically using Navalny for this purpose.

Data extract 10: Categorizing Western representatives as hypocrites[12]

In mid-January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told that the West's statements about Navalny serve only one purpose. According to him, their main goal is to divert attention from the crisis in which the liberal model of development has found itself.

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

At this point it is also worth mentioning the effect that this kind of moral casting towards the West has on the claims of Navalny's poisoning that serves as one of the major sources of moral casting in Finnish and German news stories as previously discussed. In the coverage of Lenta.ru, it is frequently brought up that "on August 22 Navalny was taken to a German clinic, where doctors announced that he had been poisoned with a substance from the Novichok group whereas Russian doctors did not find any traces of poison." The categorization of the West as a hypocritical aggressor strongly suggests the readers to be suspicious about such poisoning claims originating from the West. At the same time, it is reported how Lavrov openly suspects that Navalny's poisoning was staged by the West and how he does not hesitate to discuss this issue with his Western colleagues when representing his own country in diplomatic meetings.[13]

Although explicit voice of individual journalists in the coverage of Lenta.ru is almost non-existent, there are a couple of exceptions, one of which is presented in data extract 11. In this example, the Western claims about corruption in Russia are questioned and delegitimized using a similar strategy

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[12] 44. Лавров призвал главу МИД Швеции честно обсудить ситуацию вокруг дела Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
[13] 44. Лавров призвал главу МИД Швеции честно обсудить ситуацию вокруг дела Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

as discussed above regarding claims about Navalny's poisoning that are turned upside-down in favor of Russia through moral casting:

Data extract 11: Categorizing claims about corruption as false[14]

Jürgen Trittin, a member of the Bundestag Foreign Policy Committee from the Soyuz-90/Green faction, called for the seizure of assets of Russian oligarchs in Europe rather than extending sanctions to the entire country, as Deutsche Welle reports. According to Trittin, information about corruption among the highest members of the Russian elite should not be ignored. He emphasized that this applies especially to those transferring most of their corrupt profits to EU countries.

…

Trittin noted that, until recently, Europe hasn't paid much attention to the message of the investigations on the Russian leadership conducted by Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent).

Let's remember that the reason for including FBK in the register of foreign agents in October 2019 was two transfers from Spain and one from the United States in the amount of more than 140 thousand rubles. Prior to this, the foreign policy expert of the Green faction Omid Nuripur proposed to finally abandon the construction of the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline.

Trittin refers to Navalny's latest video in which he talks about an extremely expensive palace near Gelendzhik. Almost two weeks after the publication of the investigation, billionaire Arkady Rotenberg admitted that the palace belongs to him.

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

As in data extract 9, in extract 11 a morally suspicious connection is made between a Western representative and the foreign agent Navalny as representing the same interests. Furthermore, moral casting in this extract directly addresses 'factual' claims about reality, by pointing out how Jürgen

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[14] 40. В Германии призвали к арестам активов российских олигархов (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

Trittin takes seriously the factual information produced by the foreign agent Alexei Navalny in his latest investigative documentary. This strategy of moral casting delegitimizes both the information produced by Navalny and the intentions of the West to take action against Russia. This is further followed by the journalist's own claims, starting explicitly with "Let's remember…", concerning the Western funding of Navalny's foundation and speculations about the Western interests behind the Nord Stream 2 project. Finally, Trittin's statement is argued to be based on wrong information and that the palace belongs to Rotenberg (and not Vladimir Putin as argued in Navalny's investigation). Very soon, Lenta.ru published another article about the same building in which it was presented as a hotel, not as an exclusive palace for Putin that has been built with money acquired through harsh corruption as claimed by Navalny in his documentary. [15]

5.2.2 Story of Navalny as a criminal Russian citizen

Despite Navalny's categorization as a Western agent who is argued to be loyal to "those others", he is also categorized as one of "us" sharing the same Russian nationality and being subordinated to the same domestic institutions as his compatriots – the target audience of Lenta's news reporting. This is highlighted in the news reporting by referring to the categorizations of Navalny originating from this domestic institutional context, most importantly to Navalny's domestic status as a criminal which determines his legal status as a part of the Russian society. In other words, Navalny is not only categorized as a Russian citizen but as *a criminal Russian citizen* which constructs a moral tension between Navalny and the rest of the Russian society. This categorization is made simply by referring to his earlier sentence and the institutional control taking care of its appropriate implementation:

> **Data extract 12: Categorizing Navalny as a criminal[16]**
>
> In the Moscow City Court, a representative of the Federal Penitentiary Service announced that Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent) has committed 60 violations of public order after receiving

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[15] 43. Эксперты оценили перспективность отеля во «дворце» в Геленджике (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
[16] 37. Представитель ФСИН заявил о 60 нарушениях Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

his suspended sentence. This was reported by a correspondent of Lenta.ru from the courtroom.

