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Extremism, in its various forms, has accompanied societies for a long time. Certain patterns, strategies, and implications seem to repeat themselves throughout different "waves" of terrorism. At the same time, ideologies also seem to feed off each other and new trends evolve, often in line with drastic societal changes. Preventing and countering violent extremism demands always being "one step ahead" of extremist groups, anticipating and evaluating new phenomena, threats and strategies. In order to do so, research needs to interact with practice to be able to detect new trends, identify the transferability of various ideological elements from one form of extremism to another and take into account transnational developments and influences. Often, trends emerge from one country but then spill over into others – developments that are accelerated by the digitalisation that has also globalised communication and identity-making. Rather than being able to anticipate, too often, research as well as practice, only reacts to what is already happening, which is to say – too late.

As the end of the year 2019 is approaching, we will take the opportunity to focus on the future and talk about what may lay ahead. While predicting future trends is an impossible task, the past year has clearly shown new trends and topics that definitely need to be taken into account.

For instance, the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March reminded us that the online and offline spheres cannot be considered separately, and that the online sphere can act as a vehicle to amplify offline actions. In her article, Ashley Mattheis analyses the effect of the "leaderless resistance" that the online world enables. She argues that the division of online and offline underestimates the role non-violent supporters on the internet play in nudging an individual towards putting words into action. In the context of the environmental movement, the year 2019 was characterized by protests, empowering radical movements such as Extinction Rebellion. In his analysis of the "pine tree" emoticon on Twitter, Brian Hughes takes a closer look at social media discourses of eco-fascists, neo-luddites, radical accelerationists, and decelerationists. He then discovers that environmentalism is part of a dissolution of old ideological categories and can no longer be associated with one ideology alone. Regarding similarities and transferabilities between adjacent fields, Michael Langones revised and updated article applies a cult studies perspective to the problems posed by Jihadism. Finally, Joel Busher, Gareth Harris and Graham Macklin, discuss why anti-minority mobilization nowadays often has certain focal points, elaborating on the new idea of "credibility contests."

We hope that this collection of different topics and approaches can give you some inspiration as where it might be useful to look for future trends in extremism. On behalf of our entire team, we hope you will enjoy reading this new issue!

Yours,

Judy Korn, Thomas Mücke
and Dennis Walkenhorst

DISRUPTING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE:

Extremism's Integration of Offline / Online Practice

Photo: Amanda Lins/Unsplash

BY ASHLEY MATTHEIS

Extremist practices are increasingly bridging the offline and online milieus. Often, however, in the media, in policy, and in legal frameworks, these two environments are thought of as distinct and separate spheres (Szmania and Fincher 120). Moreover, the offline sphere is generally presented as "real," while the online sphere is presented as "virtual," or somehow less real (ADL "Real World"). This tendency stems from multiple factors including a long history of representing technology in either dystopic or utopic frames, difficulty in defining and explaining the distinctions between the two spaces as they become more integrated generally, and the limitations of existing policy and legal frameworks in relation to addressing the online sphere. Research, however, suggests that people experience these spaces – offline and online – as coextensive spaces of living their daily lives (Castells 118, Singer and Brooking 25).

In its offline aspect the broader right-wing movement is comprised of a range of groups and ideological variances that have traditionally had difficulty coalescing into a coherent movement with broad appeal. In its online aspect, right-wing extremist practice is focused on spreading ideology, recruiting and radicalization, and building transnational communities.

In its offline aspect the broader right-wing movement is comprised of a range of groups and ideological variances that have traditionally had difficulty coalescing into a coherent movement with broad appeal (Michael "New Face" 264). US right-wing extremist groups have broadly and publicly discussed using the strategy of leaderless resistance. They have, however, had difficulty in developing it and deploying it effectively (Michael 264). In its online aspect, right-wing extremist practice is focused on spreading ideology, recruiting and radicalization, and building transnational communities (DHS "Strategic Framework" 10). This online practice has been successful as "[e]xtremist networks have become increasingly international" because "[n]ew media has made it easier for members of extremist groups and movements to connect through their shared perceived victimhood that is tied to a common identity – be it on the base of race, religion, political affiliation or

class" (Ebner 127). The success of the integration of offline and online practices leverages the maturation of web-based technologies which have made the potential for the development of a form of leaderless resistance more real (Berger "Evolving").

Within this context and in concert with the technological affordances of social media and web-based platforms, right-wing extremism is interacting with other forms of extremism. Such interactions include building interconnections with ideology recently identified as male supremacist extremism from the "Manosphere," a loose online network made up of Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs), Pick Up Artists (PUAs) and Involuntary Celibate (Incels) misogynist online cultures (Waltman and Mattheis 17-20). Right-wing extremisms are also interacting with Jihadist extremism through "a paradoxical mixture of competition and cooperation," (Ebner 140) inclusive of borrowing motifs for violent propaganda and tactical practices such as using vehicular attacks.

The interaction between offline and online practices is increasingly important for right-wing extremist groups and adherents because it enables the advancement of their goals in ways groups have been unable to achieve through direct action (Garfinkel 13). Understanding this interaction is urgent given the success with which extremist ideologies and practices are shifting normative culture through online media. Moreover, the current difficulty that predominantly online expressions of right-wing extremism – such as the Alt-Right – have in building unity with more traditional groups in offline milieus offers an opportunity to develop effective responses before a coherent unity emerges (Mattheis "Digital Hate").

The interaction between offline and online practices is increasingly important for right-wing extremist groups and adherents because it enables the advancement of their goals in ways groups have been unable to achieve through direct action

Therefore, this paper explores the integration of offline and online behaviors through two primary effects: 1) through the deconstruction of organizational structures including the strategy of leaderless resistance, lone actor violence, and self-radicalization and 2) through the dispersion and normalization of ideological variants in relation to online interactivity. The integration of offline / online practice promotes this diffusion of organization because it establishes networks irrespective of geography, temporality, or common language while it provides access to a vast array of extremist media and communities in which people can become immersed. It also promotes the dispersion of ideology by making it flexible and participatory. This makes the ideology more broadly appealing and increases the potential for individuals to identify with a somewhat "customized" version (Koehler 129).

Deconstruction of organizational structures poses a problem for conceptual concreteness and policy understandings of terrorism which rely on traditional understandings of "groups" as geographically emplaced, hierarchical, and associational through direct contact and relationships in order to pursue criminal action. Deconstructed, diffuse webs of actors is, in fact, the purpose of the strategy of leaderless resistance and its goal of creating "lone actor" (lone wolf / solo actor) violence through "self-radicalization" as articulated by Louis Beam in the early 1980s. This process of organizational dis-organization has been enabled by the integration of the use of web-based platforms and is increasingly amplified by the affordances of social media platforms developing over the last few years (Berger "Evolving").

The integration of offline / online practice has also led to the dispersion and normalization of ideology due to the incorporation of online communicative norms and practices which reconfigure ideological discourses through users' manipulations of cultural attachments. These practices work through processes of media production and sharing that rely on ideological and cultural borrowing (appropriation of content and practices of other groups) and bricolage (admixtures of available content that generate new meaning out of existing elements). Such practices are not exclusive to online behavior but are rather "a way for social actors to engage actively or strategically….to respond or adapt to 'global modernity''s complexities, diversity and contradictions" (Altglas 490). As such, bricolage is a function of human creative practice. Their use, however, is widespread in everyday interactions on social media. These practices can be most clearly seen in memes production which is predicated on blending

Photo: Nahel Abdul Hadi/Unsplash

cultural forms and touchstones in novel, ironic, and often humorous frames. The goal of these practices is to make content highly consumable and shareable leading to broad dispersion (Singer and Brooking 186-87). Regular exposure to such content as it disperses including participation through sharing, cross-posting, and repurposing can rapidly normalize embedded ideas,

To explore these effects of offline / online integration, this paper unfolds in several sections. The first section takes up the topic of organizational deconstruction and describes the effects of offline / online integration as applied to leaderless resistance, lone actor violence, and self-radicalization. The second section takes up practices of ideological dispersion – borrowing and bricolage – providing a discussion of the ways that online communicative practices impact the reproduction of right-wing extremist ideology making it highly consumable, flexible, and participatory. The third section outlines a framework for understanding current offline / online integrated practice through a framework of intimate publicity. This is followed by a fourth section which details how extremist ideology is spread through its intimate public by leveraging affective attachments points. The final section concludes the paper by briefly detailing two research reports and three radicalization stories that support the utility of the intimate public framework developed in earlier sections.

Organizational Deconstruction:

Leaderless resistance, championed early in the 1990s in US white supremacist extremist circles by Louis Beam, is a strategy that is deconstructive of organizations by design. It does this specifically in relation to the threat of government oversight in order to evade criminal statues and law enforcement through a framework of flattened hierarchy. Deconstructing the organizational “center” by diffusing action through unrelated small “cell” tactical groups and individuals (lone actors) prevents government intervention because there are no organized structures or leaders to attack (Beam). Lone actor terrorism (also called lone wolf, solo actor, and in some cases homegrown violent extremist) is a practice where individuals (seem to) work individually to plan and commit terror attacks. It further deconstructs organization structures by supplanting hierarchy and group structure entirely (Beam). Indeed, such individualization of violent acts is conceptualized as the penultimate outcome of the strategy of leaderless resistance (Berger “Evolving”). However, the success of the strategy of leaderless resistance and the concept of lone actors are debated (Berger “Evolving”, Burke, Sweeney 628)

In an attempt to clarify the conceptualization of leaderless resistance , M.M. Sweeney identified four primary criteria in the scholarly literature: “leaderless resistors cannot be members of organizations they represent; leaderless resistance is a tactical manifestation of an organization; the goal of leaderless resistance is to insulate members and leaders from prosecution; and leaderless resistance arises from organizational failure” (621-22). Sweeney then applied these criteria to a unique case – the Phineas Priesthood – of “truly leaderless” actors within US right-wing extremist culture (622-26).

Photo: Daria Nepriakhina/Unsplash

Ultimately, Sweeney's findings indicate that a lack of clarity around the notions of organizations versus ideology lead to misunderstandings of leaderless resistance and "lone wolf" or lone / single actor violence, which are most often not "truly leaderless" violence (628-29).

Further complicating the evolution of Right-Wing extremist strategy and action is the widespread use of internet technologies and platforms by a variety of participants who may or may not engage with formally organized groups. As such, online participation works to deconstruct organizational structures by diffusing adherence and dispersing ideology through technological media. Here, the notion of "self-radicalization" has been used to designate the seemingly isolated nature of radicalization – independent of "association" with extremist groups or actors – through a person's engagement with web-mediated platforms (Alfano et al 289-90). This understanding comes from the nature of web and social media platforms which provide the ability for anonymous and disconnected participation in ideologies because there is no need to establish oneself as an official group member. Self-radicalization, particularly through online technology, is also considered a root cause of recent lone actor violence and the potential realization of leaderless resistance (Berger "Evolving").

Self-radicalization, however, is a problematic concept in the context of internet culture because it is often used as a term to differentiate between offline and online behavior. As Susan Szmania and Phelix Fincher have noted, "policy makers have often conceptualized online and offline radicalizing environments as separate and distinct" (120). In this frame, offline radicalization is seen as a social process and online radicalization is seen as an isolated – i.e. self-directed – process. Discussions of "self-radicalization," then, overlap with discussions of "online radicalization" even though "self-radicalization" as a concept is not exclusively correspondent with online practice.

Radicalization online, including the "push" to "individual" violent action, is a social process (Berger Extremism 120, Michael "Lone Wolf" 29, Burke "Myth", Koehler 119) that is technologically mediated.[1] It appears "individual" because it occurs in

[1] "Technologies help shape perceptions and actions, experiences, and practices. In doing so, they help shape how human beings can be present in the world and how the world can be present for human beings." See: Peter-Paul Verbeek. 2015. "Beyond interaction: a short introduction to mediation theory." Interactions. http://interactions.acm.org/archive/view/may-june-2015/beyond-interaction

communities that allow for asynchronous (not occurring at the same time), global communication. Participation is interconnected and interactive including meme circulation, media sharing, and posting / cross posting from a variety of participants and actors who together form an ideologically based "interactive community" (Singer and Brooking 169). Moreover, recent changes in extremists' online behavior in relation to attempts to "de-platform" or regulate extremist content online, show that these participants understand themselves as communities. The move to closed groups, forums, and platforms, attempts to build their own platforms, and some groups' movements "down the stack" show that participants value and desire to maintain these communities and connections (Hughes "New Ways").

In addition to efforts and strategies to maintain online communities, there have been multiple efforts to move such online affiliations offline. The most infamous recent instance of this in the US was the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA in August 2017. Here predominantly online communities such as the Alt-Right and more established "offline" organizations such as the Traditionalist Workers Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and Identity Europa organized as a unified collective. The hope of the groups was to regularize the practice of large rallies to push their political agenda ("White Nationalist"). However, this became an unlikely possibility due to the instability of the interconnections of the groups – particularly the newer Alt-Right groups – and because of negative press surrounding the murder of Heather Heyer, an anti-racist protestor.

Currently, it seems as if the larger coalition has become unsustainable, but the attempt points to important facets of the use of an offline / online framework. Rally attendees and groups used web-based and digital means of communication to organize the event ("White Nationalist"). Thus, the large-scale conversion of online community into offline participation and action is a key – if yet not fully realized – goal. On a smaller scale, many of the more traditional groups also now rely on the capacities of the web and social media to recruit and bring in new participants (Koehler 119-122). This is a shift that corresponds to the more ubiquitous and coextensive natures of web and social media with offline life.

In light of this clear integration of offline and online participation, online radicalization requires new ways of understanding the interactivity of offline and online relations. This is essential because the production, circulation, and positive reinforcement of belief and participation are happening within ideological "interactive communities" (Singer and Brooking 169) that also bridge the offline and online spheres (Koehler 130-31). This nature of offline/online communities becomes important to understanding shifts in practice – typically considered inspirational rather

Charlottesville „Unite the Right" Rally *Photo: Anthony Crider*

Recent reports have also noted a growing pattern of right-wing extremist groups "borrowing" visuals, tactics, and strategies from Jihadist extremist frameworks.

than associational – such as the sharing of manifestos and the increasing "gamification" of mass attacks, including attackers' livestreams referencing first person shooter video games and forum posts discussing kill counts (Mattheis "Manifesto Memes"). This type of interactivity online – participating in producing, sharing, posting, and commenting – produces enjoyment and association between participants which poses radicalization online as "a social process of affective networking" (Johnson 101). Such practices and interactions must be understood as associational in the sense that they are interactive "community" reinforcement of radicalization.

Generating Participatory, Flexible Ideology:

The combination of deconstructed organization and the affordances of social media and web-based technologies have further dispersed the ideology of right-wing extremists making it flexible – easily modified in response to participants' interests – to increase its appeal to a wide-ranging, varied audience. What is important about such flexibility is that it allows for individual identification with the ideology through personal frames of resonance as well as common social frames of resonance. At the level of individual frames, a rich example of how ideological flexibility derived from online cultural frames works is the Christchurch attacker's manifesto, "The Great Replacement" includes his adaptions of Kipling poems, ironic misdirection including labeling Candace Owens responsible for his radicalization, and use of the "subscribe to PewDiePie" meme (Romano). This also contributes to the variations applied to right-wing extremist ideology that have been expressed in other recently posted manifestos. Such variation is clear in the El Paso attacker's "Notification Letter" which identifies with notions of white genocide through US based border politics by substituting "Mexican immigrants" for the "Islamic invaders" typical to Euro-centric white supremacist, identitarian extremism.

At the level of communal frames of resonance, this flexibility is also useful for connecting a multiplicity of right-wing extremist ideologies and ideas to other hate-based ideologies such as the misogynist Manosphere culture online from which violent Incel extremism derives. Such interconnection and ideological transfer have become clear in the last several years through an increase in blog posts and media which interweave the two ideologies through narratives of anti-feminism and the shared belief that women's equality is destroying society (Mattheis "Digital Hate"). Anti-feminism works as a site of ideological transfer because it is broadly present in socio-cultural life as well as being a mainstay of masculinist online tech cultures. As such, women, particularly feminist women, are already identified as an outgroup making anti-feminist and misogynistic narratives highly resonant in online contexts and thus provide a useful mechanism for spreading and transferring ideology.

Recent reports have also noted a growing pattern of right-wing extremist groups "borrowing" visuals, tactics, and strategies from Jihadist extremist frameworks. We see this for example mirroring between right-wing extremist and jihadist extremist groups and practices such as the group "The Base" which takes its name from the English translation of "Al Qaeda," the use of vehicles for committing mass attacks between Jihadist and Incel groups, and the use of similar motifs – particularly tactical, military, and first-person shooter motifs – in video propaganda and right-wing extremist attack live streams (Johnson "Striking Resemblance") This sort of borrowing is also embedded in the practices of what has been called reciprocal radicalization between right-wing and Jihadist extremist groups (Ebner 10-11).

The process by which such ideological flexibility is gained relies on the admixture of various ideological and cultural components in the production of right-wing extremist propaganda, particularly visual images and videos. This blending of content to generate meaning from existing elements is a form of "bricolage" – a sort of ideological pastiche through which users marry existing ideas, imagery, and cultural touchstones in novel ways to create new meanings. Bricolage, in its original conception by Claude Levi-Strauss, was applied to the generation of new mythologies and it was "intended to capture how cultures create something new out of what already exists" (Altglas 477).

The practice of ideological bricolage follows broader internet subcultural norms

photo: Annie Spratt/Unsplash

of visual and textual bricolage and participatory media production and sharing. Ryan M. Milner asserts that "[i]nternet memes depend on collective creation, circulation, and transformation" and that "[t]hey are multi-modal texts that facilitate participation by reappropriation, by balancing a fixed premise with novel expression" (14). Their multi-modal nature follows the multi-modal nature of the internet where the blending of two or more modes of communication including "written language, image, audio, video, and hypertext" allows for more versatile mediated conversations (Milner 24). This can also be seen in the appropriation of signs and symbols such as the "ok" hand sign and the "Pepe" frog image and their rearticulation within a range of media including memes, videos, and selfies among others (Singer and Brooking 187).

