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Jihadist and Violent Right-Wing Extremist Discourses: Why is There a Difference in Policy Responses?

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by

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1. Introduction

According to the annual trend report compiled by Europol, an increasing number of extremist groups of various motivations consider violence a justified means to pursue their goals (2019). In theory, this should not be a cause for worry for the United Kingdom. The nation has thought about ways to deal with extremist violence long before 9/11 forced the rest of the Western world to catch up. Although the British approach was primarily driven by experiences in Northern Ireland, the need to take the diversity of extremist motivations into account was recognized early (Gearson & Rosemont, 2015). Yet, its signature CONTEST strategy has come under fire for allegedly being focused on jihadist extremism, which appears especially problematic at a time when far-right attacks are on the rise. As this thesis will demonstrate, the policy response has indeed been biased.

The problem is arguably rooted in the definitory confusion surrounding the concepts of extremism, violent extremism and terrorism. All three continue to be seen as a major challenge to liberal societies, however, it remains unspecified what these phenomena constitute of exactly. Thus, an Islamist connotation has dominated the public debate, and both the academic and policy community continue to use the terms interchangeably (Omursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019). This practice has resulted in the stigmatization of the larger Muslim community. Further, most counterstrategies have been developed with this specific threat in mind and struggle to combat violence from other extremist motivations. To understand these phenomena better, a closer look at the groups receiving these labels is required.

Developing clearer definitions through which the classification of groups can be improved and stigmatization can be prevented, warrants an analysis of their ideologies. The study of discourses present in extremist material has proven imperative to uncover what groups stand for (Hale, 2012). In the 21st century, the vast majority of this material can be found online, as the virtual world's ease of accessibility and low costs are particularly attractive for extremist groups (Schafer, 2002). However, previous studies have largely focused on textual content and ignored visual formats, such as videos, which dominate the online world. This has arguably resulted in incomplete analyses and classifications that have intensified the problem, rather than solving it.

This thesis aims to bring these issues together by seeking to find an answer to the question why society has taken jihadist discourses, and thus related groups, more as a threat than those of the violent far-right. To begin, I engage with the conceptual debates surrounding relevant concepts for this study, specifically extremism, violent extremism and terrorism, and

suggest workable definitions that allow for comprehensive research to be conducted. This is followed by an introduction of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, which is the methodological framework used for the empirical chapters. Within two case studies, I then examine the videos produced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)[1] and the English Defence League (EDL). The goal is to uncover which discourses are present in the videos and how these are conveyed. The findings are then used as the foundation for exploring possible explanations for why the United Kingdom has taken jihadist extremism more seriously than violent right-wing extremism. I argue that despite minor differences, the discourses present in the ISIS and EDL videos are of similar intensity, and consequently should warrant similar policy responses. Further, I suggest that an embedded sense of otherness towards the Muslim community within British society, the reactionary nature of the EDL movement, and a different approach to violence between the two groups are possible explanations as to why jihadist extremism is seen more as a threat in the United Kingdom than the violent far-right.

2. Literature Review and Concepts

Relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to the study of extremist discourses. Existing research predominantly relates to the aim of developing a better understanding of the radicalisation process, while case studies on rhetoric remain scarce and implications of policy relevance have been explored even less. These gaps can be explained by the preoccupation with longstanding definitory debates and an arguably misplaced focus on developing preventive measures without engaging with the foundational aspects first.

Contrary to popular perception, the development of extremism as a field of scholarly inquiry was not in response to the 9/11 attacks. With the phenomenon being as old as humanity (Lentini, 2008), it has a long history of attracting researchers from a variety of disciplines. The field experienced its first peaks in the early 1960s driven by the desire to understand right-wing political violence during and post-war (von Beyme, 1988), and later in the 1970s when Europe experienced the emergence of the Red Army Faction in Germany and the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Ireland (Sageman, 2014). The 9/11 attacks by al-Qaida fundamentally redefined both the direction of research and the term extremism itself by labelling it with a

[1] The author acknowledges that a variety of names are being used to refer to this group, including Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Daesh, all of which are highly context-dependent. However, as the name Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has evolved into the most frequently used within academia, government and the media, this is the variation that will be used subsequently.

predominantly Islamist connotation. This history highlights that developing clear definitions is crucial.