…

In 2014, Navalny was sentenced for 3.5 years to prison and to a fine of 5 000 rubles on charges of fraud and money laundering. The court decided to consider the imposed sentence conditional with a probationary period, first for five, then for six years.

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 12, basic details are given about Navalny's earlier sentence: the crime that he was guilty of was fraud and money laundering and the punishment he received was 3.5 years in prison which was later turned into a suspended sentence, and a fine of 5 000 rubles. In addition, he is accused of having violated the conditions of his suspended sentence which implies that his punishment has not been implemented successfully. However, it is also important to pay attention to the first part of the data extract where once again Navalny is categorized as a foreign agent as in most articles published by Lenta.ru. Combined with the category of a criminal Russian citizen, he ends up being categorized as *a criminal Western agent*. In this way, the category of a criminal is utilized as an additional powerful layer of moral casting to further strengthen the already highly morally charged category of a Western agent.

Although Navalny is categorized as a criminal and thus as someone who has committed a crime or crimes, news reporting focuses on his criminality as a criminal mindset. This results from statements of domestic actors, which reflect the character of Navalny's trial in early February 2021 – instead of committing a new crime Navalny was accused of violating the probation conditions of his earlier sentence. By frequently pointing out how Navalny has been prone to violating these conditions even more than 60 times, he is further categorized as *a criminal type of person* with a criminal mindset guiding his behavior. This categorization is also highlighted by referring to statements according to which Navalny was given a second chance to correct his behavior, reflecting humanity as the cornerstone of the penitentiary system:

Data extract 13: Categorizing Navalny as a criminal type of person[17]

> The representative of the Federal Penitentiary Service also explained that the department had not previously demanded the replacement of Navalny's suspended sentence with imprisonment due to the principle of humanity on which the penitentiary system stands. "We believed that Navalny would change his attitude towards the execution of his sentence and take then path of correction. But he did not draw the proper conclusions", he said.

> *(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)*

In addition to the categorization of Navalny as a criminal type of person, news reporting also several times refers to statements of domestic authorities highlighting Navalny's special treatment as the only Russian twice receiving a suspended sentence. While the categorization of a Western agent questions Navalny's loyalty to his country as a whole, the categorization of a criminal type of person directly questions Navalny's loyalty to his fellow citizens as well and the domestic public order securing the peaceful functioning of the daily life of his compatriots. In other words, as a Russian citizen Navalny can be expected to be tied to certain obligations towards his fellow citizens in the name of public order. His categorization as a criminal type of person, however, by definition implies that his behavior does not fulfill these obligations. Thus, although Navalny did not commit any new crime, his fellow citizens are categorized as victims of his criminal mindset which is implied to make him fail to follow the probation conditions of his earlier sentence.

Navalny's categorization as a regular criminal with a criminal mindset is further highlighted by explicitly denying any political dimension of his trial. Data extract 14 shows how this is made through a reference to the statement of the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov who emphasizes that the Kremlin does not have any habit of following or commenting court decisions. This statement together with Navalny's categorization as a criminal serves as rhetorical moves of depoliticizing the trial and responding to the Western accusations of its deeply political dimension.

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[17] 61. Навальному заменили условный срок на реальный и отправили в колонию на 3,5 года (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

Data extract 14: Categorizing Navalny's trial as a routine procedure[18]

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov states that he is not aware of any reaction from President Vladimir Putin to the sentence of Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent). He is quoted by Ria Novosti on Wednesday, February 3. Peskov, answering a related question from a journalist, added that the Kremlin traditionally does not comment on court decisions.

(Lenta.ru, February 3, 2021)

Following from the categorization of Navalny as a criminal Western agent, his supporters, also expectedly Russian citizens who take part in the local street protests, are categorized as supporters of a criminal Western agent. Through this kind of moral casting, in this moral storyline the state authorities' measures against protests in support of Navalny appear as justified measures against those who threaten the public order. In fact, reporting how the authorities have massively prepared to deal with illegal street protests and how they are ready to use their coercive power against those who behave inappropriately highlights the readiness of the authorities to maintain the public order and thus to protect the loyal Russian citizens from those engaging in illegal actions. In addition, as a further device of moral casting, news reporting of Lenta.ru tends to focus on the coercive measures of the authorities against *violent* protesters:

Data extract 15: Categorizing Navalny's supporter as violent persons[19]

The second suspect of the attack on the police during an illegal rally [demonstration in support of Navalny] was detained in St. Petersburg. This was reported on the website of the city investigative department.

The detainee born in 1989 comes from the Arkhangelsk region. It is suspected that he is one of those who used violence against the police on Sennaya Square on January

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[18] 71. Песков ответил на вопрос о реакции Путина на приговор Навальному (2/3/2021)
[19] 25. В Санкт-Петербурге задержан второй подозреваемый в нападении на полицейских (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

21. At the moment the question of the arrest of the man is being considered. All the circumstances of the incident are being clarified, including the identity of possible accomplices.