An example of visual bricolage through ideological borrowing that makes clear its capacity (and perhaps intention) to manipulate interconnections between forms of extremism includes a meme series developed in relation to the Christchurch attack. This series blends male supremacist, specifically Incel meme visuals and narratives of redemptive violence with right-wing extremist ideology (Mattheis "Manifesto Memes"). It positions right-wing extremist attackers as "Chads," alpha males who do not suffer the indignity of involuntary celibacy, to argue that mass violence is a pathway to proper masculinity. The series includes multiple memes which compare various violent actors including right-wing extremist attackers, Incel attackers, and jihadist attackers. Comparisons rate the relative success of right-wing extremist attackers and highlight the failures of Incel and Jihadist attackers in order to promote mass violence – specifically aimed at protecting whiteness – as the "right" pathway. Thus, gender is the fulcrum for blending of these two extremist ideologies to promote identification and normalization of their most violent components.

Importantly, bricolage appears to occur at all levels of propaganda production and ideological transfer while borrowing appears to occur primarily within the propaganda of the most extreme, violent actors and groups. In this sense, bricolage is a form with broader use while borrowing is more highly targeted and specific in its appropriation of content, visuals, and topics. Both bricolage and borrowing, as strategic tactics of online communication, make sense within the right-wing extremist framing of the "culture wars" where "[m]aking something go viral is hard; co-opting or poisoning something that's already viral can be remarkably easy" (Singer and Brooking 191).

Photo: Acebarry/Wikimedia Commons

Conceptualizing Offline / Online Integration through Intimate Publics:
Publics in a traditional political conception are "coherent groups acting with shared concerns and interests within the broader imagined community of the public sphere as part of democratic political processes" (Wessler and Freudenthaler). In online spaces, coherent group structure is limited due to digital cultural norms (Ganesh). Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant provide conceptions of discursive publics that work better with the vagaries of online structures. Warner's conception of publics articulates them as self-organized "space[s] of discourse," that function as a relation among strangers, mediated by cultural forms and contingent upon historical context, which come together through "mere attention," (not agreement) and are thus "the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (Warner 51- 62). This provides a way to understand online relational structures as publics which are formed through discursive association (attention to circulating discourses including texts, images, etc) and interactive (social), asynchronous participation (reflexive circulation).

Warner, however, argues against the notion that publics are constituted through categorical group membership such as gender, race, or class (58-60). In the cases of right-wing extremism or male supremacism online, where a primary organizing discourse is white or male identity respectively, Warner's conception requires adaptation. To account for categorical affiliation in publics, Lauren Berlant develops the notion of "intimate publicity" which describes how women form public-ness as women in light of their historical exclusion from the participation in the political public sphere (iv-xi). This frame is useful in thinking about how extremist publics focused on white identity or male identity work as integrated offline / online practices by capitalizing on the capacities of social media to circulate grievances.

Intimate publicity, as Berlant defines it, refers to the formation of public-ness through the circulation of discourse where engaged individuals have an expectation "that the consumers of its particular stuff [discourses, texts, and commodities] already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience (xiii). Thus, publics characterized by intimate publicity cohere through an affective sensibility of shared experience between members even though they are strangers. From this view, extremist "intimate" publics – both right-wing and male supremacist – stick together and break apart in relation to circulating discourses integral to their concerns derived from feelings of common historical oppression; characterized by notions of white genocide or misandry (hatred and discrimination against men) respectively.[2]

[2] For primary texts which outline contemporary iterations of these ideologies, see: "The Great Replacement" by Breton Tarrant (https://www.ilfoglio.it/userUpload/The_Great_Replacementconvertito.pdf)and "The Misandry Bubble" by Thomas Frey (https://www.singularity2050.com/2010/01/the-misandry-bubble.html)

Circulating discourses in this space include existing historical cultural stories, myths, and narratives as well as intentionally developed narratives that are circulated through a range of mediated forms including posts, memes, video games, fan fiction, videos, manifestos and even message-laden clothing.[3] The determining factor in extremists' circulation of specific discourses is whether or not the discourses mobilize affective (emotive rather than logical) attachments that resonate with public's members' shared sense of common historical experience. Thus, the individual feels the truth of a discourse rather than deliberating about its veracity. Affective attachments that have been useful for right-wing extremist ideology are: immigration framed as invasion of the west (Great Replacement), recapturing homeland and identity (Blood and Soil), leftist deviance and rejection of "traditional" social and family structure (feminism / multi-culturalism / anti-government), cultural deterioration (non-assimilation), and violence against women (rape by migrant men) and the West (Jihadist terrorism).

Attachments with a discourse may be positive or negative. Within right-wing and male supremacist extremist intimate publicity, positive attachments tend to be articulated through the frame of nostalgia while negative attachments tend to be articulated through the frame of precarity (Mattheis "Digital Hate"). Interestingly, much of the online material developed by these groups in order to further the circulation of their preferred discourses is done to present them as objectively, often "scientifically" true. This accounts for the current increase in the circulation of "racial science" discourses that originated under eugenics research in the 1920s and 1930s, because those discourses purport to scientifically prove the feeling that the white race is superior (Schoen 20-25). Importantly, this process of circulating discourses works particularly well when points of affective attachment are found in less extreme variations in normative social and political discourse (Mattheis "Manifesto Memes"). In this way, affective attachments provide a bridge between offline and online space where extremists can relate to and reinforce the ideas they encounter online because of their offline experience and vice versa.

Building Intimate Publicity through Affective Attachments:

A primary set of affective attachments within the circulating discourses of right-wing and Manosphere extremist ideologies, includes misogyny, anti-feminism, and gender (Mattheis "Digital Hate", Reaves 1-20, Johnston and True 1-6). A vast array of memes, videos, blog posts, comments, and pseudo-scientific wiki pages are dedicated to explaining how women, feminism, and non-biological explanations of gender are responsible for the decline of men, society, and Western civilization. Thus, this set of attachments is embedded within a whole range of narratives for each group. These attachments, for right-wing extremists, are forwarded specifically through narratives of great replacement theory and white genocide which revolve around white men's instrumentalization and control of white women's wombs and reproductive capacities. Among Manosphere groups, including Incel cultures, this set of affective attachments makes up the foundational base of their claims. They are forwarded through narratives about feminism's oppression of men through "misandry" (gendered hatred of men) and male dis-

Circulating discourses in this space include existing historical cultural stories, myths, and narratives as well as intentionally developed narratives that are circulated through a range of mediated forms including posts, memes, video games, fan fiction, videos, manifestos and even message-laden clothing

"Straight Pride" supporter *Photo: Marc Nozell*

[3] See: Cynthia Miller-Idriss, The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany (2018)

Photo: Fibonacci Blue/Wikimedia Commons

posability (the idea that women and society use men and throw them away rather than valuing men as human beings) as features of a gynocentric social order (Wright).[4]

Both right-wing and Manosphere conspiracy theories ground the fall of (Western) civilization – an outcome of the existential threat facing the in-group – in women's destruction of the natural social order through their failure to understand and accept their "proper" place. Feminism is posed as a tool created by a hostile force and used (unwittingly by 'good' women and intentionally by 'bad' women and cultural Marxists) to sow social chaos and convince people that impending social destruction is in reality progressive, positive change. For right-wing extremists, feminism is a tool of the Zionist Occupied Government – a global Jewish network that controls government through media and corporate control (Waltman and Mattheis 10). For Manosphere groups, feminism is a tool of the "Gynocracy," or a government and legal system ruled by women and women's interests through duped male proxies where women are not the majority members of governance (Wright "Gynocentrism"). In both cases, feminism was created by design to destroy (white) men and masculinity and will ultimately destroy (Western) civilization unless people (whites, men, and 'good women') wake up and take a stand.

This shared set of attachments – misogyny, anti-feminism, and gender – provides a highly mobile (circulatable) framework for radicalization by extending existing social, religious, and political frames of discourse. Thus, extremists' narratives using gender are highly resonant because they "[fit] neatly into…preexisting story lines by allowing [people] to see [them]selves clearly in solidarity with – or opposition to – its actors" (Milner 159). So, constructing ideological materials – memes, videos, texts – for online consumption that draw on and radicalize through narratives and images using misogyny, anti-feminism, and gender-based arguments is useful because people can affectively attach to those arguments based on their personal experiences and concerns. This connection increases the impact of the material because the reader's / viewer's own existing beliefs are engaged to make the materials feel true. The intimate publicity developed from circulating ideology through affective attachments, indeed through the manipulation of affective attachments, is amplified by the generation of media through ideological bricolage. Milner articulates the amplifying effect of affective content production online saying, "[a]s social media users find ways to express (or exploit)

[4] For Incels gynocentrism, misandry, and male disposability are implicit concepts framed through narratives of sexual rejection based on their lacking looks and social status. Here, shallow and superficial women fail to appreciate these men as good guys who revere (hot) women. This narrative frame undergirds the "gentleman" and "saint" labeling of Incels who commit mass attacks. See detailed information on Incels forum wiki: https://incels.wiki/w/Main_Page

anger, they generate new pieces of content that are propelled through the same system, setting off additional cascades of fury" (162). The example of the Radical Right Attackers as Chads meme series above shows how the process of manipulating affective attachments to gender – specifically dominant (white) masculinity – make racialized hate mobile within the framework of male supremacist extremism.

Other meme series have been manufactured to mobilized affective attachments to gender in a variety of ways. One of the most disturbing is a set of images of battered and bloody women, appropriated and manipulated from an anti-domestic violence campaign, to promote the narrative of migrant rape of white women in Sweden (Mas).[5] This series mobilizes women's fears of violence and rape and men's anxieties about being able to protect "their women" – really access to and control over white women's bodies – as a framework for promoting identification with right-wing extremist ideology. Each of these manipulations of affective attachments through gender works within the framework of intimate publicity by leveraging white / male precarity and explicating the extant dangers leading to ominous threats posed by the continuance of white / male oppression.

Support for Intimate Publics as a Conceptual Framework:

A recent pair of research reports highlights gender, anti-feminism, and misogyny as aspects of violent extremism on and offline. The Anti-Defamation League's 2018 report "When Women are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy" offers a view of the online interrelation of misogyny and white supremacist extremism. It argues that "a deep-seated loathing of women acts as a connective tissue between many white supremacists, especially those in the alt right, and their lesser-known brothers in hate like incels (involuntary celibates), MRAs (Men's Rights Activists) and PUAs (Pick Up Artists)" (5-6). The basic premise of the ADL report has recently been empirically corroborated in the offline context in a report by Monash Gender, Peace, and Security Centre. The 2019 report, "Misogyny & Violent Extremism: Implications For Preventing Violent Extremism" includes the important finding that there is "factors commonly thought to affect support for violent extremism" such as "religiosity, age, gender, level of education achieved, employment, and geographic area" that "more than any other factor, support for violence against women predicted support for violent extremism" (Johnston and True 1). These reports highlight the utility of this paper's conceptualization of offline / online organizational coherence through the mobilization of affective attachments and intimate publicity.

A recent set of popular press pieces from formerly radicalized individuals also shows the utility of gender, misogyny, and anti-feminism as attachment points within the intimate publicity of right-wing and male supremacist extremism.

Similarly, a recent set of popular press pieces from formerly radicalized individuals also shows the utility of gender, misogyny, and anti-feminism as attachment points within the intimate publicity of right-wing and male supremacist extremism. In "What Happened After My 13-Year-Old Son Joined the Alt-Right," an anonymous mother details the story of how her teen-aged son was radicalized into the Alt-Right online after being accused of sexual harassment at school. She notes that "online pals [from Reddit and 4Chan] were happy to explain that all girls lie—especially about rape. …

They insisted that the wage gap is a fallacy, that feminazis are destroying families…. They declared that women who abort their babies should be jailed" ("13 Year Old"). Her son eventually became a Reddit moderator entrenched in Alt-Right ideology before being deradicalized and returning to normal teen-aged life.

"The Making of a YouTube Radical," details the story of Caleb Cain's online radicalization. He pinpoints his entry into extremism online: "One day in late 2014, YouTube recommended a self-help video by Stefan Molyneux, a Canadian talk show host and self-styled philosopher. / Like Mr. Cain, Mr. Molyneux had a difficult childhood, and he talked about overcoming hardships through self-improvement" (Roose). Importantly, he notes that "Mr. Molyneux…also had a political agenda. He was a men's rights advocate who said that feminism was a form of socialism and that progressive gender politics

[5] See "Rapist Migrant" section debunking the imagery used as appropriated visuals from domestic/intimate partner violence cases: https://observers.france24.com/en/20180105-fake-images-racist-stereotypes-migrants

were holding young men back" (Roose).[6] According to the article, Cain has deradicalized also through viewing YouTube videos by anti-fascist personalities like ContraPoints (known offline as Natalie Wynn) whose primary goals is to produce videos that debunk extremist messaging and use YouTube's algorithm to get it in front of viewers of extremist material. Importantly, this show how a public is made up of those who agree and disagree with the circulating discourses and how they participate in the discourse circulation.

The most recent piece, "How Women Fall into America's White Power Movement," outlines the stories of Samantha and two other women radicalized into Identity Europa. One unnamed woman who joined Identity Europa then started dating a man in the group noted: "her boyfriend's view was 'Women deserve to be subjugated. Women deserve to be humiliated. Women deserve to be raped. Women deserve to be impregnated.' It wasn't a joke. ... I can't believe I supported that stuff'" but "'I thought I was trash, so I didn't mind when they talked about women being dogs, worthless" (Reeve "Fall"). This woman's comment highlights how affective attachments to gender – even negative attachments – can be used to engage people.

Each of these individuals, who likely never met either off or online, shares an associational relation as members of a public predicated on their attention to and participation in the circulation of discourses, texts, and things tied to right-wing and male supremacist ideology. Their public-ness is intimate given the sensibility of a shared experience – a common history of oppression as whites / males – which is expressed through grievances framed as precarity (story one – accusation of sexual harassment, story 2 – troubled past and difficulty relating to women) or nostalgia (story three – the promise of family and safety). The ability to analyze these three stories across a single analytic frame shows a variety of ways people are radicalized into right-wing extremism through gender as a point of affective attachment. Moreover, the stories' details showcase multiple forms of offline / online integration dependent on individual's access to and relationship with platforms, formal groups, and their personal characteristics such as age and location. In the case of current expressions of right-wing extremism and increasingly violent related forms of extremism such as male supremacist extremism, there are multiple negative effects of this disconnected approach to offline and online practices. These include a lack of focus on and misunderstanding of non-violent extremist participation as action that supports and bolsters violent actors (Szmania and Fincher 122) and processes of ideological transfer between multiple forms of right-wing extremism and externally with other forms of extremism (Mattheis "Digital Hate"). This brief analysis offers an example of the insights that an analytic rooted in publics theory can provide. It also points to the potential for better understanding contemporary practices of extremism through new conceptualizations of integrated offline / online practices. While a publics approach does not solve all the extant problems of definition or conceptualization – particularly those related to the limitations of policy and law in respect to integrated off / online practice – it can help build a case for why policy and law must address the issue differently. For practitioners in the prevention and deradicalization arenas, this analysis and conceptualization hopefully offers insights that can support existing approaches and assist in formulating productive new approaches to your practice.

[6] Stefan Molyneux has since migrated to the Alt-Right as he has incorporated "race realism" into his Manosphere gendered ideology (Roose, Futrelle).

AUTHOR

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"PINE TREE" TWITTER AND THE SHIFTING IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ECO-EXTREMISM

BY BRIAN HUGHES

Does environmentalism – and by implication its radical core and extremist fringes – "belong" to the political left or to the right? This is a question whose answer is both historically and culturally contingent. Past instantiations of environmental politics have been claimed by both left and right. Today, as climate shocks resound more loudly with each passing day, we are on the cusp of a new revolution in the political orientation of environmentalist radicalism. The far right has rediscovered ecology. Eco-fascism is emerging at both the highest levels of state and the lowest reaches of the political underworld. However, this may be only part of a much larger, more ideologically complex, emerging extremist threat. The climate crisis—and the crisis of global financial capitalism from which it is inextricable—may yet be driving a realignment of extremist environmental politics. An exploratory analysis of radical environmentalist discourse on the Twitter platform reveals the emergence of an ecological extremism that confounds contemporary understandings of left, right, authoritarian and liberal. If this represents the future of eco-extremism, it may be necessary for researchers and practitioners to reorient the frameworks that guide their assessment of emerging risks.

The history of conservation, and of connections between environmentalism and extremist ideology, demonstrates that the protection and restoration of wild spaces (or at least their social imaginary) has been fluid across left and right. Fascism, "was ecology-minded long before socialism" (Coren, 1995, p. 45). German National Socialism, for example, incorporated existing threads of German conservationism into the Nazi project, in "a volatile admixture of primeval Teutonic nature mysticism, pseudo-scientific ecology, irrationalist anti-humanism, and a mythology of racial salvation through a return to the land" (Biehl, 1995, p. 14). In the United States (where my research is focused), mid-century environmental issues enjoyed a mainstream bipartisan consensus (Allitt, 2014) until the 1980s, when the American conservative movement abandoned ecology in response to "the Republican Party's increasing ties with resource-based industries" (Farber, 2017, p. 1009). Roughly contemporaneous is the emergence of European left-liberal Green parties with their "ecologically oriented disposition…and a close link to the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s" (Burchell, 2002, p. 1).

In the final decades of the 20th Century, environmental radicalism in the Anglosphere and much of the West belonged to the far left. The Radical Environmentalist and Animal Rights (REAR) movement was epitomized by groups like the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Earth Liberation Front (ELF), Greenpeace, Earth First!, and others. These groups framed their ac-

tivities – both legal and criminal – through a politics of liberation (Hirsch-Hoefler & Mudde, 2014), which was “contextualized within larger socio-political, radical-left ideologies and ambitions, typically Marxism, communism, anarchism, or anti-industrial capitalism” (Pieslak, 2015, p. 151). This “red and black” eco-radicalism came under severe scrutiny at the height of the Global War on Terror, and in the United States was aggressively pursued and prosecuted under post 9/11 terrorism statutes (Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 2006).