Debates about definitions are not merely theoretical ramblings, they carry great weight beyond academia. In the national and international political arena, whichever aspects are included or excluded, define the direction of policy, diplomacy, and military action (Mahan & Griset, 2008). As early as in the 1980s, scholars criticized the lack of progress made towards definitory coherence, yet the problem appeared impossible to overcome. The predominant reason for this was the difficulty of accessing relevant material. This forced researchers to rely on secondary sources to such an extent, that their studies provided merely anecdotal evidence based on partial data and were consequently prone to dangerous generalizations (Schuurman, 2018). As a result, bringing together a wide variety of different views proved to be a challenge for any scholar or practitioner keen on developing transferable findings.

It is a cause for concern that the core concepts of extremism, violent extremism and terrorism to date have not been assigned a universally accepted definition. Consequently, the more significant challenge is that these terms continue to be used interchangeably in academia, the media, and policymaking. First, this causes scholars to come up with their own definitions to fit their research. Second, the concepts have evolved into powerful labels that are capable of rapidly shaping public opinion (Bruce, 2013). The lack of clear definitions means that news outlets pick whichever label they see fit, thus furthering the conceptual confusion and possibly even damaging the public perception of entire communities. Lastly, definitions vary not only from country to country but also from agency to agency. This significantly undermines both inter-agency and international cooperation regarding these phenomena. Based on this, it is crucial to discuss the distinguishing features of each concept before diving into the research of discourses.

2.1. Extremism

Three different approaches dominate in existing scholarly literature: extremism as a label for people, extremism as a method, and extremism as defined by goals. Kydd and Walter use the term in reference to persons or groups willing to resort to high levels of aggression in pursuit of a political purpose (2002). They join a surprisingly large number of researchers whose papers are dominated by vagueness and confusion. First, no attempts are made to explain who they consider an extremist; a possible interpretation can only be pinpointed by examining the usage of the term within their research. Second, their definitory approach, or the lack thereof, results

in the interchangeable usage of arguably distinct terms. Throughout their study, extremists are referred to as terrorists, and extremism is treated as synonymous with violent terrorism, begging critical questions such as if there is a non-violent form of terrorism in the first place. Not only is this confusing to the reader, but the lack of a clear understanding of what these terms constitute arguably also discredit the contribution these scholars sought to make.

Eatwell and Goodwin suggest dividing the term into extreme by method, extreme by a goal or a combination of both (2010). However, this differentiation creates further confusion and overlap. If extremism on its own can also refer to methods, then the terms terrorism and violent extremism are arguably rendered pointless. Defining extremism by goals is a prominent approach within the political sciences and the policymaking circles. Midlarsky describes the phenomenon as a social movement that directly opposes state authorities, seeks to restrict civil liberties and is prepared to resort to murder to advance its goals (2011). Backes suggests that extremists reject pluralism, cultural tolerance, legal rules, and majority rule (2010). Lastly, the UK government sees anyone as an extremist who vocally or actively opposes British values of democracy, liberty, and tolerance or calls for the death of British soldiers (HM Government, 2015). While these specifications might apply to some contexts, they risk excluding cases with the slightest deviations. Thus, their use as a universal framework is limited.

Admittedly, developing a definition of extremism that has wide-spread applicability is challenging because of the contested nature of the concept. Scholars such as Aly, Balbi, and Jacques have circumvented this problem by solely focusing on a definition of violent extremism instead (2015), and there are even definitional nihilists arguing that a universally applicable definition would be counterproductive (Ramsay, 2015). While this might seem like a logical way to overcome the issue because violence, contrary to extremism, is not in the eye of the beholder, this is a highly problematic approach. Just like fruit salad cannot be defined solely on the basis of ‘something that contains fruit’, violent extremism is not just ‘something that contains violence’. Without clarifying the foundation these concepts build on, vagueness, context-specific, and synonymous usage will continue to increase the fragmentation of the field. Further, ignoring the definitory debate altogether will make it even more challenging to build a coherent understanding of these phenomena and impossible to develop policy-relevant insights.