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 15 it is reported how the police has detained a potentially violent supporter who is suspected to have attacked the police during an earlier illegal street protest. Thus, this protester is represented as a violent person with recurring participation in illegal actions, as a potential threat to the public order. In this extract it is also clearly emphasized how the authorities take action against such threats in order to maintain the public order: they detain suspects, arrest them if required, thoroughly clarify what happened, try to find possible accomplices and openly report these procedures on the website of the city investigative department.

However, as data extract 16 shows, according to President Putin himself Navalny's supporters are led by a certain kind of false consciousness caused by social media that Navalny among others uses as his main communication channel:

Data extract 16: Categorizing Navalny's supporters as victims of social media[20]

Putin added that modern information platforms "are starting to control consciousness more and more": having studied the interests of the users, they show the materials that they "deem necessary". Because of this, according to the leader of the state, a person starts to make decisions without even realizing that he is being led. The President concluded that the decisions that will be made to protect users from harmful content should not restrict freedom of choice or freedom of speech.

…

Earlier, Roskomnadzor warned social media platforms about administrative responsibility related to agitation of teenagers to take part in rallies. As a result, it was decided to fine seven platforms for calls to participate in the action on January 23:

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[20] 56. Путин обвинил соцсети в управлении сознанием пользователей (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube. Each of the violators faces an administrative fine in the amount of 800 thousand to four million rubles. Social media platforms partially removed calls for participation in illegal mass actions.

On January 23 and 31, actions were held in Russia in support of the opposition politician Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent).

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

In data extract 16, Putin argues that street protests result from harmful social media content that is offered to the users through the logic by which social media operate. This is clearly argued to cause threats for the public order in Russia and for this reason the problem has been addressed through significant fines. Putin emphasizes that these measures "should not restrict freedom of choice or freedom of speech" but that "decisions will be made to *protect* users from harmful content". In this sense, Navalny's supporters who protest on the streets are not categorized as violent types of persons per se, but as not completely aware of the motives behind their protest actions. They are rather categorized as innocent victims of harmful social media content that has been disseminated by the foreign agent Alexei Navalny. In their hearts they can be expected to be loyal Russian citizens instead of supporters of Alexei Navalny, and their protest actions indicate that they need to be further protected by the authorities.

Finally, the interests of foreign actors are frequently brought up by emphasizing how "Around 20 employees of embassies of foreign countries including the United States, Bulgaria, Poland, Latvia, Austria and Switzerland appeared in the court to observe the trial." Although this observation is in some news articles left without further commentary, as soon as the Kremlin gave its official statement on the issue, news reporting of Lenta.ru started to explicitly mention that the Russian authorities consider the presence of foreign diplomats as foreign interference:

Data extract 17: Categorizing the collective West as a violator of Russia's national sovereignty[21]

The official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, criticized the presence of foreign diplomats at the trial of Alexei Navalny (the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of organizations performing the functions of a foreign agent) in the Moscow City Court, calling it interference in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation. She wrote about this on her Facebook.

Zakharova reminded that diplomats usually support their citizens in foreign courts. However, since Navalny is a citizen of the Russian Federation, she noted that "this is not just interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state", but "self-exposing the unsightly illegal role of the collective West in trying to contain Russia".

(Lenta.ru, February 2, 2021)

What is important in data extract 17 is that Zakharova justifies her argument about inappropriate foreign interference by referring to Navalny as one of "us", as a Russian citizen whose trial is a domestic matter. The data extract illustrates how Navalny is flexibly and within the same news article categorized both as a foreign agent, as one of "them" and as a Russian citizen, as one of "us". These categorizations construct a moral storyline according to which Russia's national sovereignty is being threatened, either by Navalny himself or by the Western community that openly supports him.

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[21] 45. Захарова раскритиковала присутствие иностранных дипломатов на суде с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

6. Conclusion and discussion

6.1 Summary of the findings

To sum up my findings and to answer my first research question, the storylines that I identified in my empirical data are summarized in figure 1. In Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel, Navalny is categorized as one of "them" through his Russian nationality. However, the category of Russian is accompanied with morally charged categorizations of poisoned opposition leader and political prisoner. In addition, he is categorized as belonging to the European/Western community through the European Convention of Human Rights and by representing political opposition against Putin's regime, almost like a hero with a tragic fate. In the coverage of Lenta.ru, he is categorized as a Russian citizen and as one of "us" from the perspective of the Russian audience, but this categorization is accompanied with categorizations of a criminal and Western agent, the latter of which simultaneously categorizes him as one of "them" and invokes the category of a traitor. I argue that these highly different and contradicting storylines provide evidence for the hypothesis that the signifier 'Alexei Navalny' can be considered to discursively float in my data.