With the far-left REAR movement broken apart by federal prosecution, and with environmental shocks associated with global climate change, a new, far right environmental extremism is emerging today. In March 2019, the Christchurch Mosque shooter’s manifesto proclaimed its author an “ecofascist” (Tarrant, 2019, p. 17) and announced that “there is no nationalism without environmentalism…There is no traditionalism without environmentalism” (2019, p. 38). Groups such as Atomwaffen Division, The Base, the English group National Action, and other white supremacist militia groups, ”frame the urban and industrial aspects of modernity as an attack on the white race, and present Jews and immigrants as parasites and invaders” (Lawrence, 2019). Their communication materials make frequent references to a dreamed-of societal apocalypse, brought on in part through environmental degradation. In the event of such a collapse, these groups aim to seize power and institute their own harsh visions of social order and racial purity wherein “a sacred mission to defend one’s spiritual home…[turns] mass murderers into martyrs for a “higher” purpose” (ibid). In only a few years, these examples have been marked by violence (Miller-Idriss, 2019) and at least five definitively linked murders in the U.S. alone (Ware, 2019). Clearly, one should take seriously the birth of this new far right eco-extremism. Groups such as these represent an underworld of eco-fascism. Yet there is a parallel environmentalism of the far right emerging within the right-populist wave that still convulses Europe, the U.S. and Australia. Climate change denialism is increasingly untenable to all but the most motivated fantasists. Right-wing movements’ rhetoric and policy is evolving in response, and has begun to link the looming specter of environmental shocks to more perennial far-right concerns. For example, “in many European countries, where younger activists within far-right parties – those who will have to live with the worsening effects of climate change – are agitating to cut into green parties’ monopoly of the issue by tying it to their anti-migrant appeals” (Abegglen, 2019). The European refugee crisis and U.S. immigration policy (both of which redound partly to climate issues) have evoked in the far-right political imagination “a new socio-technical machine, a kind of Fortress Eco-Nationalism…in which either the wealthy or the entire population of the wealthy states will laager up behind militarized seawalls and sea-lanes…[and] a militarized approach to socio-economic transformation” (Ajl, 2019).

Meme

The growing salience of eco-fascism as a mainstream political potential should not be divorced from the clandestine terror of groups like National Action and Atomwaffen. As climate crisis veers closer to climate catastrophe, and eco-authoritarianism moves from the realm of the potential to that of the real, the two movements may enjoy a mutually enhancing relationship. As Belew notes, “vigilantism should be understood as violence that serve[s] to constitute, shore up, and enforce systemic power” (2018, p. 108). On the one hand, extralegal militias routinely execute violence on behalf of sympathetic states. On the other, the very presence of guerilla eco-fascist groups renders state eco-fascism more plausible, and perhaps desirable to some, as an ordered alternative.

However, the appearance of these deadly, environmentally aligned groups, is only one facet of a far more diverse and complex emerging eco-extremism. While at the moment, far-right environmentalism is ascendant, there is good reason to anticipate that this will not always be the case. As suggested in the study below, the very foundations of future eco-extremism could upset the today’s accepted orientations of Left and Right, liberal authoritarian.

Pine Tree Twitter and a Breakdown in Ideological Consistency

The following qualitative analysis of so-called Pine Tree Twitter was undertaken in the summer of 2019, in order to understand emerging discourses of 21st Century eco-radicalism. Pine Tree Twitter is a social media discourse of ecofascists, neo-luddites, radical accelerationists, decelerationists, and more (Hanrahan, 2018). These individuals often identify themselves to one another by placing a Pine Tree emoji in their names or bios. In researching these groups’ shared com-

munication, this study uncovered a trove of idiosyncratic ideologies and microcultures. Those idiosyncrasies suggest that the emerging foundations of eco-radicalism may not easily map onto our conventional understandings of the political left and right.

It must be noted that the use of Twitter here is merely a sampling strategy. There is no reason to think that Pine Tree Twitter represents the totality of emerging eco-extremism. Indeed, the most troubling far-right apocalypticism—such as that of Atomwaffen, National Action, the Base, and others—takes place today on encrypted messaging applications (Owen, 2019). But neither is Pine Tree Twitter an insignificant space in eco-radical discourse. While today's vanguard of eco-fascism may best be observed on platforms such as Telegram, Pine Tree Twitter represents the possible bud of a future eco-radical growth—one which has yet to emerge.

To obtain this study's sample, a Twitter search was conducted for accounts with the hashtag #PineTreeGang in their bios. This method resulted in two seed accounts, which were used as the core of a two-round snowball sample. The profiles of every follower and followee of these seed accounts were analyzed. Any accounts displaying a pine tree emoji in their name or bio were added to a list of possible Pine Tree Twitter accounts. This process was then repeated for the followers and followees of every account obtained in the first snowball round. Finally, every account was scrutinized for environmental and politically radical content, so as to eliminate false positives. In the end, this method obtained 985 individually confirmed Pine Tree Twitter accounts. 100 of these were randomly sampled for examination and preliminary coding development. These are the findings of that pilot study.

For the purposes of coding, accounts were analyzed to identify salient ideological tendencies and cultural signifiers. It was noted when accounts expressed sentiments reflecting the following ideological tendencies: (1) White supremacism or ethno-nationalism; (2) Anti-Semitism; (3) Support for far-right populist politics; (4) Criticism of capitalism; (5) Social Progressivism; (6) Anti-Interventionism or anti-Imperialism. Most accounts sampled exhibited more than one ideological tendency.

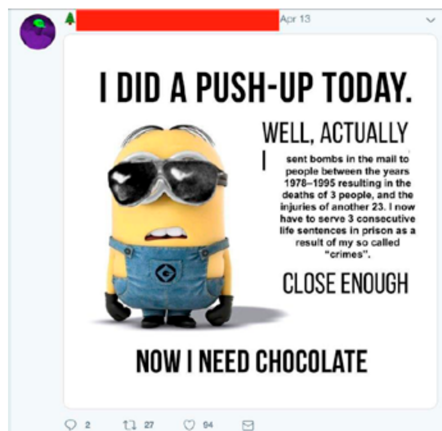
A collection of micro-cultures also seemed to exist within Pine Tree Twitter. These were coded according to the following categories: (1) "Skullmasks," that is, accounts espousing the visual grammar or rhetoric of clandestine eco-fascist groups; (2) "Ted Gang," that is, accounts

Meme

that idolize the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski; (3) Pagan, heathen, or occultist; (4) Christian Orthodoxy, such as Traditionalist Catholicism or Eastern Rite; (5) "channers," that is, accounts making use of the argot and iconography of the 4chan and 8chan image boards. Many accounts identified themselves with more than one such micro-culture.

Using those ideological and cultural codes, these accounts were then coded according to political scientist Corey Robin's theory of ideological difference between the politics of Left and Right. In his book The Reactionary Mind, Robin states that the key difference between the political Left and Right is in their treatment of (in his words) regimes of power. The Right, he says, is concerned with preserving and expanding the private regime of power. It will "cede the field of the public, if [it] must, but stand fast in private. [It will] allow men and women to become democratic citizens of the state; [but] make sure they remain feudal subjects in the family, the factory, the field. The priority of conservative political argument has been the maintenance of private regimes of power" (Robin, 2017, p. 15). This is what unites libertarians, fascists, and monarchists alike, the belief that power is to be sorted out among an elite through mechanisms of the market, heredity, strength of will, or some other method. The Left, by contrast, is characterized by its belief in a public regime of power, "not a sacrifice of freedom for the sake of equality, but an extension of freedom from the few

Comments



Meme

to the many" (Robin, 2017, p. 9). This is the common thread linking pluralist democracy, anarcho-syndicalism, and the theoretical telos of Marx: the conviction that power is to be distributed evenly and exercised in the interest of human emancipation. In some cases, of course, that end is seen to justify any necessary means.

This binary is complicated and perhaps stretched to the breaking point when applied to Pine Tree Twitter. The following findings indicate how.

Findings

A significant percentage of sampled accounts only expressed run-of-the-mill far-right positions. Roughly one-third of the sample displayed strong white supremacist, ethno-nationalist or anti-semitic sentiments; generally, if an account expressed one of those positions, it also expressed the other two. Many of this far right segment also expressed support for populist right politics, and conversely most supporters of populist projects also expressed white supremacist, ethno-nationalist, or antisemitic ideology. Interestingly, very few of these racist and/or populist accounts expressed much interest in ecology. They made few, if any, comments on environmental issues, and rarely shared imagery of wild nature (a common practice across the rest of Pine Tree Twitter). The absence of ecological content in these far right accounts might not be shocking. There is a "fashion cycle" to the online far-right. It's a means of signaling status in a digital subculture that holds "normies" in contempt (Nagle, 2017). And Pine Tree seemed to be the preferred digital fashion statement of 2018-19.

Interestingly, however, these otherwise run-of-the-mill far right accounts were distributed evenly across Robin's division of power regimes. That is, a roughly equal number of white supremacist, ethno-nationalist, antisemitic, and populist accounts expressed preference for the freedom and equality of the public regime of power as for the hierarchy and micro-feudalism of the private regime of power. Accounts that exhibited interest and support for populist political projects tended to reflect Cas Mudde's definition of populism as "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2015). However, among Pine Tree Twitter accounts, these populist tendencies tended not to consolidate this desire in the figure of a strong leader (e.g. Trump, Orban, etc.).

Similarly, accounts expressing tendencies toward white supremacist collectivism were coded as preferring the public regime of power. In this case, while the public is defined racially, individual interest and unitary authority are otherwise subordinate to the racial collective. This contrasts with the classic fascist preference for a strong, authoritarian, executive (Paxton, 2004). While this racist, antisemitic, populist one-third of Pine Tree Twitter demonstrates questionable ecological bona fides, it nevertheless betrays fundamental preferences that are otherwise typically associated with the Left.

In contrast to the abundance of accounts expressing these far right positions, very few – less than 10% of the entire sample– expressed sentiments belonging to the category of standard liberal social progressivism. Among these, tolerance toward LGBTQ interests was the dominant theme. Criticism of capitalism, on the other hand, was far more pronounced in the sample. It appeared across roughly one-third of all accounts sampled. Of this third, roughly 40% were either white supremacist, ethno-nationalist and/or antisemitic. In accounts that were critical of capitalism—and for which the public/private regime preference could be deter-

Retweets

Meme

mined—a preference for public regimes of power outweighed the private by more than 3:1.

Only 15% of Pine Tree Twitter could be coded as truly anarcho-primitivist, or “Ted Gang” (taking Kaczynski as a role model). Ted Gang tended not to be particularly left or right-wing. Only 12% of “Ted Gang” accounts exhibited any white supremacist or antisemitic sentiment. Ted Gang accounts’ affiliation with other ideological and identity codes was sparse and scattered. These accounts were truly Kaczynski-esque, in that they were misanthropic, nature-loving, non-joiner types. However, if the number of “skullmask” accounts were added to those Ted Gang accounts, then support for violent primitivism overall would rise to nearly a quarter of the entire sample. Interestingly, this would also lower the overall ratio of public-to-private power preference across the board. In other words, the inclusion of clandestine eco-fascists nudges the preferences of primitivist Pine Tree Twitter yet further toward Robin’s traditionally left-wing public regime of power. This is doubly interesting, since the political philosophy articulated in *Industrial Society* and its Future (the so-called “Unabomber manifesto”) is broadly anarcho-libertarian—advocating for the smallest possible regimes of power, located in the atomized individual. Under conventional understandings of Left and Right, one might expect the opposite outcome.

How to account for such surprises and seeming contradictions? One answer may be found in a critique of liberalism. Across Pine Tree Twitter, the features of liberalism are routinely diagnosed as afflictions on human society and the earth at large. Individual rights, secularism, consent of the governed, and capitalism – Pine Tree Twitter exhibits a fierce hostility to all of these values. A tentative conclusion might even propose that anti-liberalism is the primary unifying tenant of Pine Tree Twitter. The question remains, however: Why should this anti-liberalism align with an environmental politics that seems to confound divisions of Left and Right, even as it incorporates the darkest ambitions of fascist terror? The answer to that question might yet be found in Pine Tree Twitter’s close proximity to the diverse, complex, and frequently misunderstood discourses of accelerationism.

Acceleratonism:

In today’s extremism and terrorism studies circles, the term “accelerationism” is often treated as synonymous with eco-fascist militia groups such as Atomwaffen, National Action, the Base, and others, who “believe that violence, depravity and degeneracy are the only sure way to establish order in their dystopian and apocalyptic vision of the world” (SPLC, 2018) and “have assigned [the term] to their desire to hasten the collapse of society as we know it” (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). And while these types should certainly remain a pressing concern in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism, they do not represent the totality of accelerationist thought. The term “accelerationism” can refer to a broad and eclectic field of intellectually challenging philosophies – from cybernetic communists to radical gender abolitionists – most of whom repudiate racism and violence. And while one-third of Pine Tree Twitter accounts sampled were accelerationist in the eco-fascist sense articulated by the ADL and SPLC, there were an additional 161 self-identified acceler-

Green nationalism is the only true nationalism

There is no Conservatism without nature, there is no nationalism without environmentalism, the natural environment of our lands shaped us just as we shaped it. We were born from our lands and our own culture was molded by these same lands .The protection and preservation of these lands is of the same importance as the protection and preservation of our own ideals and beliefs.

For too long we have allowed the left to co-opt the environmentalist movement to serve their own needs. The left has controlled all discussion regarding environmental preservation whilst simultaneously presiding over the continued destruction of the natural environment itself through mass immigration and uncontrolled urbanization, whilst offering no true solution to either issue.

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Tarrant’s Manifesto

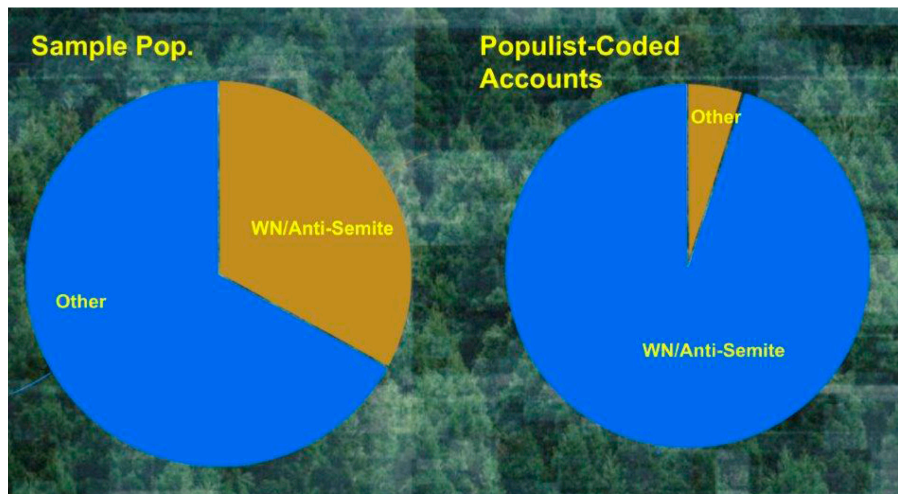
ationist accounts linked by one degree (edge) to the Pine Tree Twitter network. These did not fit the ADL and SPLC’s definition of accelerationism as far-right apocalypticism.

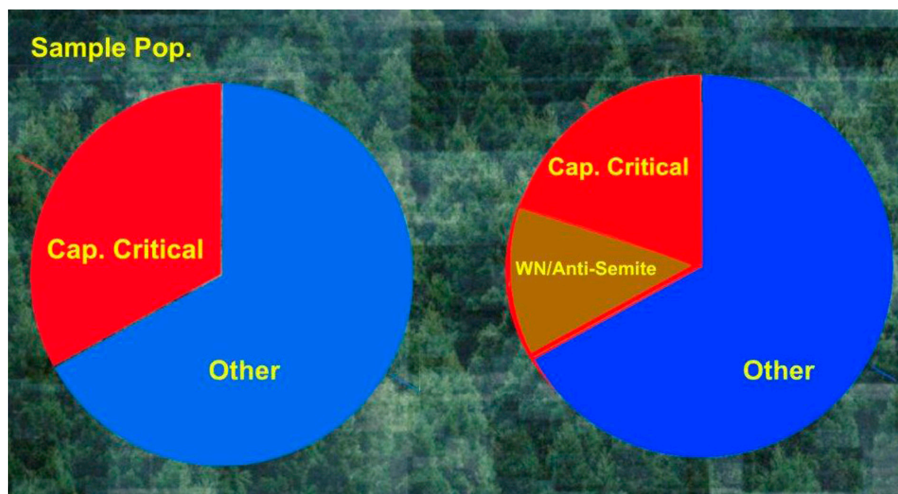
It can be difficult, if not inherently misleading, to explain connections between the vast range of “accelerationisms” currently in existence. As will be discussed below, most “accelerationisms” share little pedigree as intellectual or social movements. Nevertheless, ideas and social movement derive their significance from the objective material conditions out of which they emerge. When several discourses share key theoretical propositions, are found in a single discursive cluster, and share a name, it is fair to speculate on their common material origins.