Consequently, I acknowledge that extremism is an essentially contested concept. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis and to set a precedent, extremism can arguably be best defined as views, rather than goals or methods, that “are outside the mainstream political thinking of a given society” (Schmid, 2014, p. 14). This highlights that at its core, “extremism is a relational concept” (Schmid, 2014, p. 11). Consequently, there is a need for a point of

comparison to determine in relation to what something is considered an extreme deviation from. Naturally, what is seen as mainstream depends on the socio-political context. For example, in contemporary Western Europe, the commitment to democratic values, the acceptance of diversity, and the peaceful coexistence of various religious and cultural traditions would arguably constitute mainstream political thinking. Committing to the proposed definition does not only represent an attempt to clear up the variety of conceptualizations currently in circulation, but I also aim to demonstrate how extremism is the foundational step violent extremism and, in some cases, even terrorism is built on.

2.2. Violent Extremism

The concept of violent extremism has risen to prominence mainly due to the variety of suggestions on how to counter it. While the United States was heavily engaged in coercive military measures abroad as a response to 9/11, European nations soon shifted their approach to focus on homegrown extremism by aiming to prevent their citizens from getting radicalized in the first place. This resulted in a surge of literature and policies on countering violent extremism (CVE) with little attention devoted to defining what it is: CVE efforts can target changing behaviour, beliefs or both, there is a substantial variation between both countries and scholars (Harris-Hogan, Barrelle & Zammit, 2016). This ambiguity has turned the term "into a catch-all category that lacks precision and focus" (Heydemann, 2014, p. 1), which is not only a significant risk in government policies being misdirected (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004), but also a great cause for concern within the Muslim communities who are alarmed by the lack of differentiation and the lack of efforts made to address the Islamist connotation of these terms (Sheikh, Sin, King & Shaikh, 2010).

If extremism describes beliefs that are outside of the mainstream, then violent extremism can be defined as the willingness to act on these views with violence. Whether actual acts of aggression are carried out or if groups only call for violent action to be taken, should not make a difference. Thus, the concept of extremism implies that under a liberal system, there should be tolerance towards different belief systems (Austin, 2018). Consequently, with violent extremism, there is a clear indication that action or the threat of action being taken is present, and that these acts may not be in accordance with existing perceptions of legality. In short, extremism should be regarded as a component of society which can co-exist with other beliefs peacefully, while violent extremism may constitute a criminal act.

Terrorism is frequently framed as violent extremism and consequently faces significant definitory challenges as well. In academia alone, there are over 260 definitions in circulation (Schmid, 2012). In a way, the 9/11 attacks and the worldwide attention it warranted helped narrow down the definition by establishing a religious, specifically jihadist, connotation. However, the change resulted in the stigmatization of the Muslim community and little attention given towards enhancing our understanding of other forms of terrorism (Stephens, Sieckelinck & Boutellier, 2019). The disparity remains evident in academic works to date as the dominance of publications related to Al-Qaida and ISIS prevail. One of the most notable steps towards changing this perception was the establishment of terrorism as a social construct by Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, and Breen-Smyth (2011). Based on this notion, the application of the term to an incident or a group is an inherently ideological and politically driven decision that might be abused to exert a specific political effect or public response (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004). What arguably distinguishes this concept from (violent) extremism is that terrorism is a fear-inducing tactic with symbolic targets, rather than a belief (Young & Findley, 2011). In other words, violent extremism may or may not lead to terrorism. Acknowledging these definitory challenges and biases is crucial for giving the field of extremism studies new depth and breadth. Further, engaging with the concepts and the debates surrounding them is essential to enhance our ability to improve the classification of extremist groups.