Figure 1: Summary of storylines identified in the data

The dimension of moral casting is further illustrated in figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 illustrates the major moral division and category devices that I identified in the news reporting of Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel. The figure is divided into two parts, the blue one presenting the morally "good" side and the red one representing the morally "bad" side. The figure shows that the moral storyline is based on a moral relation between the category pair opposition/civil society led by Navalny versus Putin's regime, the former of which is located on the "good side" and the latter on the "bad" side. The former is further morally charged through the category device of victimhood drawing together categorizations of a poisoned opposition leader, a political prison and repressed member(s) of civil society that were empirically identified in the data. The latter, in turn, is morally charged through the category device of aggressor which refers to moral accusations towards the Russian state as a violent repressor of its own citizens.

In addition, "we" as members of the European community (Helsingin Sanomat) or as members of the Western community (Der Spiegel) explicitly take the "good" side by defending Navalny and the Russian civil society. On the other hand, "we" are explicitly distanced from the "bad others" by morally judging and othering them, by discursively making them the exact moral opposite of "us" through moral casting.
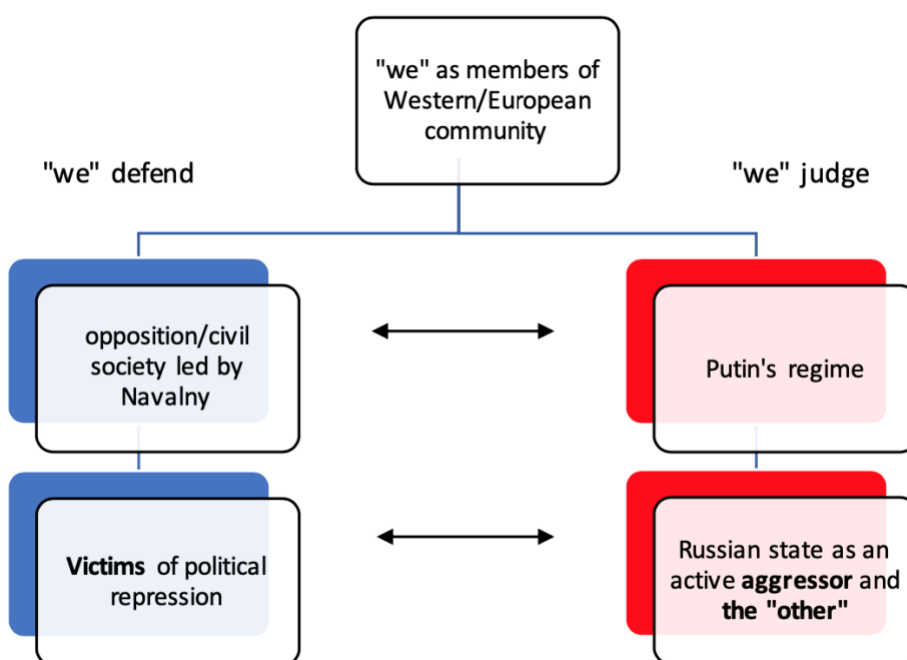
Figure 2: Story of human rights

Figure 3 illustrates the Russian counterpart for the moral storyline represented above. In the coverage of Lenta.ru, the major moral division is constructed through the category pair of loyal citizens versus traitors/criminals including Navalny and his supporters, the former of which is located on the morally "good" and the latter on the "bad" side. As in figure 2, the category devices "victim" and "aggressor" can be found in figure 3 as well. However, they are ascribed to very different actors compared to figure 2; in the coverage of Lenta.ru victims are the loyal citizens who are threatened by criminal behavior and foreign interference. The aggressors in this storyline, in turn, are Navalny, his supporters and the West. In this storyline, "we" Russians represented by state institutions clearly defend the "good" ones, the loyal Russian citizens and loudly judge the "bad" ones, traitors and criminals who represent the "others".

Figure 3: Story of national sovereignty
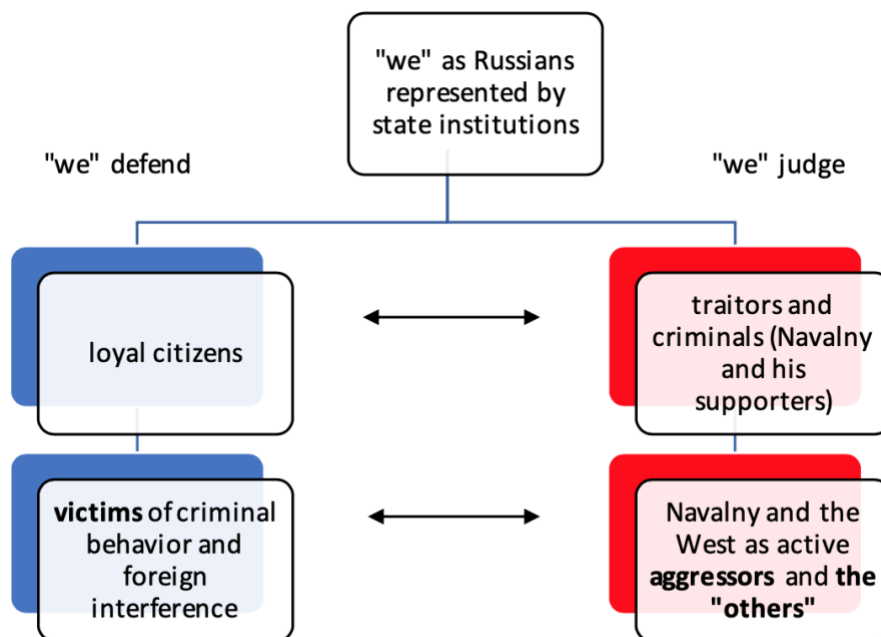
6.2 On victims and aggressors