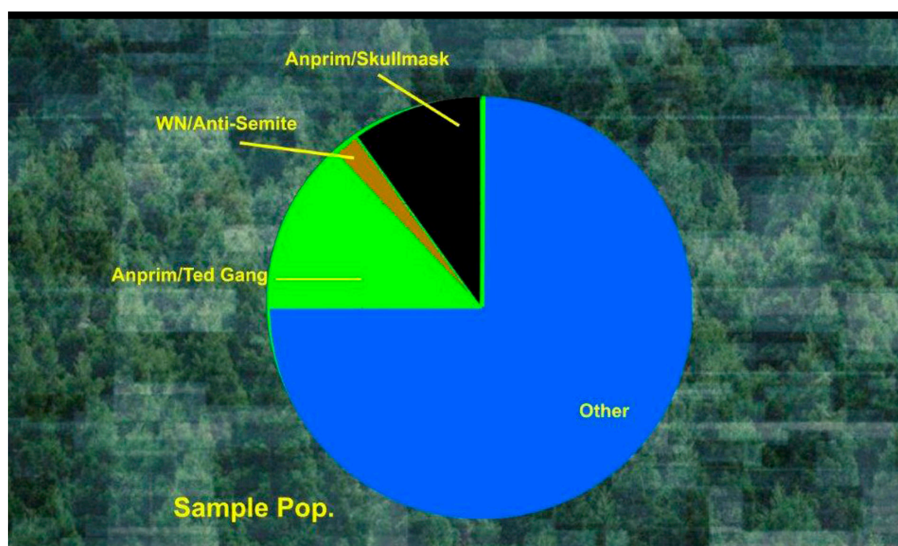
Ideologically, what all accelerationist positions share in common is an ardent desire for the collapse of the current order and the emergence of new political economy – if not a new ontology – for humankind. Inquiry into the roots and implications of the entire range of accelerationist discourse yields a rich, suggestive answer to the puzzles posed by Pine Tree Twitter’s political ambiguity. These “missing pieces” suggest a shared motive and mainspring: an aesthetic, philosophical, and political reaction to the expansive, extractive logic of contemporary capital, its dehumanizing implementations of technology, widespread human alienation and anomie – and their disastrous effects on the ecosystem. One must understand the breadth of accelerationist thought in order both to distinguish between genuine terrorist risk and its distant philosophical correlates, and to recognize the conditions of culture and political economy that motivate them all.

For the purposes of a crude taxonomy, the range of accelerationist discourse may be divided between right-wing accelerationism (r/acc), left-wing accelerationism (l/acc), and “unconditional” (that is, politically unaligned) accelerationism (u/acc).

Right-wing accelerationism (r/acc) generally refers to the beliefs that the progress of global capitalism will eventuate a return to some hierarchical social arrangement, whether might-makes-right ecofascism, or some return to religious empire. It includes eco-fascists, tech-worshipping neo-reactionaries, and elements of Christian Orthodox Pine Tree Twitter. These groups occasionally (but not always) share philosophical or organizational pedigrees.







Ideology-coded accounts

Naturally, the eco-fascists already discussed should be considered right-wing accelerationists. However, right accelerationism should also include the speculative philosophies of Nick Land (Land, 2018) and some of his intellectual progeny. Land’s thought bears little resemblance to that of eco-fascist militias, but he is nevertheless

unambiguously an accelerationist and of the right. Land posits that the functions of capital increasingly run along “a positive feedback circuit, within which commercialization and industrialization mutually excite each other in a runaway process… As the circuit is incrementally closed, or intensified, it exhibits ever greater autonomy, or automation” (Land, 2017). The telos of this process is in the total capture of humanity by capital. This is far stranger than any vulgar impulse to overthrow a government. In a kind of demonic inversion of “singularity” utopianism, capital itself is rendered the subject of history, while humanity is reduced to an epiphenomenon. While Land has made weak protestations to the contrary, his philosophy should be considered right-wing in that it observes capital-in-itself as the ultimate private regime of power—a singular and self-justifying elemental force of inhuman power and human unfreedom. Land is a central voice in several modalities of far right ideology, including neo-reaction (NRx) and the “dark enlightenment.

By contrast, left accelerationism (l/acc) refers to the belief that global capitalism will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, and that its end should be hastened so that a liberatory politics can emerge. Left accelerationism is as old Marx’s fusion of Hegelian dialectics and Feuerbach’s materialism. Marx writes in On the Question of Free Trade that “the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favor of free trade” (Marx, 1848). While this fragment does not characterize Marx’s own strategic orientation, it captures the historical materialist mechanics shaping Marxist accelerationism today. Contemporary thinkers like Snircek and Williams have given firmer shape to this orientation, envisioning a future of cybernetic automation and equality (Srnicek & Williams, 2015). While these authors present their works in conversation with Land’s, the two camps generally repudiate one another.

In a similar vein, left acceleration also includes radical ontologies such as Donna Haraway’s cyborg feminism and Helen Hester’s xenofeminism, which seek to reimagine gender through human-machine symbiosis (Haraway, 1991; Hester, 2018). L/acc includes “blaccelerationist” thinkers like Aria Dean and Hamishi Farah, who argue that “blackness is always already accelerationist” since blackness itself was founded in slavery’s fusion of human and capital (Dean, 2017). Running throughout these thinkers is the hope that contradictions inherent to the capitalist system, combined with that system’s dynamic of technological innovation, will lead to the undoing of oppressive orders while simultaneously tripping a boundary into radical new modes of social – and even corporeal – organization.

Unconditional accelerationism (u/acc) refers to acceleration for its own sake—whether as a teleological inevitability (à la Land) or in a spirit of Promethean exploration. It is a radically amoral body of thought, and at times can seem (for better or worse) like the Freudian death drive articulated through a spirit of posthuman scientific and ontological exploration. Unconditional accelerationism has given birth to some fascinating and ideologically uncategorizable positions. As one blogger put it: “while left-accelerationism (L/ACC) and right-accelerationism (R/ACC) seek to recompose or reterritorialize Leviathan in accordance with each of their own political theologies, U/ACC charts a course outwards” (Berger, 2017). It is as much an aesthetic as a mode of thinking. It is “nothing more than a view of modernity — the very feeling of modernity, even” (xenogothic, 2019). As a body of thought, unconditional accelerationism owes a significant debt to Land’s philosophy—and in fact, Land himself has attempted to place his legacy with unconditional accelerationist thought. However, due to its aestheticization, eclecticism, and frequent flights into science fiction, u/acc is less a political philosophy than a broad gestalt with diverse political implications.

Again, it would be misleading to look for common pedigree across every tendency of the full accelerationist discourse. It is unlikely that National Action’s ideologues have read Marx’s Notes on Free Trade—and still less likely that the Laboria Cuboniks xenofeminist collective reads Siege. Rather, the force that unites the full range of accelerationist discourse with Pine Tree Twitter’s emerging eco-radicalism lies in the tangible, material experience of life under global capitalism in the age of eco-crisis. The baffling politics of Pine Tree Twitter, like philosophical accelerationism’s strange teleologies, or the violent atrocities of eco-fascist terrorism, all scan the horizon for a future beyond techno-capital’s calamitous success.

As Frederic Jameson put it: “Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world” (Jameson, 2003). This is precisely what is undertaken by philosophical accelerationists, eco-fascist terrorists, and the ambiguous politics of Pine Tree Twitter. All are essentially displacements of the human response to the “forward and upward” frenzy of capital logic, pushed to a breaking point in our current moment of ecological crisis (and perhaps ultimately collapse). They are the diverse articulations of the same sense of panic that suffuses a present day in which glaciers disappear overnight, insect populations collapse, oceans deoxygenate—and yet carbon emissions continue to soar. While some accelerationists and eco-radicals follow this impetus into bigoted violence, others build aestheticized philosophical dreamscapes. But each does so in the desperate hope that they can somehow foresee—if not bring about—the end of system that seems to them increasingly incapable of reforming itself. Is it any wonder that they follow each other on Twitter?

Conclusion: Emerging Risks

A better understanding of the full accelerationist discourse, along with this study into Pine Tree Twitter, can help to make sense of emerging extremist risks in an age of increasing environmental shocks. Throughout the process of this study, it often seemed as though one could only attempt to understand these ambiguous ideological positions through conventional

political frames, rather than taking them fully on their own terms. Perhaps the very qualitative categories currently available do not fully capture whatever new ideological mixtures are to be found in Pine Tree Twitter.

The past few decades' extremism has been structured around questions that depend on the assumption of the Westphalian nation state—its relation to race and ethnicity, immigration, and identity. It is also structured by a struggle over the fruits and follies of global capitalism, who will reap its benefits and who will constitute its exploited pool of labor. That is changing with the approach of climate catastrophe. Just what shape this change will take in the future, and how it will structure extremisms and terrorisms to come, is still unclear. However, as we see in the ambiguous politics of Pine Tree Twitter, it will likely involve a dissolution and reorganization of old ideological categories. And as suggested is the survey of accelerationist discourse, this flight from old ideological and cultural formations will be driven by the very conditions which produced the ecological crisis in the first place.

What emerges in the future will likely retain many trace qualities of today's extremist tendencies, but new priorities are sure to emerge. We need to be prepared to understand them, even if—or especially because—our current categories may not always suffice. The study and taxonomy provided in this paper will hopefully offer a step toward that understanding.

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PATHWAYS TO VIOLENCE: A CULTIC STUDIES PERSPECTIVE [1]

BY MICHAEL D. LANGONE

This article applies a cultic studies perspective to the problems posed by extremist violence. The paper (a) describes the conversion process and how this process can lead some individuals down a pathway to violence; (b) argues that a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West is by no means inevitable and that advocacy of the clash-of-civiliza-tions view risks becoming a self-fulfilling alarmism; (c) proposes that the respectful "deep communication" of the psychother-apeutic process is vital to communication across worldviews; and (d) offers action recommendations in the areas of prevention, assistance, law enforcement, and research.

In the summer of 2006, British counter-terrorism officials foiled a plot to blow up airliners. Among the many news stories was that of a British Muslim woman who planned to use her baby to get by security and blow up an airliner with liquid explosive in her baby's bottle. Newscasters and viewers were shocked and bewildered. How could any mother do such a thing?

People asked the same question in 1978 after the mass suicides/murders in Jonestown, Guyana of People's Temple members, led by Jim Jones. Among the nearly 1,000 bodies authorities found in the jungle of Guyana were more than 276 children (Singer, 2003). Many of these children died from poison that their own mothers administered. "I can't believe they poisoned their own babies!" was an anguished cry heard again and again.

Twenty-eight years separate these two events. During this time period the world witnessed many horribly destructive events perpetrated by terrorists and cultists, including but by no means limited to the Jonestown suicide/murders; Aum Shinrikyo's gas attack on the Tokyo subway; the Solar Temple murders; the Salmonella poisoning of residents of Antelope, Oregon by members of the Rajneesh group; the first World Trade Center bombing; the terror attacks in Bali, Madrid, Beslan, and London; and, of course, 9/11 as well as recent terror attacks on European soil such as the Bataclan shooting in November 2015. Less known in the West, but also horribly destructive are the terror attacks against Muslim populations, many of which involved hundreds of deaths.

When people try to understand the motives for such seemingly incomprehensible violence, they usually begin, as Gomez (2006) says about terrorist violence, "with our reaction to the terrorist act itself." Parents tend to do the same when confronted with a child's cult involvement, especially one that includes sudden changes of behavior. In such circumstances, parents of cultists and observers of "unbelievable" terrorist acts will often use the term "brainwashing" in their attempts to understand events that seem to defy explanation. Mutch (2006), for example, cites Muslim parents and officials who use "brainwashing" in reference to certain Muslim extremists. In the popular mind, "brainwashing" is seen as a powerful and mysterious process or "force" that moves people out of the zone of the understandable into the zone of the inexplicable. But when used in this way, the term merely restates our lack of understanding in a way that comforts us with the illusion of an explanation. Other cognitively comforting labels can provide a similar illusion. Some individuals, for example, have said that terrorists commit barbaric acts of violence because they are "evil." They may indeed be construed as evil but tagging that label on them provides no more explanatory power than saying, "Cancer kills people because it is a horrible disease." Labels used in this way function as "thought-terminating clichés" (Lifton, 1961) that provide the illusion of understanding when one is confronted by a mystifying phenomenon.

By no means does this suggest that concepts such as "brainwashing" or "evil" are meaningless or irrelevant to understanding how seemingly normal people can change in ways that lead them to commit unspeakable acts of violence. However, such concepts are misused when they function as labels designed to lock people into their own worldviews instead of helping them understand how other individuals can live according to very different and sometimes incompatible worldviews. Such understanding requires that we see the world as others see it, even though their worldview may be alien, even repugnant, to us. Seeing the world through "alien" eyes requires a temporary suspension of belief in our own fundamental assumptions about life, an action that can be frightening as well as cognitively challenging. If we lack the courage and skill to penetrate these "alien" systems of thought and value, we cannot understand them and, therefore, our responses to them will forever remain uninformed.

Such courage and skill are required to understand the seemingly inexplicable acts of violence associated with the Jihadist terrorism that so preoccupies us today. Although "jihad" can refer to "an individual's striving for spiritual self-perfection," in the context of violence and terrorism, the term refers to a "Muslim holy war or spiritual struggle against infidels" (answers.com definition), the definition used in this paper.

Though my focus here is Jihadist violence, the perspective I advance may also be applied to violence in other areas, e.g., white supremacist violence.

[1] This contribution is an updated version of "Responding to Jihadism: A Cultic Studies Perspective," published in Cultic Studies Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2006, pages 268-306. Major sections of the current article are reprinted with permission of International Cultic Studies Association.

Cultic studies experts can contribute to the international conversation about Jihadism because they have experience in understanding and responding constructively to the large variety of "alien" systems of thought and value observed in cultic organizations. Although much ambiguity surrounds the term "cult" (see Rosedale & Langone, Internet; Langone, Internet), it is frequently associated with those groups that appear to exercise high levels of influence and control over their followers in order to induce them to serve the goals and needs of the groups' leaders. Some terrorist groups exhibit such dynamics of influence and control.

In this essay, I will apply a cultic studies perspective to the phenomena of Jihadism. I will examine the following questions:
1. Why do seemingly normal, average people join extremist or other socially deviant organizations?
2. What factors can lead group members down a pathway to violence?
3. How can a cultic studies perspective contribute to attempts to counter violent Jihadism?

This essay makes no claim to be the definitive analysis of the subject. It is one of several articles on terrorism that have appeared in cultic studies journals (Centner, 2002; Centner, 2003; Dole, 2006; Gomez, 2006; Mansfield, 2003; Micewski, 2006; Morehead, 2002; Mutch, 2006; Stahelski, 2005). The essay will clarify the points of intersection of Jihadist terrorism and cultic studies to make future research and action endeavors more meaningful to experts outside the cultic studies field than has been the case thus far. In so doing, I hope to enhance dialogue among experts in terrorism, Islamic studies, and cultic studies.

Why do seemingly normal, average people join extremist or other socially deviant organizations?

Conversion

Elsewhere (Langone, 1996) I have discussed three models of conversion to cultic groups:
1. The deliberative model (i.e., what a person thinks about a group; this model is often favored by sociologists, clergy, and religious studies scholars);
2. The psychodynamic model (i.e., what a group does for a person, especially in terms of meeting psychological needs about which he/she might have limited awareness; this model is often favored by psychodynamically oriented therapists);
3. The thought reform model (i.e., what a group does to a person—the social-psychological dynamics of influence and control; this model is often favored by cult critics).

Although I separate these models for purposes of explanation, in practice probably all three models are relevant to varying degrees for almost all conversions. Those observers who are rigidly partial to one or another of the models will, in my opinion, have difficulty gaining a well-rounded picture of a conversion.

I think it is useful to divide the conversion process into three phases, each of which involves the interaction of variables within the person and within the environment:
1. attraction
2. conversion proper
3. acculturation

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many college-age youths were attracted to cultic groups. The highly manipulative Moonie (i.e., Unification Church) recruitment of college students was especially noteworthy because nearly one-half of the people entering the cult-watch network were concerned about the Moonies (Conway, Siegelman, Carmichael, & Coggins, 1986). For this reason, many cult critics tended at that time to emphasize the role of deceptive, manipulative, even orchestrated recruitment tactics, which were so conspicuous at Moonie recruitment centers in the United States. However, as time passed and Moonie recruitment slowed to a trickle, workers in the field began to appreciate more that there were many paths into cultic groups, some more dependent upon environmental pressures, others more dependent upon personal needs or interests of the recruits. As Zablocki (1998) pointed out, the "brainwashing" frequently associated with cultic groups refers more to the difficulty in getting out (what Zablocki calls "exit costs") than to the way people get in. Although highly manipulative recruitment into cultic groups certainly still occurs, the interaction of cultural factors with personal needs, interests, and goals of potential recruits must be examined to understand the attraction phase of cult conversion. This interaction is important, for example, in some conversions to cultic Christian groups, which appear to attract people already operating within a Christian worldview. I suspect that a similar attraction exists in the movement of some Muslim youth from mainstream to extremist groups.

Whether persons are recruited into or attracted to a group, they may still undergo a profound change in worldview. "Conversion" refers to the process—sometimes sudden, sometimes gradual—whereby persons come to accept a worldview different in fundamental ways from that which they formerly held. Conversion is often associated with, if not dependent upon, a powerful inner experience, which is typically given a spiritual interpretation (Langone, 2003). Sometimes these experiences may arise spontaneously. For example, a meditator in a monistic Hindu tradition may suddenly experience a shift to an alternate state of consciousness, which he/she interprets—sometimes under the manipulative guidance of group members or a guru—as a mystical experience of the godhead to which the tradition refers. Another example: A disconsolate Christian, Muslim, or Jew who seeks comfort by reading Holy Scripture may stumble upon a verse that dispels the confusion in his or her troubled soul, an experience that engenders a sense of special destiny and connection to God. Sometimes powerful inner experiences can be engineered. The magician James Randi (1987), for example, has exposed several faith-healing charlatans who have succeeded in tricking thousands of people into feeling a powerful "presence of God" as they witness what they falsely believe to be "miracles." Stories of lecherous "perfect masters" supposedly leading their disciples to advanced states of spiritual experience in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions are common (Garden, 2003; Hamacher, 2013; Rinpoche, 1992). And the large group awareness training (LGAT) movement (Hunter, 2017; Langone, 1989) has given millions of persons a powerful "spiritual" high during an expensive weekend of "consciousness raising" exercises.

The world's mainstream religious traditions have long recognized the existence of charlatans, manipulated conversions, and private "revelations"—that is, the need to separate the "wheat from the tares" (Vere,

2005). Because people can be fooled, responsible religious authorities seek ways to sharpen their respective flock's capacity to discern wisely, to see the "wolf in sheep's clothing," to use a Christian metaphor. Most religions over the centuries have developed an institutional wisdom—perhaps expressed more in tradition and unwritten rules than in explicit warnings—regarding the lure of false prophets and spiritual arrogance. This institutional wisdom, which is woven into the authority structure of religious traditions, provides a safe zone for spiritual seekers.