2.3. Discourse

Arguably the most effective way to determine whether a group qualifies as extremist or violent extremist is through in-depth analyses of the discourses embedded in their print and online material. Seeking to understand how ideologies were constructed and communicated through discourse, has first warranted the attention of scholars from the fields of linguistics and culture studies in the 1970s. After the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the strong link between ideational material and potential violence became apparent, activating research efforts both in academia and policy-making (van Dijk, 1985; Holbrook, 2013). Two distinct strands of extremist discourse research have since risen to popularity: analysis of jihadist (e.g. Hodges & Nilep, 2007) and of far-right ideologies (e.g. Kassimeris & Jackson, 2014). Albeit, it should be noted that the Islamist focus dominates, evidencing a continuation of the previously mentioned conceptual disparity into research application. Existing studies predominantly engage with solely one extremist group (Schmid & Forest, 2018), and publications comparing different extremist views remain scarce (Lehr, 2013). While it might seem like this exclusivity allows

for more detailed analysis, it arguably jeopardizes the comprehensiveness of the studies. As established, extremism is a relational concept, meaning that there is a need to compare it to other belief systems by design. This thesis aims to widen this narrow focus by uncovering similarities and differences between jihadist and right-wing extremist rhetoric.

The value in conducting discourse analysis lies not only in increasing our understanding of underlying ideologies, but it also has a preventive function. Societal and political responses to extremist groups have been found to be largely based on generalizations rooted in experiences of the most vicious attacks. This causes a lack of differentiation between extremist, violent extremist and terroristic groups (Saghaye-Biria, 2012; Wijsen, 2013). The study of the various discourses can further the development of more targeted and effective countermeasures, which prevent the mislabelling of peaceful communities by clearly distinguishing between the groups (Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019; van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2019).

2.4. Conclusion

In sum, the contribution of this thesis to the field of extremist research is threefold: First, it seeks to tie into the conceptual debates by setting a precedent of clear differentiation between extremism, violent extremism and terrorism within a single research project. Second, it aims to actively engage with these differentiations by uncovering the underlying assumptions of UK policy responses to violent extremist discourses. This, in particular, is an issue that cannot be debated solely on theoretical grounds. That is why there is a need to move away from descriptive towards explanatory research. After all, even if definitions are agreed upon, the actual usage is what determines a term's meaning. Lastly, this thesis is intended to break the contemporary trends of narrow-mindedness and near-exclusive focus on Islamist extremism. The practical contribution of this undertaking lies in the examination of the underlying assumptions on which policy responses to violent extremist discourses were built. Through this, an arguably better understanding of not only extremism but also societal perceptions is furthered by examining the responses at their most fundamental level, rather than diving directly into evaluating their efficacy. As a result, findings could serve as the basis of developing more productive and more targeted strategies to prevent violent extremism encompassing all motivations.

3. Research Design

The goal is to build this thesis on two case studies which analyse the discourses within online videos posted by one right-wing and one jihadist extremist group respectively. Next, a brief summary of the findings is provided, establishing a high degree of similarity between the two discourses. This insight warrants the question of why the two violent extremist ideologies have been dealt with differently in the UK, thus the possible causes for this difference in policy reactions are explored. Qualitative studies like this are frowned upon by some extremism researchers. They argue that case studies drive authors to define essential concepts in a way that these fit their research, and thus the longstanding definitional debate remains side-lined when it could be of great practical importance (Young & Findley, 2011). However, as outlined above, the subjective, culturally, and politically-specific nature of these contested, albeit critical, terms results in the necessity of examining the violent extremism phenomenon in a specific context, rather than generally. Furthermore, my research seeks to understand the responses to different violent extremist discourses within the specific political, cultural, and historical context of the United Kingdom. While some findings may prove to be transferable to other Western European countries with similar experiences, ultimately, the goal is not to develop universally applicable explanations in the first place. This would arguably be impossible, even counterproductive for breaking free from past limitations within this field of research (Rogers, 2013).

3.1. Methodology

Language is a social construct that both shapes and creates. Every author, speaker, and creator can draw upon a wide range of linguistic resources to tell a story. Thus, the incorporation or omission of each feature is based on a choice. Through the decisions made, specific discourses "comprised of ideas, values, identities, and sequences of activity" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 11) are incorporated into texts. Similar to language, "discourse does more than merely reflect events that take place in the world; discourse interprets those events, formulates understandings, and constitutes their socio-political reality" (Hodges & Nilep, 2007, p. 2). Consequently, the analysis of discourses is devoted to revealing how social and political processes are buried within language.