When comparing figures 2 and 3 it is easy to notice that both stories are based on a strikingly similar rhetorical structure, yet they construct very different moral orders. Remarkably, both stories are based on the morally charged category pair of victim(s) and aggressor(s) and the main difference is the rhetoric application of these category devices. When comparing the category of victim(s) in the stories, in Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel it is ascribed to all ordinary Russian citizens (including Navalny) and in Lenta.ru to all Russian citizens with the exception of criminals and those representing foreign interests. When looking at the category incumbents of the device "aggressor", the difference of this inclusion/exclusion becomes very clear. In Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel the device "aggressor" is ascribed to the Russian state whereas in Lenta.ru it is ascribed to Navalny and the West.

When looking at which actors are categorized through the device "aggressor", figures 2 and 3 look almost like mirror images of each other, Russia and the West categorizing each other as the aggressors. The only exception is that in Lenta.ru Navalny himself appears in this category together with the West. Thus, while in Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel Navalny belongs to the category of victims, in Lenta.ru he is specifically excluded from this category and can be found in the exact opposite category of aggressors. This also makes the inclusive/exclusive aspect of the Russian citizens as "victims" highly significant and consequential between these stories.

Furthermore, in both stories "we" defend the victims which morally seems to be the right thing to do in order to present "ourselves" in a good light fighting against the evil. However, as my study shows, this victimhood that is to be defended against an aggressor and aggressors themselves are rather flexible category devices of political rhetoric that can be ascribed to very different social actors through moral casting. As my study shows, this moral casting can unfold very differently when news stories are domesticated. My findings support the evidence of earlier research according to which news stories tend to become normative when they are somehow significantly related to "us", the target audience of news reporting. However, in accordance with the approach of epistemic governance, who "we" are was understood as an empirical question. In fact, my findings show how the category of "us" is deeply constructed in relation with the victims in each story and how its normative foundations depend on this category. In this sense my study essentially contributes to the unpacking of the phenomenon of how domesticated news stories can be made and can become "ours".

However, further observations can be made about the inclusive/exclusive aspect of the categorization of Russian citizens as "victims" in the news stories with the help of the epistemic governance approach. At this point, I argue that to fully unpack the use of the devices "victim" and "aggressor" it is worth discussing the ontological premises they draw their power from, ontology of the environment as they are called in the theory of epistemic governance. After all, as the figures show, certain social actors are not merely categorized as victims but as victims of something. In Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel, members of Russian opposition/civil society including Navalny are categorized as victims of political repression which is further based on his categorizations as a poisoned opposition politician and political prisoner, that eventually construct the category of a victim. These categorizations, however, presuppose ontological claims about him in fact having been poisoned and his trial and imprisonment in fact being based on political motivations. In the storyline of Lenta.ru, in turn, the categorization of loyal Russian citizens as victims of criminal behavior and foreign interference presupposes the ontological claims about Navalny being a criminal and loyal to the West in his political aspirations.

In addition, as my figures illustrating the logic of moral casting in two highly different moral storylines show, the ontological claims are far from being mere "facts": they are an inseparable part of a much complex construction of the membership categories of victims and aggressors, that eventually are inseparably related to further dimensions of epistemic governance: who we are and what is the right thing to do. In fact, the construction of the category devices of victims and aggressors in the news reporting illustrates how all dimensions of epistemic governance simultaneously work together and eventually end up constructing a certain conception on reality. As already discussed above, the categories of victims and aggressors are fundamentally dependent on ontological claims about reality and the understanding of "us" is deeply related to the understanding of these categories. Also, the understanding of norms and ideals (what is the right thing to do) – defending the victims and judging the aggressors – would otherwise find no justification and would not make sense.