When a powerful inner experience or other factor leads seekers away from the safety of a tradition's mainstream authorities, seekers might (a) come under the sway of a cult or sect, which may or may not be harmful to them; (b) enter a private, idiosyncratic spiritual world, which may be merely different or may be delusional; or (c) view their tradition from a vantage point that enriches the tradition (e.g., people recognized as saints or religious visionaries who have retreated so as to explore their inner vision, but who return with a mission or message that enlivens their tradition). The third option is quite rare, so movement away from the religious mainstream may entail an element of personal risk and may sometimes be personally destructive. This risk is probably magnified in modern, pluralistic societies because the mainstream religions have not had time to develop and teach discernment skills appropriate to the deep and rapid cultural changes that have occurred during the past few decades.

One might argue that the term "conversion" doesn't apply to movement from the mainstream to the extreme within a worldview—for example, within a religious tradition. Such change reflects, perhaps, a "diversion" within a tradition, rather than a "conversion," which involves a fundamental shift in one's outlook on self, world, and other. However, I believe that the incredulous, fearful reactions of parents, such as those Muslim and Christian parents alluded to above, testify to the radical nature and depth of change they observe in their children. Moreover, the benign "born again" experience of evangelical Christianity is often viewed as a genuine conversion, a radical shift in one's perceived relationship to God, even though the born-again individual may remain in the same religious tradition or even the same church. The worldview shift of a conversion that occurs within a tradition may be overlooked (except perhaps by family and other intimates of the convert) because the person still uses the same language and the same scripture. The meanings associated with the tradition's terminology and concepts, however, may change radically for the convert and may become intertwined with his or her psychological needs. Thus, a genuine worldview shift, a conversion, can occur even though on a superficial level little seems to have changed. For example, before being "born again" a member of a Christian church might say, "Jesus is my savior," many times. But after the "born-again" experience that same statement is pregnant with a depth and breadth of meaning and feeling that are completely new to the person. Such a born-again experience can occur within a mainstream Christian church or within a deviant, possibly harmful, sect or cult.

When conversion occurs across religious traditions, the depth and breadth of change is more conspicuous than conversion within a tradition because the convert typically takes on a new language and new rituals (e.g., a person raised Christian who converts to Vedanta, a monistic Hindu tradition). Because they are more conspicuous and deviate more from the norm, such cross-tradition conversions are probably more likely to elicit social concern, especially from religious authorities and families. Unfortunately, religious authorities might be less likely to recognize and become concerned about within-tradition conversions to extreme or potentially violent variants of the mainstream tradition. Or, if the religious authorities do recognize the risk, they may not know how to deal with it effectively or may be reluctant to criticize it.

After people experience the fundamental worldview shift of conversion, their behavior, thinking, and feelings will tend to accommodate to the fundamental assumptions of the new worldview because of the normal human tendency to seek consonance among one's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (see Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance—Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Moreover, as time passes and they experience daily life within their new worldview the converted become more comfortable in it (i.e., "practice makes perfect"). Other group members, sometimes without realizing it, provide rewards and punishments that tend to strengthen new converts' loyalty to the group. This is the "acculturation" phase of conversion.

Of course, the process of conversion and acculturation may occur with or without the manipulative, directive presence of a cultic group.

The term "backsliding" attests to the fact that conversions do not necessarily last, nor do they maintain their initial level of intensity. The seeker who fervently commits to a religious system might over time watch the fire within him turn to an ember or die. That is perhaps the reason why so many religions are social affairs. Seekers need the reinforcement of their fellows to maintain commitment as the fire of conversion cools. Moreover, the social bonds people form within an ashram, church, mosque, synagogue, temple, or other group over time provide new incentives to maintain the seeker's commitment to the group, incentives that may come to be more important than the conversion experience. For people who are born into a religious tradition and do not have the deepening experience of conversion, social bonds are probably the primary affiliation motive.

Leaving Groups

Backsliding, paradoxically, is probably more of a problem in high-control cultic groups than in mainstream traditions. Research (Barker, 1984; Wright, 1987) indicates that high turnover characterizes cultic groups. This is not surprising, given the tensions and conflicts that cultic groups tend to elicit. Because cultic groups are leader-centered and exist essentially to fulfill the goals of the leader, they tend to place high demands on members' time and energy. The group's idealistic ideology and a collection of manipulative techniques (e.g., guilt induction to persuade people to work harder) are used to manage the interpersonal conflicts that arise in the demanding environment (e.g., "God wants you to do this. Don't undermine the Body of Christ by being a factious man."). Because the group's ideology may have elements of magical thinking or may be based on an at best weakly coherent worldview (e.g., Christian white supremacists whose

racial views rest on a twisted interpretation of the Bible), the leader must make sure that members are not exposed to outside criticism of the group's worldview and do not have the time or mental energy to think independently and critically about inconsistencies that they might observe, especially inconsistencies concerning the leader's behavior. Hence, leaders tend to make sure that their followers are hyperbusy, obsessed with completing projects vital to the salvation of the world or some such cosmically important goal (Singer, 2003). Their exhausting participation in the group's "noble" efforts makes them feel part of an elite. The price they pay for the feeling of elitism is the suppression of their individuality, independence, and critical thinking.

The conflict between elitism and self-suppression led one ex-member of a group to call his cult a "prison of specialness." This conflict also helps explain why the concept of dissociation, of internal "splitting" of the self, resonates with so many ex-cult members. A high-demand, high-control group puts members at war with themselves. Eventually, this enduring inner conflict takes its toll and people leave their groups. Some leave feeling that they are failures for not having had the strength to endure. Others might defect because they are exposed to outside critical information, or they may share forbidden thoughts with an intimate, or they may no longer be able to overlook the leader's inconsistencies (Wright, 1987). As one ex-member put it: "The shelf on which I placed my rationalizations collapsed."

Why Conversion to Extremist Groups?

The preceding exposition sheds light, I hope, on the conversion process. It suggests that conversion to extremist or destructive groups is not that much different from conversion to benign or mainstream groups. Why, then, do some join benign groups while others join destructive groups, such as Aum Shinrikyo, which released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway in 1994?

Bad luck, in my opinion, has more to do with destructive conversions than is at first apparent. Many people, especially adolescents and young adults, go through life transitions or other difficulties that cause them to question the adequacy of the worldview that has steered their lives and conclude that their lives aren't working for them. Such distressed people may turn toward religion or some other cause as they seek a way out of their difficulties. Chance factors may determine which of the myriad of available groups gets their attention. One group member told me that he was browsing through the religion section of a library when a book fell off the shelf and hit him in the head. He began reading it, liked what the author said, and was captured by the idea that the book had fallen on his head because God wanted him to follow this guru (which he later did). Other people have joined groups because of chance encounters with recruiters on the street, or because a friend in a group said, "come and check us out," or because of a book, article, or Web site they stumbled across. Rarely is the choice of a group affiliation the result of diligent research and informed consideration of many alternatives. Since few groups present a negative face to prospective members, luck may determine whether a seeker enters a conversion pathway into a benign or a destructive group.

Cultural factors and trends might influence which groups or which types of groups a seeker is most likely to encounter. In the 1960s and early 1970s, for example, many young Americans searching for purpose and meaning were swept up in the revolutionary political fervor of the time, a fervor that was religious in form, even though it may have been secular in content. Most became involved in relatively benign organizations, while others got caught up in violent groups, such as the Symbionese Liberation Army, which kidnapped and indoctrinated heiress Patty Hearst. With the end of the Vietnam War, alternative political groups lost their appeal and spiritual groups became more prominent (Kent, 2001). Social commentators talked about the "Jesus Revolution" and young people "turning East" to refer to conversions to Christian and Hindu/Buddhist groups, respectively. Although the cultural climate does not determine what group a person will join, it can alter the probabilities about the kind of group he or she is likely to encounter and, hence, consider.

The personality, values, needs, and goals of seekers can also narrow the range of options to which seekers might remain open. Thus, a practicing Christian youth going through a troubled time may be open to groups that claim to be more "authentic" Christians than mainstream churches but be uninterested in guru or New Age groups. Similarly, a scientifically inclined atheist whose hallucinogenic drug experimentation opens him up to the existence of what D. H. Lawrence called "vast ranges of experience, like the humming of unseen harps, we know nothing of, within us" (from "Terra Incognita") may sneer at Christian proselytizers but listen attentively to people advocating a mystical Buddhism or monistic Hinduism.

The range of options to which people remain open can further narrow as a result of pathological psychological needs; for example, when "anger issues" incline seekers toward violence or paranoia concerning racial or ethnic minorities or nations. Using the psychodynamic model alluded to earlier, one could hypothesize that such individuals, by joining a violent group, receive not only social support for violent acts but religious meaning and approbation, as well. Thus, the pathway into a group that advocates a violent worldview depends upon many variables within the person, the group, and the culture that encompasses them both. There is no simple explanation, no "equation," that can predict who will join what violent group. Each case must be analyzed individually and in context.

The Pathway to Violence

Luck, as noted above, may determine whether a seeker encounters a benign or a destructive group. The tendency of groups to present a benign face can prevent recruits from seeing the end of the trail, so to speak, should they join certain groups. Although psychodynamic analyses might help explain why some individuals are especially attracted to violent groups, there are many cases of individuals who participate in group violence even though they have no history of violence proneness or psychological difficulty. Why, one may ask, do not such seemingly normal persons leave when they begin to see the group for what it is?

First, many people do leave, even in groups that are thought to be highly controlling. In Barker's study of Moonie recruitment in England, for example, 10 percent of those who attended an introductory Uni-

fication Church workshop ended up joining the group, while only 50 percent of joiners were still members two years later (Barker, 1984). The loss of new members through attrition should not surprise us, for people are very different and will respond differently even in powerful environments. Sometimes minor events determine whether a prospect leaves a group. One person who attended a Moonie workshop in California maintains that smokers were probably less likely to move on to the next step because they snuck out of the dormitory late at night to smoke and, in so doing, met up with other smokers, with whom they shared their doubts about the high-pressure weekend workshop (Dubrow-Eichel, 1989).

Commitment is not automatic, so groups must work at developing commitment among new members, and that takes time. Zablocki says:

> *Moreover, the high turnover rate in cults is more complex than it may seem. While it is true that the membership turnover is very high among recruits and new members, this changes after two or three years of membership when cultic commitment mechanisms begin to kick in. This transition from high to low membership turnover is known as the Bainbridge Shift, after the sociologist who first discovered it (Bainbridge, 1997, pp. 141-3). After about three years of membership, the annual rate of turnover sharply declines and begins to fit a commitment model rather than a random model. (Zablocki, 2001, p. 176)*

Zablocki's (2001) sociological theory of brainwashing builds upon the pioneering work of Lifton (1961), who studied thought reform among U.S. POWs in Korea and Chinese students and intellectuals on the mainland. Zablocki's theory is not about how people enter charismatic groups, or cults, but "the process of inducing ideological obedience in charismatic groups" (p. 160). He describes in detail the complex process that enables cultic groups to build commitment and loyalty among members and, when it serves the leader's interests, to devote enough resources to selected members so as to turn them into what he calls "deployable agents"—that is, members who are uncritically obedient to leaders even in the absence of external controls. Zablocki's "economic" perspective implies that members will vary in their commitment to the group/leader because leadership must make resource-allocation decisions concerning the building of commitment among different members. Leaders, then, will not put effort into developing a deployable agent, unless such a person can deliver an objective that is worth the resources that the leader expends. Hence, Zablocki says that there "is no reason to believe that all cults practice brainwashing any more than that all cults are violent or that all cults make their members wear saffron robes" (p. 196).

Zablocki's (2001) theory presumes that a necessary but not sufficient condition for brainwashing to occur is ideological totalism, "a sociocultural system that places high valuation on total control over all aspects of the outer and inner lives of participants for the purpose of achieving the goals of an ideology defined as all important" (p. 183). Although the resocialization process differs among groups, common elements include "a stripping away of the vestiges of an old identity, the requirement that repeated confessions be made either orally or in writing, and a somewhat random and ultimately debilitating alternation of the giving and the withholding of 'unconditional' love and approval" (p. 187). The resocialization process affects cognitive functioning and emotional networking, which in turn lead "to the attainment of states of hyper-credulity and relational enhancement, respectively" (p. 187). Because convictions function more as valued possessions than as a means of testing reality, "a frontal attack on convictions, without first undermining the self-image foundation of these convictions, is doomed to failure" (p. 188). The assault on members' identity is compensated by the payoff of feeling more "connected with the charismatic relational network" (p. 188), which ultimately brings about an identification with the group, an "imitative search for conviction" (p. 189), and "the erosion of the habit of incredulity" (p. 189). A symbolic death and rebirth marks the completion of the brainwashing process as "the cognitive and emotional tracks come together and mutually support each other" (p. 189). With the brainwashing process complete, the individual perceives the cost of exit to be sufficiently high that compliance with group demands becomes a rational choice.

Lalich (2004) complements Zablocki's Lifton-based process model. Although she too is most concerned with the deployability associated with the brainwashing concept, Lalich approaches the brainwashing phenomenon by examining the complex interaction of the processes of conversion and commitment. She views conversion, as does this paper, as a worldview shift that usually occurs within a social context, which can enable converts to sustain and strengthen their worldview shift. Lalich discusses four interlocking structural dimensions that underpin the social dynamics of cultic groups:

1. charismatic authority
2. a transcendent belief system
3. systems of control
4. systems of influence

"The relational aspect of charisma is the hook that links a follower or devotee to a leader and/or his or her ideas" (Lalich, 2004, p. 17). The transcendental belief system "binds adherents to the group and keeps them behaving according to the group's rules and norms" (p. 17). Systems of control are "overt rules, regulations, and procedures that guide and control group members' behavior" (p. 17), while the systems of influence reside in the group culture "from which members learn to adapt their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to their new beliefs" (p. 17). These four factors working together can lead to a "self-sealing system that exacts a high degree of commitment (as well as expressions of that commitment) from its core members" (p. 17) and that is "closed in on itself, allowing no consideration of disconfirming evidence or alternative points of view" (p. 17). The self-sealing system forms a bounded reality. Within that frame of mind, the person's choices become constrained because of the external sanctions of the social system and the person's own internalized sanctions. This places members in "a narrow realm of constraint and control, of dedication and duty"—what Lalich appropriately calls "bounded choice."

The notion of bounded choice is consistent with this essay's depiction of a conversion pathway of ever narrowing options. The elucidation of the brainwashing process can help explain how a formerly nonviolent person can become committed to a group that perpetrates violence. If individuals do

not see the end to which they will be led, and if they do not drop out of the group's system before the commitment process gathers steam, they may reach a point where, as Zablocki puts it, the exit costs become so great that conformity to and even identification with a system that might have once been viewed as repugnant become less difficult than departure from the system. Brainwashing, then, is not an "either-or" concept. It is a process that might have varying degrees of success. Although the "Manchurian-Candidate" level of control may be mythical, astounding levels of control can be achieved. Nevertheless, a leader's control is never absolute, so leaders must always factor members' individual psychologies into their plans.

In some cases, the violence at the end of the road might be radically out of (pre-group) character for some members. It seems beyond coincidence, for example, that nearly 1,000 suicidal/homicidal people just happened to come together in the jungles of Jonestown, Guyana in 1978. A powerful process of influence and control that took place over a period of years steered followers to a collective suicide and directed others to follow Jones's command to murder those who resisted the suicide order. Like Jim Jones, Shoko Asahara, head of Aum Shinrikyo, enhanced the brainwashing process by carefully selecting from the membership individuals who would be least likely to resist his demands for violence, specifically the murder of opponents and the release of lethal gas in the Tokyo subway. It seems unlikely to me that either he or Jones chose their killers at random, nor did they need "born killers." Because their members had gone through a process of intense socialization into a totalistic system, the leaders might have been able to push selected members above a critical threshold of killing potential, a threshold that the members would never have even approached in ordinary life had they not committed themselves to the group.

In other cases, as noted earlier, an individual's psychological needs might incline him or her toward violence even before the person encounters a group that advocates violence. Indeed, the preexisting inclination toward violence may cause a person to seek out or at least to choose a violent group from among those available to him or her. However, even in these situations, some process of influence and control will probably operate. When the violently inclined gather in a group, somebody comes to be in charge. A leader who understands the art of influence may be more successful in directing his violent followers toward the fulfillment of the leader's goals than one who lacks that understanding. Some youth gangs and some terrorist groups might fall in this category.

In still other cases, I suspect, a seeker's psychological needs and pre-existing belief system may so well mesh with a violent group that the brainwashing process is not necessary for leaders to have deployable agents. All the leader needs to do is make sure that he has a large enough supply of recruits to enable him to select those who would be willing to kill for the cause. As early as 2003 Al Qaeda, for example, used the Internet to screen recruits:

> *The SITE Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based terrorism research group that monitors al Qaeda's Internet communications, has provided chilling details of a high-tech recruitment drive launched in 2003 to recruit fighters to travel to Iraq and attack U.S. and coalition forces there. Potential recruits are bombarded with religious decrees and anti-American propaganda, provided with training manuals on how to be a terrorist, and—as they are led through a maze of secret chat rooms—given specific instructions on how to make the journey to Iraq. (Weimann, 2004)*

ISIS proved to be especially adept at using the Internet to recruit. Awan (2017) examined 100 different Facebook pages, comments and posts and examined 50 different Twitter users which led to 2050 results in order to capture and contextualise the impact Isis was having on social media sites. Overall, the study found that Isis was playing a significant role in its use of social media as a platform to radicalise and recruit would be extremists.

So long as an organization such as Al Qaeda or ISIS can engage in media campaigns that bring a large flow of "applicants" to the group, it can find, select, and train those people who will be useful to the organization, including those who will kill for it. If, for some reason, the flow of "applicants" subsided significantly, the group's leadership might then find it necessary to implement a brainwashing program to produce enough deployable agents to meet its needs. Of course, the leader might also implement a brainwashing program to enhance control over members who are favorably predisposed to the group's violent goals.

