New Cases Involve Symbols Adopted by Dangerous Organizations

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In 2016, an image was shared on Instagram featuring a woman wearing a scarf with the words "Slavic Army" alongside a Kolovrat symbol. Similarly, in February 2024, a carousel of images was posted, including drawings of an Odal rune wrapped around a sword and a quotation about blood and fate from Ernst Jünger, a German author and soldier who served in both World Wars. The caption reiterated the quote while selectively referencing the rune's early history, omitting its Nazi and neo-Nazi associations.

More recently, in 2024, another post appeared depicting a woman wearing an Iron Cross necklace and a T-shirt featuring an AK-47 assault rifle with the phrase "Defend Europe." The increasing use of the Kolovrat and Odal/Othala runes in online spaces signals the rise of subliminal neo-Nazi messaging. This is particularly concerning in an era where neo-Nazi and white supremacist ideologies are becoming more mainstream on tech platforms. Since 2020, extremists have strategically used social media to mobilize supporters into offline action.[1] While recent changes in content moderation policies have pushed far-right groups toward lesser-known and less-regulated platforms, the threat persists, especially when Tech Billionaires openly engage in far-right gestures, as seen during the US President's inauguration.[2]

The Odal/Othala rune originates from the runic alphabet used across pre-Roman Europe. However, Nazi Germany co-opted the symbol, along with others, to construct a mystic "Aryan" past. Post-World War II, white supremacists across Europe and North America have continued to use the rune as a symbol of racial pride, reinforcing its association with far-right extremism.[3] In 2016, a large neo-Nazi group called the National Socialist Movement announced that it would be adopting the Othala Rune as a replacement for the Swastika, in order to "become more integrated and more mainstream."[4] This move by an extremist group that holds a lot of sway with alt-right white supremacist groups in America removes most instances of plausible deniability of the Rune as a neo-Nazi symbol meant to further extremist ideologies. The Kolovrat symbol, often cited as a representation of Slavic heritage, was first popularized in the early 1990s by Alexey Dobrovolsky, a former dissident and one of the founders of Russian neo-paganism. Dobrovolsky initially applied the name "Kolovrat" (Russian: коловрат, meaning "spinning wheel") to a four-beamed swastika identical to the Nazi symbol before later extending

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[1] https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA1400/PEA1458-1/RAND_PEA1458-1.pdf
[2] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jan/21/the-gesture-speaks-for-itself-germans-divided-over-musks-apparent-nazi-salute
[3] https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/othala-rune
[4] https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/28/us/hate-symbols-changing-trnd/index.html

it to an eight-beamed variation. Historian and religious scholar Roman Shizhensky notes that Dobrovolsky derived the swastika's symbolism from *The Chronicle of Oera Linda*, a text associated with Nazi ideologist Herman Wirth, the first head of the Ahnenerbe, the Nazi organization devoted to pseudo-historical racial theories. Dobrovolsky framed the Kolovrat as a symbol of "resurgent paganism," linking it to an uncompromising "national liberation struggle" against the so-called "Zhyd yoke", a derogatory term for Jewish people in Russian and Ukrainian. He openly equated the Kolovrat's meaning with that of the Nazi swastika. Today, it remains one of the most widely used symbols within Slavic neopaganism, particularly among adherents of Rodnovery, a modern revivalist movement that often overlaps with ultranationalist and white supremacist ideologies.[5]

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The right states, *'Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.'* However, this right is not absolute and is subject to legally defined limitations. Article 20 of the ICCPR explicitly obligates states to prohibit hate speech, stating: "*Any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law*." The challenge lies in balancing freedom of expression with restrictions on hate speech, particularly when considering regional and political nuances.[6]

In this context, the increasing use of the Odal/Othala rune and the Kolovrat symbol raises significant concerns. While these symbols have historical and cultural significance in non-extremist contexts, their usage in the cases reviewed by the Oversight Board demonstrates how they are being repurposed for subliminal messaging by extremist groups. These symbols, often associated with themes of war, faith, and violence, have been appropriated by neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements to circumvent content moderation policies and incite violence, particularly within an already volatile European landscape. Given this, all three posts should be removed from the platform on the grounds of hate speech. A thorough human rights review would further help platforms understand the historical and contemporary implications of these symbols in today's global political landscape.

Additionally, evaluating whether such speech falls under Meta's Dangerous Organizations and Individuals (DOI) policy is challenging, as the list of designated groups is not publicly available. While Meta outlines the distinctions between Tier 1 and Tier 2 designations, there is little transparency regarding how these are determined or how political considerations influence them. The policy states that Meta *prohibits entities designated as Foreign Terrorist*

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[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swastika#Modern_adoptions
[6] https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/conferences/iccpr-links-between-articles-19-and-20.pdf

Organizations (FTOs) or Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) by the U.S. government.[7] However, as a global platform, Meta should not rely solely on a list developed by the United States. Not only is this unrepresentative of Meta's global audience and stakeholders, but US politics itself is dynamic, seeing a decidedly shift to right-wing politics with the recent election cycle. This has directly affected social media platforms as tech oligarchs hasten to align themselves with the political status quo, a fact which reflects in changes to platform content moderation policies, emphasizing "free speech" over all other considerations. Lastly, the DOI policy should be made public or at least accessible to trusted partners to ensure effective oversight, escalation processes, and social media monitoring.

Oversight board case:
https://www.oversightboard.com/news/new-cases-involve-symbols-adopted-by-dangerous-organizations/

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[7]
https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/dangerous-individuals-organizations/