By combining MCA and epistemic governance, I argue that my study provides contributions to both research fields. On the one hand, the underlying ontological premises of membership categories and moral casting that epistemic governance makes visible have previously not received sufficiently attention in MCA. However, they help to make sense not only of how membership categorizations are invoked in the flow of interaction, but also how these categorizations are constructed and how their moral power fundamentally draws from "truth" claims about reality. From the perspective of epistemic governance, membership categorizations can be seen as fruitful points of reference in social

reality that make it possible to empirically unpack the simultaneous interplay between each level of epistemic work without the need to approach these levels as analytically separate dimensions. After all, it is strongly emphasized in the theory of epistemic governance that separating the objects of epistemic work (ontology of the environment, actors and identifications, norms and ideals) in empirical analysis is a purely analytical approach to much more complex empirical discourses that simultaneously operate through all these dimensions.

By now it has also become clear that the signifier 'Alexei Navalny' has not only got multiple meanings as a result of domestication to different context, but that the moral storylines on him are based on fundamentally different conceptions of reality. As my empirical analysis shows, both moral storylines identified in the data follow their own inner logic that would rather collapse if the ontological claims constructing the categories of victims and aggressors were questioned. News reporting in each national context sticks to this inner logic and thus remains narratively coherent. It seems that Alexei Navalny provides a prime example that illustrates Laclau's theory on floating signifiers as floating between different hegemonic projects but at the same time as firmly integrated into these projects with their own specific and rather unquestioned conception of reality. In the context of this study, the floating signifier 'Alexei Navalny' is understood as a floating person reference being understood for instance as a poisoned opposition politician, a political prisoner, a hero, a traitor, a Western agent, or a criminal depending on where, by whom and to whom news stories about him are told.

It is also worth paying attention to how both moral storylines draw from readily available and morally sacred world cultural principles of human rights and national sovereignty as their source of moral casting in constructing the categories of 'victims' and 'aggressors'. In this sense, the identified storylines can be considered to represent local field battles that are embedded in the globally shared world culture. As my study illustrates, these world cultural principles can be utilized very flexibly and strategically in epistemic work and moral casting, resulting in very different discursive constructions. These include floating signifiers that come to discursively shape transnational political struggles. My study also indicates that in order to oppose moral casting that is based on mutually shared principles of world culture, it is rather necessary to construct a very different conception of reality; one in which the same event cannot be, for instance, interpreted as a violation of human rights but as a violation of national sovereignty, or the other way around.

The empirical findings of my study provide further support for the observations made in earlier studies according to which "we" tend to be represented through positive qualities and "they" through negative ones in domesticated news discourses. However, in earlier research, who "we" and "they" are has been rather predetermined and narrowly tied to national identities or cultures. Although cross-national perspectives have been discovered, they have not been explicitly connected to the processed of social identity building. However, my study shows that it is worth extending the scope beyond these assumptions and to explore through which kind of identifications "we" as opposed to "them" are constructed in empirical discourses. These identifications can be also based on transnational political communities such as the European union or the Western community, and/or political values such as democracy, human rights or freedom of speech in addition to and overlapping with identifications with nation-states. Thus, although world society theory emphasizes nation-states as the central organizing principle of the modern world (Meyer et al. 1997), their role in serving as identifications dividing "us" and "them" should not be overemphasized at the cost of alternative and overlapping identifications that can be discovered in political rhetoric.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

As for the limitations of this study, I acknowledge that the selection of countries for my case study influences my findings related to Alexei Navalny as a floating signifier. It is clear that the floating dimension would not have appeared if I had compared only Finnish and German news stories to each other, that are coupled as being based on a fundamentally similar inner logic in my analysis despite the minor variations between them. According to my empirical data, political rhetoric in Finnish and German news reporting does not represent two distinct hegemonic projects but a rather one single hegemonic project with some local variations. The floating effect becomes visible only through the Russian news reporting which, in turn, seems to represent a very different hegemonic project compared to Finland and Germany. The selection of countries was based on the initial observations of Navalny being represented differently in Western and Russian media and my study confirms these observations. In fact, the rhetorical struggle between Russia and the West as each other's identity counterparts has its long history and my study shows evidence that Navalny as a floating signifier has become one of the rhetorical mediators in this struggle.

Based on my study, I argue that domestication can be defined as a phenomenon constructing floating signifiers only with the precondition that selected countries represent different hegemonic projects. On the other hand, this kind of analysis aimed at discovering floating signifiers as emerging through domestication of global news events can also help to discover and evaluate different hegemonic projects, their relations to each other and how they eventually end up constituting global, transnational and national political orders. Although my study is based on a comparative setting between national contexts and although I have analyzed media outlets that are popular among the national audiences, it cannot be claimed that the stories that I have identified are the only stories that are being told by all national news outlets to each national audience. Instead, different hegemonic projects can find support beyond the state borders as my comparison between Helsingin Sanomat and Der Spiegel already shows. It is left for future research to discover how this kind of transnational hegemonic projects represented by floating signifiers shape struggles over national identities, for instance, given the challenges that fundamentally different and morally charged conceptions of reality can be expected to pose to national integrity.