The flexible model described in this paper can be summarized as follows:

1. Something causes a person to become dissatisfied with life in some way and opens him or her to other perspectives and worldviews—that is, to become a seeker.
2. Cultural trends will influence the kinds and quantities of groups that are most likely to get a seeker's attention.
3. Personal psychological predispositions and values will narrow the range of groups that have the potential of gaining a person's attention and interest.
4. Chance factors—e.g., street recruitment, friendship networks, social media connections—may determine which groups of potential interest the seeker examines.
5. Since most groups present a benign face to the world, chance factors may determine whether the group the seeker examines is (potentially) violent or destructive.
6. If in the early stages of exploring a group a seeker has a powerful inner experience or series of experiences the seeker perceives to be consistent with the group's ideology, he or she may be more likely to make an initial commitment to the group—that is, to convert to the group's belief system, to adopt the group's worldview.
7. Whether a group is destructive or benign (generally unknown to a seeker in the early stages of group exploration), seekers during the first two or three years after initial commitment may tend to lose interest in and disconnect from the group in question. They might do so because, for example, information from outside the group causes them to reevaluate aspects of its ideology, interpersonal conflicts within the group reduce its attractiveness, or they begin to question the sincerity of leaders or the adequacy of certain doctrines.

8. Those who remain and continue with the process of commitment building, whether they do so because of a manipulative environment, a good fit between the member's needs and the group, or both, become acculturated to the group. Although attrition might still occur for a variety of reasons, the rate of attrition among committed members decreases substantially.
9. Some members may be subjected to the intense commitment-building process of brainwashing if the leader decides that the benefits of producing members who are deployable agents outweigh the costs of implementing a brainwashing program.
10. Some from among the group of deployable agents may be selected and further indoctrinated and/or trained to ensure that they will commit violent acts at the behest of the leader, should the leader deem such acts desirable.
11. Some members' pre-existing belief systems and psychological needs may so mesh with the leader's violent goals that they might do his bidding without having to go through the intense indoctrination process of brainwashing, although this process might enhance their loyalty to the group.

How can a cultic studies perspective contribute to attempts to counter violent Jihadism?

Samuel Huntington's ideas about "the clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1996) have generated controversy that has misrepresented the author's views, particularly concerning conflict between Islam and the West. Although Huntington maintains that the possible clash of civilizations is the greatest threat to world peace, he also says that an "international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world war" (p. 13). Unfortunately, extremists and misguided commentators within Islam and the West stoke passions on both sides, presenting the tensions between Islam and the West as a now-unavoidable clash of civilizations, which is bound to become much more violent and may eventually go nuclear. The advocacy of this view could become a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy.
Political responses to this threat of spiraling conflict between Western and Islamic nations or movements must, of course, take center stage. However, violent conflicts between the West and Islam necessarily begin with the actions of individuals who have moved along a pathway to violence. Prior sections of this essay tried to explain how previously nonviolent individuals can unwittingly enter and traverse this pathway. In this section, I will discuss strategies that might deter individuals from traveling all the way down the road to violence. My hope is that moderate Muslims and Westerners will recognize that families, clergy, helping professionals, local community leaders, and educators can play a vital role in preventing the escalation of social and religious conflicts by discouraging individuals from entering and following a pathway to violence.

I will build upon the earlier depiction of the pathway to violence in order to identify constructive actions in four areas: (1) prevention, (2) assistance, (3) law enforcement, and (4) research. Before I explore these four areas, however, I want to address two broad issues. First, I will present evidence for rejecting the notion that Islam and the West are, or will soon be, locked in a war of civilizations. Next, I will elaborate upon the underlying premise of this essay; namely, that understanding and appreciating another person's worldview is difficult, especially when that worldview is markedly different from one's own, and I will offer some general suggestions regarding communication across worldviews. What I will discuss in the following sections has broad applicability to issues of cultism and extremism and is by no means limited to diminishing Jihadism.

Jihadism Is Not a War of Civilizations

To their credit, George Bush and other world leaders after 9/11 said again and again that Islam is a peaceful religion and that the terrorists were not representative of Islam. They realized that frightened, angry citizens with no personal experience with Muslims could easily make distorted judgments of Muslims based on the violent images on their TV screens. Fortunately, these efforts appear to have been somewhat successful. Surveys of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006, March 22) indicate that, despite the terrorist attacks of the past two decades, a majority of Americans still view Muslims positively, not as positively as they view Jews and Catholics, but about as positively as they view Evangelicals and more positively than they view atheists. The favorability ratings were Jews, 77%; Catholics, 73%; Evangelical Christians, 57%; Muslim-Americans, 55%; Atheists, 35%. Unfavorable ratings were Jews, 7%; Catholics, 14%; Evangelical Christians, 19%; Muslim-Americans, 25%; Atheists, 50%.

Other surveys have found lower favorability ratings (ABC News Poll, 2006, September 5–7; CBS News Poll, 2006, April 6–9) for all religions, not just Islam. These discrepant findings could be due to methodological issues, such as giving respondents an "unsure" option.

The Pew survey's results for the following questions, however, were disturbing: "Do you think that the terrorist attacks over the past few years are a part of a major conflict between the people of America and Europe versus the people of Islam, or is it only a conflict with a small, radical group? Do you think this conflict is going to grow into a major world conflict, or do you think it will remain limited to a small, radical group?" Twenty-nine percent saw it as a major conflict, and another 26 percent from among the 60 percent who saw it as a limited conflict believe that it will grow into a major conflict. Hence, according to this survey, 55 percent of the U.S. population expects the current conflict with Jihadists to turn into a violent clash of civilizations. Given the common human tendency toward confirmatory bias (Baron, 1992), these findings are troubling because they suggest that one or two major terrorist attacks in the could substantially strengthen the belief that we are heading toward a violent clash of civilizations, when in reality we are not.

Other survey data fortunately suggests that the violence of Jihadists has only a limited appeal among the Muslim masses and may have significant appeal within only a small number of Muslim nations. A survey of 1,276 Muslims attending Friday service at 12 mosques (out of 33) in Detroit (Bagby, 2004) reported the following findings relevant to this discussion:

- "'Mosqued' Muslims constitute one-third of all Muslims (a percentage like that of church-going Christians (Csillag, 2005, January), which perhaps indicates that most American Muslims

are relatively integrated into American culture).
- Mosque participants in the study came from 42 countries.
- Almost two-thirds of mosque participants are first-generation immigrants. (This suggests that Muslim assimilation to the secular culture is following trends of other immigrant groups.)
- The average mosque participant is 34 years old, married with children, has at least a bachelor's degree, and makes about $75,000 annually.
- The largest group (38 percent) of mosque participants prefers a flexible approach to understanding Islam. Only 8 percent of participants follow the Salafi approach, which can be described as very conservative. About 50 percent of participants follow various classical schools.

  A 2018 Pew survey estimated that there were "about 3.45 million Muslims of all ages living in the United States in 2017" (Pew Research Center, January 2017). If 8% of these identify as Salafist, then there are about 276,000 Salafists in the United States. Even if all Islamic terrorists in the U.S. were Salafists (a questionable assumption) and even if there were 1000 terrorists, then about 275,000 Salafists are NOT terrorists and terrorists would represent less than one-half of one percent of all Salafists. Hence, it is vital to think through the numbers before jumping to conclusions such as "Salafist beliefs cause terrorism."

Obviously, the residents of Muslim nations may hold very different views from Muslims living in Detroit. Because some of these nations are authoritarian, the reliability of surveys, if they even exist, might be called into question. However, there are indications that extremism is not as popular as the clash-of-civilizations question in the Pew survey might lead one to believe. A Pew Global Attitudes Project report (2005, July 14), for example, found the following percentages of respondents affirming that Islamic extremism was a threat to their country: Morocco, 73%; Pakistan, 52%; Turkey, 45%; Indonesia, 45%; Lebanon, 26% (53% among Christians, 4% among Muslims), Jordan, 10%. Although the lower figures among Jordanian and Lebanese Muslims might indicate that their populations are more radicalized or, conversely, that they feel more confident in the stability of their countries, the fact remains that residents in major Muslim countries share Westerners' concerns about extremism and, consequently, shouldn't be viewed as supporting it.

This survey also found that support for suicide bombing is not high. The disparity in the percentages of respondents saying that suicide bombing is never justified reveals major differences among Muslim nations: Jordan, 11%; Lebanon, 33%; Pakistan, 47%; Indonesia, 66%; Turkey, 66%; Morocco, 79%.

High percentages of respondents also believed that democracy could work in their countries and was not only for the West: Turkey, 48%; Pakistan, 43%; Lebanon, 80%; Jordan, 80%; Morocco, 83%; Indonesia, 77%. These figures are supported by another survey, conducted by the Institute for Social Research, which found that Muslims and Westerners differed more on their attitudes toward sex than toward democracy (Swanbrow, 2003, March 10). This survey found that 68 percent in both the West and Islamic nations strongly disagree that democracies are indecisive and have trouble keeping order, and 61 percent in both societies strongly disagree that it's best for a country to have a powerful leader who decides what to do without bothering about elections and government procedures. Fully 86 percent of those surveyed in the West, and 87 percent of those in Muslim nations, strongly agree that democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government.

Walker (2006), in an essay that challenges alarming portrayals of the Muslim threat to Europe (e.g., Fallaci, 2004; Bawer, 2006), says an

> *opinion poll conducted in Britain for the BBC after the London bombings found that almost nine in 10 of the more than 1,000 Muslims surveyed said they would and should help the police tackle extremists in Britain's Muslim communities. More than half wanted foreign Muslim clerics barred or expelled from Britain. Fifty-six percent said they were optimistic about their children's future in Britain. And only one in five said that Muslim communities had already integrated too much with British society, while 40 percent wanted more integration.*

The Pew Global Attitudes Project (2005, July 14) also found that residents of some Muslim nations tended to have favorable attitudes toward Christians (Indonesia, 58%; Lebanon, 91%; Jordan, 58%), although in other nations the favorability ratings were low (Morocco, 33%; Turkey, 21%; Pakistan, 22%). Unfortunately, the favorability ratings of Jews in all Muslim nations in the survey were dismal (Turkey, 18%; Pakistan, 5%; Indonesia, 13%; Lebanon, 0%; Jordan, 0%; Morocco, 8%).
A 2017 Pew survey found that "both immigrant and U.S.-born Muslims are about as likely as the general U.S. population to say they are proud to be American. And they express pride in their religious identity at about the same rate as U.S. Christians" [immigrants 93%, US born 90%, general public 91%] (Pew Research Survey, 2017).

It appears, then, that survey data do not support the notion that Islam and the West are headed toward an inevitable war of civilizations. This does not mean that frightening problems do not exist in the relationship of Islam and the West or, more specifically, between certain Muslim nations and the West or between certain radicalized movements or mosques and the West. We should be careful, however, not to overgeneralize these problems, for doing so can contribute to a self-fulfilling alarmism that could precipitate an avoidable clash of civilizations. Unfortunately, the Jihadists, at least some of whom may welcome a clash of civilizations, probably realize that more 9/11-scale attacks could move public opinion toward this self-fulfilling alarmism. That is why the priority of all Western and Islamic nations should be to prevent such attacks from occurring.

Those of us outside the security arena can also contribute to the reduction of self-fulfilling alarmism. All who communicate to the public—Western and Islamic—need to be precise about the sources of conflict. So much of what we think we know about the world rests upon the media's focus on emotion and conflict. The journalistic cliché, "if it bleeds, it leads," implies that violent extremists will get much more attention than peaceful moderates. We must all, then, constantly remind ourselves about

how the media can mislead as well as inform. If, for example, certain Jihadists use an extremist interpretation of the Koran to justify their well-publicized terrorism, moderate Muslims should openly challenge that interpretation and Westerners should not construe it as "the" Muslim view of what the Koran says.

Western and Islamic journalists should make an extra effort to pay more attention to these moderate Muslim voices. The "if-it-bleeds-it-leads" mentality causes journalists to become part of the causal nexus that gives rise to the phenomena they observe and on which they report. Because in free societies journalists have special status and privileges, they also ought to have, it seems to me, a special ethical obligation to resist the bottom line of ratings when rating-friendly sensationalism, simplification, or selectivity can have deleterious effects on the body politic or when journalists are obviously used by publicity-hungry extremists. All journalists should be aware of Islamic statements against terrorism, such as Kurzman's long list (updated August 1, 2018).

Recommendation One

More high-quality survey research should be conducted to provide reliable data on the attitudes of Muslims and Westerners in various countries. Given the importance of the issues related to the clash of civilizations, the research database appears to be very inadequate.

Recommendation Two

Muslim and Western journalists, policy makers, and others should examine media reports with a critical eye for self-fulfilling alarmism and inaccuracies.

Understanding Other Worldviews: Methodological Self-Doubt

The fundamental assumptions that underlie our worldview can bias us to perceive another according to how his or her actions make sense in our, but not the other person's, view of the world. This bias manifests whenever we take in information about the world outside ourselves, whether through interaction with others, reading, observations, or other means. Once we become aware of the unavoidability of personal bias, the question arises: "How do I find out if what I believe to be true is indeed true?"

The answer to this question is to follow an epistemology of methodological self-doubt (or, in religious terms, humility in the arena of belief and faith, not merely the arena of lifestyle, with which most religions associate "humility"). Methodological self-doubt does not mean that one rejects one's own worldview. Philosophy, for example, distinguishes philosophical from methodological naturalism. The former is a metaphysical position that all of reality, including consciousness, can be explained as material events, as "atoms and the void." The latter is an epistemological principle of investigation that even deeply religious scientists can follow to learn more about natural phenomena.

I believe that an epistemological principle of methodological self-doubt lies at the heart of the "deep communication" that enables two people to understand each other at a fundamental, worldview level. "Deep communication" refers to the nonjudgmental sharing of fundamental, close-to-the-heart perceptions, beliefs, values, goals, and feelings. Deep communication is perhaps most conspicuous in the psychotherapeutic process, in which therapists place their own fundamentals in "suspend mode" and nonjudgmentally open themselves up to their clients' inner selves. Therapists show an interest in and willingness to learn from clients through the clients' words and actions within the therapeutic relationship. Therapists do not allow their "theories" to force clients into categories that are inconsistent with the clients' view of the world. Nevertheless, therapists do more than help clients see themselves in a psychological mirror. Therapists use their own understanding of the world—their own worldviews, which change constantly as a result of dialogue with their clients—to help clients learn about themselves. Thus, the methodological self-doubt of psychotherapy is not linear, as is methodological naturalism. Psychotherapy is an oscillation. Therapists temporarily suspend their own worldview to try to enter the worldview of clients, but then therapists return to their own worldview, enriched by their encounter with clients, to figure out how to help clients address the issues that generated enough conflict to bring them into therapy in the first place. During this back-and-forth process, therapists engage clients in a dialogue that opens both to other perspectives and gives clients the confidence to try new behaviors. In short-term psychotherapy, this process is a form of mutual problem-solving. In long-term psychotherapy, it can, for all intents and purposes, result in a conversion, a worldview shift of the client that enables him or her to lead a more rewarding life.

A successful psychotherapeutic endeavor rests on respect (Langone, 1992), which honors the client's

- mind, the capacity to reason.
- autonomy, the right to run one's own life.
- identity, however dysfunctional that identity may be.
- dignity, the need to feel worthwhile.

A psychotherapist cannot penetrate a client's worldview unless the client permits the therapist to enter the client's inner sanctum. During successful therapy, clients slowly disclose beliefs, sometimes beliefs that have been "secrets" or beliefs of which clients have been previously unaware, as the therapist earns their trust over time. This trust is not likely to develop except in a context of respect. If a therapist were to demean clients' minds, disregard their autonomy, assault their identity, and trample on their dignity, clients would not trust the therapist enough to engage in any deep communication (although there are cultic scenarios in which unscrupulous therapists can persuade vulnerable people to put up with abuse that would not normally be tolerated).

Respect is even more important to deep communication in nontherapeutic settings, for the other person is not coming to an expert for help. For example, a clergyman, a teacher, a police officer, or a parent who wants to "get through" to a youngster who is troubled or is flirting with a cultic or extremist organization must begin with respect, which, as I tried to explain above, is not the same as merely having "good intentions" toward the person. These well-intentioned people should be more ready to listen and to ask questions than to lecture and offer opinions. They should be patient and earn the right to be admitted to the youth's inner circles; they should neither expect nor demand this right. If they can succeed in establishing a deep communication, they can understand how the youngster sees

the world and might then be able to engage him or her in a dialogue that results in positive change. Like the therapist, the helpers must oscillate between methodological self-doubt and quiet deliberation as they move ever closer to deep communication and informed, authentic dialogue with the youth about whom they are concerned. Some exit counselors, for example, put much effort into helping families with a cult-involved loved one learn how to understand and appreciate their loved one's worldview. One team even requires families to list 50 positive things about their child's group and his or her relationship to it (Patrick Ryan and Joseph Kelly, personal communication, October 6, 2006), to help families learn how to suspend their worldview's judgmental evaluations of their loved one's situation.

Unfortunately, such "cross worldview communication" is difficult and not common. Work in the cult arena reveals that helpers in contexts that are not overtly psychotherapeutic tend to be so focused on changing a young person that they unwittingly sabotage their ability to find out what the young person really thinks, knowledge of which, ironically, would make the helpers more effective change agents. Clergy, who are well versed in theology, tend to challenge the youth's overtly expressed belief system in terms of the clergy's belief system (e.g., a priest who responds to a youngster's atheism with quotations from the Bible, when the Bible has no more credibility with the young atheist than does Homer's Iliad). Teachers, if they have experience with Socratic method, might be a bit more inquisitive than clergy, but still tend to have a predetermined destination toward which their educational endeavors point. Parents' alarm tends to thrust them into a caretaker mode that exacerbates the normal separation conflicts young people have with their parents. Law enforcement professionals tend to have a narrow area of concern (Were rules broken?) and think in terms of rewards and punishments to motivate the youngster to do what adults desire.