In addition, since person references have not been approached as floating signifiers prior to my study, I have outlined a novel approach to the study of moral order in transnational political meaning-making, an approach that encourages to analyze how person references are discursively constructed and utilized in political rhetoric. After all, different political figures and actors, and their relations with ordinary people as the subjects being governed, play the major role in our understanding of different political processes. At the same time, these actors and their actions are interpreted through a certain moral order characterized by moral divisions such as victims and aggressors. This division is highly significant and consequential in constructing actorhood of those who are discursively ascribed to these categories, especially because such categories can be applied relatively flexibly from discourse to discourse as I have shown. Consequentiality, who we consider representing these categories is crucial in shaping our moral stance towards different political actors and their actions.

In addition, I argue that moral categorizations extend their influence to claims made about the actors' inner emotions, desires, and motives: for example, victims can be expected to feel resentment and anger towards the aggressors and aggressors to be led by evil and selfish motives. For this reason, in addition to mapping the moral order across different political debates and politicized events I suggest future research to take one step further and to examine how emotions, desires and motives are explicitly communicated in political discourses by making claims about what different actors want,

think, or feel, and how these claims become understandable and justified through the actors' normative membership categorizations.

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Appendix: A numbered list of analyzed news articles

1. Viron uusi ulkoministeri Eva-Maria Liimets puhuu Venäjästä tavalla, jota ei voisi kuulla suomalaisen ministerin suusta (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
2. EU:n korkea edustaja matkaa Moskovaan, vaikka Baltian maat varoittavat seurauksista (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
3. Yves Rocher -vyyhti on kummitellut Aleksei Navalnin niskassa pitkään, ja tänään hän saattaa saada yli kolmen vuoden vankileirituomion (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
4. Oikeus muutti Aleksei Navalnyin ehdollisen tuomion ehdottomaksi, edessä yli kaksi ja puoli vuotta vankileiriä (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
5. Navalnyin näytösoikeudenkäynnistä tuli Putinin loppukauden merkkipaalu (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
6. ”Selitys on yhden bunkkerissa asuvan henkilön viha ja pelko”, Navalnyi sanoi – HS:n kirjeenvaihtaja seurasi paikan päällä, kun oppositiojohtaja sai odotetusti ehdottoman tuomion (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
7. Merkel: Navalnyi vapautettava heti – Poliisi otti kiinni yli 1 400 mielenosoittajaa, Kremlin mukaan poliisilla oli oikeus käyttää kovia otteita (Helsingin Sanomat 2/2/2021)
8. Näin presidentti Niinistö ja muut eurooppalaiset johtajat kommentoivat Navalnyin tuomiota (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)
9. Niinistö Navalnyin tapauksesta: Nyt kun oikeudenkäynti on päättynyt, on vielä suurempi syy vaatia hänen vapauttamistaan (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)
10. Poliisi tukahdutti Moskovan öiset protestit kovin ottein – ”Tämä on käännekohta”, arvioi tutkija (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)
11. Navalnyi joutui vankilaan, mutta hänen lähipiirilläkään ei ole helppoa: kotietsintöjä, pidätyksiä ja rikostutkintoja (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)
12. Kansan luottamusta menettäneen ja naurunalaiseksi joutuneen Putinin valta on enää kuorta (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)
13. ”Kun ihmiset tiedostavat, mistä on kyse, kaikki nämä kulissit hajoavat” – HS julkaisee Aleksei Navalnyin oikeudessa pitämän puheen sanasta sanaan (Helsingin Sanomat 2/3/2021)
14. Die Lage am Morgen – Nord Stream 2 und Nawalny: der Preis der Pipeline (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
15. Kremlkritiker vor Gericht – Festnahmen und massives Polizeiaufgebot bei Prozess gegen Nawalny (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
16. Urteil gegen Kremlkritiker – Nawalny muss mehrere Jahre ins Gefängnis (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
17. Die Lage am Abend: Vergiftet, verknackt, verurteilt (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
18. Reaktionen auf Nawalny-Haftstrafe »Zynismus pur« (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
19. Verurteilung von Alexej Nawalny – Am Ende ein Witz (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
20. Proteste gegen Nawalnys Verurteilung – Menschenrechtler berichten von mehr als tausend Festnahmen (Der Spiegel 2/2/2021)
21. Pressestimmen zur Haftstrafe für Nawalny - »Eine Erkenntnis ist, dass Putin und seine Gefolgschaft sich bedroht fühlen müssen« (Der Spiegel 2/3/2021)
22. Nach Urteil gegen Nawalny – Platzeck lehnt Sanktionen gegen Russland ab (Der Spiegel 2/3/2021)
23. Sergej Smirnov – Russischer Chefredakteur zu 23 Tagen Arrest verurteilt – wegen eines Retweets (Der Spiegel 2/3/2021)

24. В Москве ограничат движение на нескольких улицах около Мосгорсуда (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
25. В Санкт-Петербурге задержан второй подозреваемый в нападении на полицейских (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
26. В Москве ограничили движение на нескольких улицах возле Мосгорсуда (Lenta 2/2/2021)
27. В Москве ограничили движение возле Мосгорсуда (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
28. Юлия Навальная приехала в Мосгорсуд (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
29. Навального доставили в суд (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
30. У Мосгорсуда начались задержания (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
31. О перспективах партии «Новые люди» (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
32. Начался суд по делу Навального (2/2/2021)
33. Около 20 сотрудников посольств прибыли на суд по делу Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
34. Навальный в суде назвал себя индивидуальным предпринимателем (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
35. Кремль прокомментировал суд над Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
36. ФСИН попросила посадить Навального на 3,5 года (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
37. Представитель ФСИН заявил о 60 нарушениях Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
38. ФСИН попросила оштрафовать Навального на полмиллиона рублей (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
39. ФСИН заявила о не вставшем на путь исправления Навальном (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
40. В Германии призвали к арестам активов российских олигархов (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
41. Кремль оправдал действия силовиков на акциях протеста (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
42. Председатель Симоновского суда Москвы подал в отставку (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
43. Эксперты оценили перспективность отеля во «дворце» в Геленджике (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
44. Лавров призвал главу МИД Швеции честно обсудить ситуацию вокруг дела Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
45. Захарова раскритиковала присутствие иностранных дипломатов на суде с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
46. Навальный уведомлял ФСИН о нахождении в клинике в Германии (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
47. Возле Мосгорсуда задержали более 200 человек (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
48. Совфед заявил о желании Запада заменить Навального его женой (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
49. Мария Захарова рассказала о пролитом на Навального кофе (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
50. Кремль отреагировал на присутствие иностранных дипломатов на суде по Навальному (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
51. Лавров заподозрил инсценировку в ситуации с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
52. В посольстве Великобритании объяснили приезд дипломатов на суд по Навальному (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
53. В МИД назвали политической акцией появление иностранных дипломатов в Мосгорсуде (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
54. Навальный потребовал немедленно освободить его (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
55. Прокурор попросил отправить Навального в колонию общего режима (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
56. Путин обвинил соцсети в управлении сознанием пользователей (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
57. Прокурор назвал Навального единственным россиянином с двойным условным сроком (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
58. Глава Симоновского суда сообщил о принятом в прошлом году решении об отставке (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
59. ФСО закрыла Красную площадь (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)

60. Алексея Навального отправили в колонию на 3,5 года (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
61. Навальному заменили условный срок на реальный и отправили в колонию на 3,5 года (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
62. Раскрыты подробности приговора Навальному (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
63. Защита Навального обжалует решение о замене условного срока на реальный (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
64. США высказались о решении отправить Навального в колонию (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
65. Прокурор назвала условный срок Навального беспрецедентным снисхождением (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
66. Захарова прокомментировала угрозу санкций стран Запада из-за Навального (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
67. ЕС прокомментировал решение отправить Навального в колонию (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
68. Навального этапируют в колонию в Центральной России (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
69. Макрон прокомментировал приговор Навальному (Lenta.ru 2/2/2021)
70. Захарова раскритиковала заявления США по суду с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
71. Песков ответил на вопрос о реакции Путина на приговор Навальному (2/3/2021)
72. Кремль прокомментировал оцепления в центре Москвы (2/3/2021)
73. Кремль сравнил действия силовиков на протестах в России и Белоруссии (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
74. Урганта раскритиковали за шутку с намеком на Навального в эфире Первого канала (2/3/2021)
75. Лавров заявил о зашкаливающей истерике Запада из-за Навального (2/3/2021)
76. Лавров отправил Евросоюзу видео о насилии против митингующих на Западе (2/3/2021)
77. Верховный суд одобрил взыскание 88 миллионов рублей с Навального и ФБК (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
78. Лавров призвал Запад не путать вежливость России со слабостью (Lent.ru 2/3/2021)
79. Кадыров назвал дравшегося с бойцами ОМОН чеченца трусливым шакалом (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
80. В правительстве Германии не исключили новых санкций из-за ситуации с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
81. Австрия призвала ЕС продолжить диалог с Россией вопреки ситуации с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
82. Главреда «Медиазоны» арестовали за ретвит шутки (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
83. Кадыров напомнил о прошлом Навального (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
84. МИД заявил о грубых действиях западных дипломатов в ситуации с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
85. В ЕС обсудят дальнейшие шаги по ситуации вокруг Навального (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
86. Задержан подозреваемый в поджоге автомобиля Росгвардии на акции 31 января (2/3/2021)
87. МИД заявил о грубых действиях западных дипломатов в ситуации с Навальным (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)
88. Евросоюз призвал Россию к немедленному освобождению Навального (Lenta.ru 2/3/2021)