These criticisms are not meant to suggest that theological argument, education, emotional entreaty, or motivational analysis have no role in the goal of helping a youngster (or an adult) involved in or flirting with a cultic or extremist group. I do believe, however, that such actions have a better chance of success if they are based on an informed understanding of how the person in question sees the world. Such understanding requires a deep communication within a shared worldview or across different worldviews, which in turn requires the patient courtesy, the methodological self-doubt, the ongoing respect of the therapeutic process, even though the context of the communication is not overtly psychotherapeutic.

Recommendation Three

Parents, teachers, clergy, law enforcement personnel and others who seek to prevent young people or adults from following a path that leads toward cultic entanglements or extremist violence should learn and cultivate the skills of deep, respectful communication, which are so central to the process of behavioral and belief change and communication across worldviews.

Recommendation Four

Cultic studies experts should develop resources and training programs designed to teach helpers how to achieve the deep communication that underlies any attempt to understand how others see the world.

Prevention

Kropveld (2004) emphasizes the importance of considering cultural, social, legal, and political differences among countries in evaluating and designing preventive education programs concerning cultic groups. Among the factors that must be considered are the following:

- The historical context (i.e., whether cult-related tragedies have occurred in the country);
- The relationship between state and religion;
- The privileges (if applicable) given to certain religious groups;
- The presence or not of a state religion;
- The state financing of certain religions;
- The government's position regarding the cult phenomenon;
- The impact of public and/or political pressure.

Cultural differences will influence governmental actions or inaction regarding the control or suppression of cultic groups, the illegality of certain actions, the penalties for violations, and the vigor with which a government may address the issue.

There are, however, certain areas in which cultural differences will play less of a role, given that the society in question respects the basic human rights that are taken for granted in most democracies. The primary area of such action is the education—inoculation, if you will—of young people to make them less likely to be interested in, need, examine, convert to, commit to, or become subservient to a cultic or extremist group.

There are several areas along the pathway to violence where the vulnerability of young people to cultic or extremist groups could be decreased through preventive action.

Recommendation 5

Counseling and educational services designed to help young people develop more effective coping skills to manage life challenges should receive greater attention and support from governments and private foundations.

Comment: *At 16 years old, a person is still considered a minor, a child, whose life is regimented and directed by parents and other authorities. Only six years later (fewer if the person does not attend college), that person will have graduated college and may be expected to participate as an equal in the adult world of work, find a mate and get married, and begin raising a family. That so many young people suffer from feelings of inadequacy and depression is not surprising, given the stress they experience moving so quickly from childhood to adulthood. During no time in life do human beings assume so much increase in responsibility in so short a time span. And yet, society pays relatively scant attention to the psychological needs of its youth. An offering of more guidance and assistance to youth would not only reduce their vulnerability to cultic and extremist groups but would contribute to the amelioration of many other social problems, as well.*

Recommendation 6

Schools, religious institutions, and community organizations should support cultic studies experts in the devel-

opment of educational programs that make young people in high school and college aware of the different types of cultic and extremist groups they will encounter in the ideological marketplace.

Comment: *So many groups present themselves as the "only" pathway to God, the "only" group led by a true prophet, the "only" group that is truly doing God's work, the "only" group that can bring social justice to the world, the "only" group that can lead you to enlightenment in this lifetime. An educational program that discusses the wide variety of groups in the marketplace and demonstrates how many of them claim to be unique in virtually the same way and how many are not what they claim to be will make youth more informed consumers, more "streetsmart," about the "idealism" market. Such an educational program should NOT develop and discuss a compendium of "bad" groups. A "blacklist" approach is difficult to sustain because groups change, and they exist on a wide spectrum from benign to highly destructive. Moreover, any "list" is sure to omit most of the thousands of groups that exist and will become quickly out of date as new groups enter the marketplace. Instead, the focus should be on a nonjudgmental presentation of the variety of groups, movements, and organizations that young people will encounter in the "ideological marketplace." The approach should be one of consumer education in which young consumers are given advice on how to research and evaluate groups that might capture their interest or attention. Conceptualizing the phenomenon as an "ideological marketplace" will avoid religious freedom issues, for many of the groups in this marketplace are political, educational, psychotherapeutic, or commercial.*

Recommendation 7

Cultic studies experts need to further develop educational programs that help young people in high school and college understand the subtle techniques of manipulative socio-psychological influence employed by cultic and extremist groups and the normal psychological processes, such as confirmatory bias, which can hinder their capacity to make truly informed decisions.

Comment: *Although some useful resources exist (e.g., Fellows, 2000), much more needs to be done. It is especially important to place manipulative influence within a broader cultural context and to link the educational efforts to social psychology research (e.g., Cialdini, 1984). Young people need to better understand the ways in which advertisers, for example, use influence techniques. They also need to better understand how certain processes, such as confirmatory bias and rhetoric (in the sense of persuasive communication), can interfere with the evaluation of information.*

Recommendation 8

Mainstream religions need to develop educational programs that improve spiritual discernment among their members, particularly in regard to (a) the evaluation of powerful inner experiences and how these can sometimes be engineered; (b) the processes of religious conversion and commitment building and how unscrupulous leaders can mislead and exploit people who are experiencing religious change; (c) the recognition of arguments and appeals based on sophistry; and (d) the misinterpretation or misuse of scripture (e.g., the Bible, the Koran).

Comment: *Programs that address issues of spiritual discernment will probably have to be developed and implemented within religious organizations in countries that have a sharp separation of church and state. In countries where this separation is not so stark, governmental educational institutions may be able to take on this task.*

Assistance

Usually the people who are most directly harmed as a result of an involvement with a cultic or extremist group are the group members and their families. Helping professionals—including mental health professionals, clergy, lawyers, and law enforcement personnel—are sometimes indirectly distressed because they don't know what to do when families, former group members, or current group members seek their assistance. The issue is complicated by the fact that involved persons often do not conceptualize their problem as one involving unhealthy psychological influence. They or their helpers may, therefore, neglect important dimensions of the problem. Only a small percentage of former group members, for example, come to cult experts for assistance, in part because there are so few cult experts. Therefore, the most efficient approach to assisting families and former members is to provide training and consultation to helpers. It is also important to articulate more clearly than has thus far occurred ways to help families to improve communication and decrease conflict with loved ones involved in cultic or extremist groups.

Recommendation 9

Cultic studies experts, in conjunction with helpers in Muslim communities, need to establish mechanisms to ensure that programs on helping youth and their parents are regularly presented at conferences and meetings that Muslim helpers are likely to attend.

Recommendation 10

Cultic studies experts, in conjunction with helpers in Muslim communities, need to expand the number and geographical range of workshops designed to provide concrete assistance to families and youth.

Recommendation 11

Cultic studies experts, in conjunction with helpers in Muslim communities, need to develop mechanisms for providing consultation to helping professionals who provide services to families and youth.

Recommendation 12

Cultic studies experts, in conjunction with helpers in Muslim communities, need to more clearly articulate strategies for decreasing conflict in families of youth involved in violent activities and helping those families guide their loved ones toward more appropriate behavior.

Recommendation 13

Cultic studies experts should reach out to Muslim religious and community organizations to identify the ways in

which the former can work with the latter to devise strategies to protect and help Muslim youth who are or might become attracted to cultic and extremist groups. Cultic studies experts cannot provide "the" answers. However, they can elucidate the psychological mechanisms of influence and control destructive groups employ and strategies for countering such influences.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement traditionally has had a narrow focus on prosecuting criminals. However, the terrorism of recent years has injected elements of prevention and preemption into law enforcement, which have been a challenge to organizational cultures, such as the United States' FBI. Cultic studies experts may be helpful to law enforcement (including homeland security) in one or more of the following ways:

Provide a monitoring function regarding extremist and cultic groups by strengthening, expanding, and training the large international network of—mostly volunteer—cult watch organizations (see Kropveld, 2003) and organizations that address violent extremism. To work properly and ethically, monitoring should be part of a broader research agenda. Just as mental health professionals and researchers might be legally and/or ethically obligated to notify law enforcement when they learn of child abuse, so organizations monitoring violent groups could be helped to develop appropriate protocols for determining when law enforcement should be notified concerning the actions of extremist or cultic groups.

Develop more effective methodologies for communicating with and obtaining cooperation and information from captured terrorists, members of extremist organizations, or, most importantly, defectors from extremist/terrorist organizations. I recognize that experienced interrogators of terrorists in law enforcement organizations have much more experience with this population than do cult experts, and that it would be presumptuous for the latter to tell the former how to interrogate. However, dialogue between the two groups of experts could enhance the effectiveness of each.

Until such dialogue begins to take place and cult experts and law enforcement professionals better understand how their specialties relate to each other, I believe it is appropriate only to call for further communication at this time.

Recommendation 14

Cult experts and law enforcement personnel concerned about terrorism and other extremist groups should meet in special seminars and workshops to determine how each may benefit from the other's expertise.

Research

This field is so under-researched, given its importance, that research is needed in all areas. In addition to the need for more survey research, which was noted earlier, I believe that research in the following areas is particularly important:

Recommendation 15

More psychological research, which is sensitive to individual differences, on the pathway to violence must be conducted so that we can better understand what factors govern whether an individual continues moving along that pathway. Too often research strives to identify "the" pathway to violence, even though reason and evidence strongly suggest that there are multiple pathways to the same destination.

Recommendation 16

Intensive research of defectors from and "almost joiners" of extremist and terrorist groups should be conducted with the collaboration of Muslim researchers, helping professionals, and community organizations. Families of involved persons should also be studied.

Recommendation 17

Researchers should collaborate with cultic studies helping professionals, volunteer leaders of cult watch organizations, and Muslim researchers, helping professionals, and community leaders to develop information-collection protocols that will have research and practical applications.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to identify areas in which experts in terrorism, cultic studies, and Islam might find common ground on which to build action plans to counter violent extremism at the individual, family, and community level. My suggestions are merely a starting place, not a roadmap.
Others have looked at social-psychological aspects of terrorism. A National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) report (2005, April), for example, organizes its findings around four questions: prediction, prevention, preparation, and recovery from attacks. Prevention is the area in which cultic studies can most effectively contribute. Surprisingly, however, this important report's prevention section addresses none of the issues discussed in or recommendations made by this paper. That is not to say that the report's recommendations (e.g., developing bio-imaging markers, surveillance technologies, data mining) are not useful. Ultimately, however, Jihadist terrorism is about the decisions that certain individuals make to kill other individuals. These decisions are not predestined. They have cultural, interpersonal, and psychological antecedents. Changing the antecedents of violence can prevent it. The authorities responsible for homeland security and the struggle against terrorism do not appear to have appreciated this fact as much as they should, perhaps because social and behavioral scientists are disinclined to use qualitative methods, such as case study methodology (Dole, 1995), to study the complex problem of extremist violence. Such methods have been essential to the cultic studies field. I hope that this paper will stimulate dialogue between researchers, helpers, community leaders, families, and affected individuals so that they can examine the problem of extremist violence from fresh perspectives, including those of cultic studies experts.

AUTHOR

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HOW CAN ANALYSIS OF ‘CREDIBILITY CONTESTS’ HELP US UNDERSTAND WHERE AND WHEN ANTI-MINORITY ACTIVISM IS MORE LIKELY TO GAIN MOMENTUM?

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BY JOEL BUSHER, GARETH HARRIS AND GRAHAM MACKLIN

Activism against ethnic, religious, sexual or other minorities is not an evenly-spaced challenge. Rather, at any given time, anti-minority mobilisations are likely to be more concentrated in particular cities, towns or even neighbourhoods. So why do some places become focal points for such activism at particular points in time, while other similar places do not? And what can we do to inhibit the ability of anti-minority activists to build support in any given place at any given time?
We argue that one way we can help to answer these questions is by understanding the ‘credibility contests’ in which anti-minority activists become engaged as they seek to build support.

In what follows, we first elaborate on the idea of ‘credibility contests’ before setting out a simple framework through which to analyse these contests. We argue that one of the key strengths of this framework is that it enables us to integrate ‘supply-side’ and ‘demand-side’ explanations for the growth or decline of anti-minority activism. In doing so, it helps us to achieve a more holistic and dynamic understanding of such activism and how we might effectively respond to it.

Figure 1. Core components for the analysis of credibility contests

This briefing is informed by comparative research on the trajectory of anti-minority activism in two English local authority areas,[1] as well as ongoing dialogue and engagement with local authorities across the UK and beyond.

[1] This article is based on the article ‘Chicken suits and other aspects of situated credibility contests: Explaining local trajectories of anti-minority activism’, by Joel Busher, Gareth Harris and Graham Macklin, published in Social Movement Studies, available via https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1530978. The article examines why one English town became a national, and even international, focal point for anti-minority activism towards the end of the 2000s while another broadly similar town, with a history of far right political ‘successes’ did not.

Introducing the idea of credibility contests

Joseph Nye, the American Political Scientist, observes that all forms of politics are, ultimately, ***'a contest of competitive credibility'***.[3] Opposing actors try to enhance their own credibility in the eyes of those they see as their potential allies or supporters, while at the same time trying to undermine the credibility of their opponents. The greater the credibility that an actor has in the eyes of their target audience, and the less credibility that their opponents have, the more likely they are to be able to persuade that audience to accept and adopt their views about the world and the way that things should be done.

Some credibility contests are broadly symmetrical: opposing actors compete with one another for similar forms of credibility. Think, for example, of two or more political parties seeking to persuade the general public that they, rather than their opponents, should be entrusted with looking after the best interests of a country or town.

Other credibility contests can be asymmetrical. For example, while activists in a social movement or pressure group might seek to undermine the credibility of a sitting national or local government, they might not seek to replace them directly. In addition, while members of a national or local government are likely to claim to be acting in the best interests of most, if not all, residents of their constituency, activists in a social movement or pressure group might often pursue the interests of a specific group or category of people – think for example of marches against rent increases in urban areas, or farmers' protests against environmental regulation.

In the case of anti-minority activism, we are more likely to see asymmetric credibility contests, with organised anti-minority groups claiming to speak for the interests of a specific, usually supposedly victimised or marginalised, constituency, such as 'ordinary English people', the 'marginalised majority', or other labels to that effect. The more successful they are at positioning themselves in this way in the eyes of the people that they are trying to appeal to, and the more effective they are at discrediting attempts by their opponents to undermine such claims, the more likely they are to be able to gain traction.

Analysing credibility contests: a five-part framework

The question then is how to explain when and under what conditions anti-minority activists are more likely to achieve successes within these credibility contests.
Drawing on our research, we propose a framework comprising five basic components: 1) the socio-economic and historic context of the place in question; 2) possible catalytic events around which anti-minority activists can mobilise; 3) the local activist networks and the wider movement structures with which they are connected; 4) the responses of statutory agencies and civil society actors who are trying to inhibit the growth of anti-minority activism; and 5) the actions of the people whose views and interests the anti-minority activists claim to represent. The interactions between these five elements shape the outcome of the credibility contests.

1. The local socio-economic and historic context

Context matters: where anti-minority activists are able to successfully 'plug into' local narratives of grievance and frustration they are more likely to be able to build support. Based on our research, we can break this down into three parts:
To what extent are there underlying observable processes of social change that might lend themselves to the formulation of grievance or threat narratives? For example, economic decline, rising poverty or crime, or rapid demographic change.

To what extent does the town feature in national and international debates about specific social or policy 'problems' around which anti-minority activists seek to mobilise? Where a town is positioned as a 'hotspot' or 'epicentre' in national and international media narratives about a particular policy issue, this is likely to increase mobilisation opportunities.

Are there specific events within local histories (e.g., contentious legal rulings, decisions by the statutory authorities, instances of community tensions) that might be used by anti-minority activists to weave narratives in which current issues can be constructed as part of a longer history of injustice?

2. Possible catalytic events

While an uptick in anti-minority activism can emerge at any time, in most cases there will be some kind of event or series of events that act as a catalyst. This might be instances of criminality that might be used to demonise the minorities that they seek to mobilise against ; a contentious legal hearing; protests by groups that anti-minority activists consider as opponents or 'the enemy'; terrorist attacks; or other news stories. It is important therefore to consider what such catalytic events might look like and what opportunities they might open up for anti-minority activism. It is also important however to think about what might stop an event acting as an effective catalyst. In our research we identified a number of factors that might be relevant. These include:

- Timing: while several areas may experience events that provide mobilisation opportunities for anti-minority activists, the first place to experience a particular type of event will often attract particular media and public attention, making it easier for anti-minority activists to mobilise there, and potentially turning it into 'the place where it all began'. Furthermore, towns that are among the first to experience mobilisation around a particular issue do not have the benefit of being able to learn from the experiences of other towns. Timing can also be important in cases where the developments taking place within the town align with and become central to national, or even international, political and policy debates.

- How well the event fits with grievance narratives already circulating within the town, and wider media narratives about the town.

- Certain types of incidents that have heightened emotional resonance can provide particularly effective condensing symbols for anti-minority activism, including crimes of sexual nature involving

[3] Nye, J. S. J. (2011). The future of power. New York: Public Affairs. p. 106.

members of the perceived out-group, or those involving the desecration of national symbols.

- The extent to which there are activists nearby with the wherewithal to mobilise quickly in response to the event and/or to engage national or international actors who can help them to amplify their mobilisation efforts.

3. Local activist networks and their ties to national and international networks

Anti-minority activism is more likely to take root and gather momentum when there are relatively local activists who: a) have the acumen and access to resources required to exploit mobilisation opportunities, and/or b) are able and willing to facilitate efforts by national or international activists to turn the town or city into a focus of attention.

Here, there are a number of points to consider:

- How 'savvy' are the local activists? Do they appear to have the acumen to exploit mobilisation opportunities as they arise, or at least the ability to learn and adapt as they go?

- How well linked are they to the communities they are trying to mobilise? Do they already have some 'standing' there, or do they have the charisma and links to local gatekeepers that enables them to forge bridges into those populations?

- Do they have links into wider national or international networks that they can leverage to bring in resources, such as campaign expertise, or legal and financial support?

- To what extent are local activists campaigning around issues that resonate with local residents, or are they adopting radical ideological positions that are out of step with the opinions of the people they are trying to mobilise?

- To what extent are the tactics that they use likely to be considered 'appropriate' or 'respectable' by the people they are trying to engage, or are they likely to be seen as 'trouble-makers'? Not all violence is necessarily perceived to be 'illegitimate' – sometimes certain forms of violence can be seen as an appropriate, or at least understandable, expression of frustration and a desire for justice.

4. The response of statutory agencies and civil society actors who are trying to inhibit the growth of anti-minority activism

While catalytic events and the presence of savvy and well-connected activists might increase the likelihood of there being an uptick in activism, mobilisation opportunities and prospects can be inhibited by the responses of statutory agencies and civil society actors. Here again, we identified three issues that require particular consideration:

- Are the responses of the statutory agencies and civil society groups demonstrably consistent with the values that they claim to stand for (e.g., in most cases, respect for democratic values and equality, both before the law and in the distribution of social goods)? Anti-minority activists thrive on being able to accuse the 'liberal establishment' of supposed 'hypocrisy' and 'double standards'.

- How well aligned are the responses to the specific type of activism that is taking place? Different types of anti-minority activism – more or less violent, using more or less overtly discriminatory 'issue frames' – require different responses. Attempts to manage, control or inhibit activism that miss the mark might not only be ineffective, but may even backfire. For example, if activists operate broadly through recognised democratic channels, such as petitions or community meetings, attempts to inhibit or close down those activities using legal instruments or other forms of disruption might provide opportunities for those activists to position themselves as victims, defenders of 'free speech' etc – a form of 'jujitsu politics' through which they use the ('over-')reactions of state and civil society opponents to fuel their grievance narratives and, potentially, build public sympathy and support.[4]

- Are there processes of information sharing and institutional learning in place among local statutory agencies and civil society groups? Those seeking to respond to or manage anti-minority activism are more likely to be successful when they are effectively tapping into good practice and intelligence that enable them to adapt in a changing strategic environment.

5. The actions of the people whose views and interests the anti-minority activists claim to represent

The actions of the people that anti-minority activists claim to speak for are also likely to be important in shaping the outcomes of the credibility contests. If prominent actors within that 'constituency' make clear that the activists do not speak for them, this can severely undermine the credibility of the activists' claims. Conversely, if some people within the same imagined 'constituency' express support or sympathy for the activists, this can boost their credibility and their cachet with local people.

The actions of these people are likely to be particularly significant when the individuals involved are symbolically important within the grievance or conflict narratives of the groups in question. For example, in the case of anti-Muslim activism, this might include people that are positioned as the principal victims of 'Islamification', 'political correctness' etc., such as the victims of child sexual exploitation by a network of Muslim men, or the victims of an Al-Qaeda inspired terrorist attack, or people who have particular cachet by virtue of their social position or role, such as active or former members of the armed forces.

Conclusions: Putting it all together, and into practice

If we want to respond effectively to anti-minority activism, we have to understand how such activism gains momentum, at particular times and in particular places. And if we want to accurately understand how it gains momentum at particular times and in

[4] McCauley, C. 2006. "Jujitsu Politics: Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism." In Collateral Damage: The Psychological Consequences of America's War on Terror, edited by P. R. Kimmel and C. E. Stout, 45–65. Westport: Praeger.

particular places, we have to develop ways of thinking about anti-minority activism that acknowledge and enable us to pick our way through the complex and dynamic processes through which anti-minority activism gains and loses traction. Critically, this also includes looking at where anti-minority activism fails to take off, even when the wider environment looks as though it should have been conducive to such activism.

We propose that examining the credibility contests that emerge around the claims and counter-claims that characterise anti-minority activism gives us an effective way of doing this. This is because by doing so we not only bring into focus the 'supply-side' and the 'demand-side' factors, but also how these different factors interact with one another. While underlying conditions of significant deprivation, potential catalytic events or the presence of savvy or well-connected activists can all make it more likely for a town to become a focal point for anti-minority activism, it does not guarantee it. What matters is the alignment between these different factors, and the extent to which state actors and civil society groups seeking to manage or challenge anti-minority activism are able to disrupt, or might inadvertently contribute to, that alignment.

So what does this mean in practice? We suggest three basic steps.

First, from our experience working with multiple local authorities, we believe it is helpful to ***think of anti-minority activists as storytellers***, who are trying to persuade potential supporters to embrace their views about the world, about what comprise the most urgent problems, and about how these problems should be addressed. Where anti-minority activists already have a significant support base, we need to understand how they use the stories they tell about the world to translate support into action. This means that we need to listen to and understand the claims that anti-minority activists are making, where these claims come from, what serves as 'evidence' for these claims and how they might appeal to the wider community, even if we vehemently disagree with them.

Second, from the credibility contests perspective ***policymakers and practitioners are not 'referees' in these contests, but active participants. In other words, policymakers and practitioners*** seeking to manage, inhibit or challenge anti-minority activism are also essentially storytellers, trying to persuade potential supporters to embrace their views about the world, about what comprise the most urgent problems, and about how these problems should be addressed. This means that they too must think honestly not only about how they effectively challenge the credibility of the claims being made by anti-minority activists, but also about their own credibility with key audiences and how this might be strengthened or diminished. From this point of view, one of the key questions for policymakers and practitioners should be about how they can proactively build their credibility with these key audiences, particularly outside of moments of 'crisis'.

Third, and quite simply, we would encourage policymakers and practitioners to ***incorporate a series of basic questions within their planning procedures.***

1. Who are the 'players' in the credibility contest that you are looking at?

2. What claims are they making? And to who?

3. What gives them credibility with those key audiences? And what undermines it?

4. What courses of action are available to those seeking to inhibit, challenge or manage the impacts of anti-minority activism?

5. How might these courses of action affect the credibility contest?

Asking these questions is of course unlikely to 'solve' the challenges posed by anti-minority activism, let alone identify a 'perfect' solution. We believe it can however help policymakers and practitioners to better understand the situation in which they are operating and to identify and work through the various dilemmas that they encounter along the way.

AUTHORS

Dr Graham Macklin is Assistant Professor/Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo, Norway. He has published extensively on extreme right-wing and anti-minority politics in Britain in both the inter-war and post-war periods including Very Deeply Dyed in the Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945 (2007), British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives (2011), co-edited with and Nigel Copsey; Failed Führers: A History of Britain’s Extreme Right (2020) and, with Stephen Ashe, Joel Busher and Aaron Winter, co-edited Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method & Practice (2020). Macklin co-edits Patterns of Prejudice, Fascism and the ‘Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right’ book series.

Dr Gareth Harris is a Visiting Fellow to the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (Coventry University). His research focuses on the dynamics of local mobilization, anti-minority politics and community engagement around anti-minority narratives. He has published on responses to demographic change among majority populations, and anti-minority activism in journals such as Comparative Political Studies, Political Studies and Social Movements. He is convener of the Special Interest Group on Counter-Extremism (SIGCE), a local authority network to promote peer-to-peer learning and develop good practice on counter-extremism. He is currently working on a CREST-funded project on the pathways towards and away from violence during ‘hot periods’ of anti-minority activism with Drs Joel Busher and Graham Macklin with Julia Ebner. The project includes a case study on events in Chemnitz 2018.

Dr Joel Busher is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR), Coventry University, and chair of the CTPSR Working Group on P/CVE. His primary research interests are in the escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation of political violence; far right and anti-minority politics; and the implementation of counter-terrorism policy and its societal impacts. He has published extensively on these topics, and his book, The Making of Anti-Muslim Protest: Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League (Routledge), was awarded the British Sociological Association’s Philip Abrams Memorial Prize. He is an Associate Editor of Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression; a member of the editorial board of Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change, joint editor of a forthcoming book, Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice (Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right), and of a forthcoming special issue of Perspectives on Terrorism.

Joana Cook: A Woman's Place. US Counterterrorism since 9/11

Joana Cook's "A Woman's Place – US Counterterrorism Since 9/11" comprises an impressive and sharp analysis of the way US presidential administrations have (or have not) included women in the discourses and practices around the Global War on Terror (GWOT) after 9/11. Holistically, Cook considers women as "actors, partners and targets of this work" (p.2). Her book is based on the premise that despite having played an important role in terrorism and counterterrorism efforts, women have often been pushed in auxiliary roles, relying on idealized roles for men and women. Historically, however, women have played more than just supporting roles as housewives and bearer of future fighters but have taken on more important und strategic roles in terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, LTTE or Tehrik-i-Talibal Pakistan (p.8). This has become especially clear in the wave of individuals who joined the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq: 13% of foreign fighters are female, not included local women who have joined the terrorist organisation.

THE BOOK
Joana Cook:
A Woman's Place – U.S. Counterterrorism Since 9/11
C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2019, 592 p., ISBN 978-1787381315

The underlying assumption of Cook's analysis is that any counter-terrorism strategy is constructed according to the assessment of the terrorist threat. If women are considered substantial actors of terrorism, naturally, women will be included more extensively in counterterrorism strategies. Thus, if women's roles within terrorist organisations continue to be underestimated, counterterrorism measures will fail to include gender-sensitive approaches. In order to analyse how women have become visible in the Global War on Terror since 2001, Cook has drawn upon a wide range of sources that are publicly accessible (e.g. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, National Strategy for Counterterrorism, documents produced by the Department of Defence, US State and USAID). With a focus on Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, Cook unravels how language determines the implementation of the GWOT regarding gender aspects and argues that the more women are included in the language and written form of policy the more women are included in practice. To break down the key factors that inform women's roles in counterterrorism, Cook has divided the analysis into discursive, operational and institutional factors, covering national and international operational environment and objectives as well as institutional conditions.

Throughout Cook's analysis, it becomes clear that the rhetoric as well as the practice of counterterrorism has changed regarding the incorporation of women. While still frequently being neglected in the context of security related issues and often being included in indirect counter-terrorism efforts (stabilization, peacemaking, mediation) rather than in direct strategies, the role of women as actors, partners and targets of counterterrorism has become more visible. However, Cook also places emphasis on the fact that this development could change at any time along with the respective presidential administration. Since the election of Donald Trump, for instance, his "controversial and bombastic language" (p.360), his discourses around terrorism, his perception of Islam (notably his conflation of Islam and terrorism) and his focus on women as victims (of Muslim men) reduces women – again, into the roles of victims. According to Cook, the importance that is allocated to gender issues in policy-making is not more than a "minimal lip-service" (p.370).

Cook concludes her analysis with a powerful outlook on the special attention that will have to be paid to the future importance of counterterrorism as a key security focus as well as future trends in jihadist groups. She paves the way for further research expanded to more countries and the far-right extreme as well as leftist movements. As we are likely to continue to see women being pushed aside in counterterrorism efforts, a full understanding on women's roles in terrorism and counterterrorism is essential. Cook concludes: "We must demand that women are involved in meaningful and inclusive ways in all aspects of security and particularly countering terrorism and violent extremism (in its many forms) in our societies today." (p. 420)

Julia Handle

Julia Ebner: Radikalisierungsmaschinen. Wie Extremisten die neuen Technologien nutzen und uns manipulieren

"Radikalisierungsmaschinen. Wie Extremisten die neuen Technologien nutzen und uns manipulieren" was published in September 2019 with Suhrkamp Nova and translated by Kirsten Riesselmann (the original english version will be published in February 2020 with Bloomsbury Publishing).
The book provides a broad overview of how and with which means Right-wing and Islamist extremists use the internet to recruit members und manipulate discourses, while still being a minority. It is structured in six chapters: Recruiting, Socialisation, Communication, Networking, Mobilisation and finally Attack. The publication seems to have been written for a non-specialist audience and gives great insight into the different strategies and tactics radicalised individuals and groups employ online, but also on how it influences their offline behaviour. By using different sets of work ("or mask") profiles Julia Ebner manages to infiltrate hundreds of groups, chats and extremist servers to provide the reader with deeper insights, while she also meets some of the actors face to face undercover.

Ebners main hypothesis is that we are currently witnessing a toxic mix of ideological nostalgia for the past at the same time as a technological futurism is taking a hold. This mix may shape the politics of the 21th century (p. 10). In the first chapter, recruiting, the author explains the strategies and mechanisms of a US-American Neo-Nazi group and the Identitarian movement to gain publicity and find new recruits (p.15). The chapter socialisation then deals with consolidation of keeping members in a group and the process of "brain-washing" individuals exemplified by the "Trad Wives" ("traditional wives") movement and a closed telegram group called "terror sisters" (p. 65). The third chapter, communication then explains the media and meme strategy of the Alt-Right movement and ultra-Right groups (p.105). Fourthly, networking goes into the functioning of the communities and the spreading of conspiracy theories using the example of Q Anon and the dating pages of racists (p.155). In the fifth chapter, Ebner is looking at mobilisation, which takes place offline and online, exemplified by chats about strategy before Charlottesville and by visiting the biggest Neo-Nazi Rock festival in Europe at Ostritz (p.195). In the final chapter named Attack the online possibilities of hacking are explored through looking at an IS hacker community and interviews with a notorious Neo-Nazi hacker and the community which was responsible for a large hack in Germany (p. 237). Ebner concludes by introduces several counter strategies which can be employed or are so already (p.289).

While this book is mainly written to provide insights to the public, writing about the infiltration methods in such detail can lead to difficulties for researchers and security actors in infiltrating groups in the future. Additionally it can lead to mental or physical harm to Ebner or other researchers. This can be observed on the twitter feeds of various people mentioned in the publication as well as in the heightened security procedures put in place by various extremist telegram groups and discord servers. Ebner herself describes both difficulties in her book, and balancing the need to inform and research while at the same time keeping ethical and security concerns to a minimum is a difficult feat. In this case starting a discourse about the various topics discussed by Ebner outweighs the questions raised above.

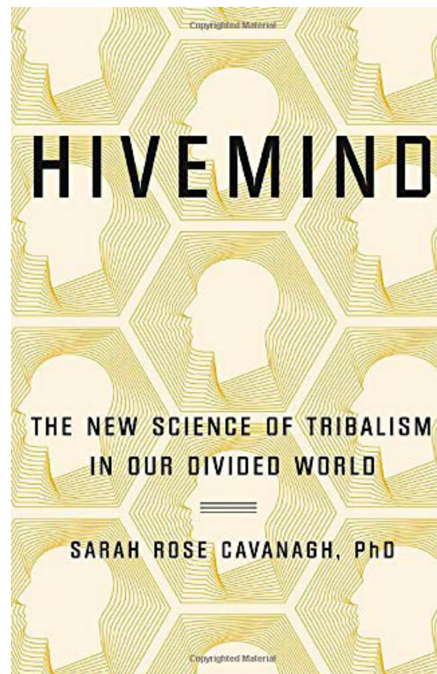
Till Baaken

THE BOOK
Julia Ebner:
Radikalisierungsmaschinen. Wie Extremisten die neuen Technologien nutzen und uns manipulieren
Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019, 334 p.,
ISBN 978-3518470077

Sarah Rose Cavanagh:
Hivemind. The New Science of Tribalism in Our Divided World

"We're synchronous beings, and the contents of our minds spread from one of us to another easily and effortlessly, whether in person or online. Fear and love and hate are infectious, and they spread over new media."
(Cavanagh, 2019, p. 17)

In her newest monograph, psychologist Sarah Rose Cavanagh explores the psychological, neurological and emotional mechanisms shaping our collective consciousness and the shared reality we live in. By drawing from various sub-fields of psychological research and interviewing experts with backgrounds in neuroscience, psychology, (group) identity research, cultural studies, information technology, and extremism, Cavanagh sets out to understand how individuals tap into the cultural resources of their collective experiences, are influenced by the social world they live in, construct their identity and emotional states accordingly, and how these processes have changed since the advent of social media and the spread of communication technologies. The hivemind, to hear, symbolizes the human experience, which is individual yet deeply connected to and influenced by the collective.



THE BOOK
Sarah Rose Cavanagh:
Hivemind: The New Science of Tribalism in Our Divided World
Grand Central Publishing, 2019, 304 p.,
ISBN 978-1538713327

While clearly written for a laymen audience and containing discussions of everything from bees and puppies to zombies and cults, Cavanagh's synthesis of research on collective behavior on social media and the neuro-psychological mechanisms underpinning it, can facilitate our understanding of extremism and radicalization processes online and support researchers and practitioners in the field of P/CVE. For example, she explains the human tendency for neural synchrony - that our brains literally harmonize with those emotionally close to us - and how this leads to both individuals seeking out connections to those with similar neuronal structures as well as synchronizing further with those we are already connected to. On the internet, this tendency can exacerbate and not only contribute to the evolution of cognitive echo chambers but facilitate their sustainability. Research has long known that during activities such as reading, our brains activate the same areas that would be activated were we the acting character in the story. Similarly, connections and narratives shared in social networks can transcend the screens and enter our brains on a neurological level, potentially increasing identity salience and making individuals more susceptible to extremist ideas conveyed by those the synchronize with. Quite literally, extremism has not only psychological but neurological causes and effects.

Emotional contagion leads to the fast spread of negative emotions through social networks leading not only, as Cavanagh shows, to people reporting higher levels of depression when it rains in the city they have many virtual ties to but potentially also to the spread of hate, fear or anger in relation to extremism regardless of physical location. However, Cavanagh generally postulates a positive outlook on social media and emphasizes its ability to make us more social and to combat negative tribalist tendencies. For instance, she explains that appraisals – stories we tell ourselves about a certain event to put it in perspective – can be changed and human neuroplasticity makes it possible to reform even the most rigorous psychological mechanisms we have acquired throughout our lives. Overall, Cavanagh's book provides an easily accessible synthesis of neuro-psychological mechanisms of collective consciousness and collective behavior, which can inform both research and practice on extremism and radicalization processes.

Linda Schlegel

demokratie

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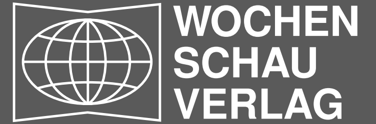

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