However, meaning-making is not limited to language; discourses can be communicated through semiotic features such as visual, sound, and design choices as well. This is referred to as multimodality and was first incorporated into the analysis of discourses through the unique work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). Visual communication as an additional object of

scholarly inquiry has since gained popularity beyond Media and Culture Studies in a variety of research fields. The resources for producing high-quality visual content and the platforms for spreading it near-instantaneously across the globe are accessible to anyone at little to no cost. Further, research findings suggest that visual features play a critical role in influencing how individuals process surrounding information (Domke, Perlmutter & Spratt, 2002). In short, if content creators construct messages through the use of both linguistic and visual features, then any academic study limited to only one aspect unavoidably results in incomplete findings.

An increasingly popular method that incorporates both aspects is *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis* (MCDA). Although there is no one universally accepted way to do MCDA, the approach utilized for the analysis of the two videos in this thesis draws upon the most comprehensive toolkit to date compiled by Machin and Mayr (2012). The same framework has already been successfully applied to a variety of topics and media, such as newsworthiness in newspapers (Bednarek & Caple, 2014), body images in reality shows (Monson, Donaghue & Gill, 2016), social classes on TV (Eriksson, 2015) and gender on websites (Moran & Lee, 2013). Apart from these, there are ongoing projects to expand the research fields MCDA is used in. One example is the research at the Curtin Institute for Computation, where a group of scholars has successfully integrated MCDA with Big Data analytics to explore changes in discourse patterns in jihadist publications over several years through an automated analysis of text and image relations (O'Halloran et al., 2019). Thus, MCDA is not only an approach to uncover underlying discourses within a variety of content types as comprehensively as possible, but it also presents unique opportunities to integrate the method into diverse studies and significantly broaden both the scope and relevance of multidisciplinary research projects.

A perceived limitation of MCDA is that this analytical approach only uncovers the meaning potential, rather than the intention of the author or reception by the viewer. While there is always an element of subjectivity present in these analyses, research has shown that, if done properly, the findings of MCDA studies largely correspond to the wider societal interpretations (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Further, it is crucial to be aware of the risk of bias as MCDA can be challenging to apply when a researcher agrees with the views represented in the discourses (Han, 2015). However, within this thesis, this is not the case.

The MCDA toolkit is designed for fine-grained analysis. In order not to go beyond the scope of this research project, I focus on how the three elements of legitimacy, ideology and a call to action are constructed through discourses of power relations within the chosen videos. Ultimately, the goal is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of two videos, rather establish a sound and comparable empirical basis for the analytical chapters. Note that the predominant

usage of the term legitimacy within social sciences research is in connection to the Weberian notion of appropriateness (Gerechtfertigkeit), in the sense of legality and lawfulness (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006). For this thesis, I use the term in reference to an action or idea being deemed justified based on a subjective assessment, and thus morally accepted and tolerated within a specific context (Beckert & Dewey, 2017).

The MCDA method as established by Machin and Mayr (2012) is based on three stages of analysis: what, how, and why. First, the linguistic and semiotic choices present in the clip are described. Linguistic elements can be spoken word, text, or subtitles, while an image, sound, movement, gesture, action, or special effect constitute a semiotic feature. The second stage focuses on how these components are depicted within the scene, specifically, how they related to the representation of people and how they attempt to persuade the viewer. For example, which associations are signified? Do any images or words stick out? How are adjectives, nouns, and verbs used? How are elements such as iconography and setting utilized? It is especially important to consider not only what is present, but also what is not. Lastly, the findings from the previous two stages are interpreted within the broader framework of social, political, and historical context to uncover underlying belief systems and the power relations that these are constructed on.

3.2. Case Selection and Data

Acts of violence supposedly rooted in jihadist and right-wing extremism continue to dominate contemporary press coverage on political aggression as evidenced by the ongoing discussions regarding the recent attacks in Sri Lanka and New Zealand. The continued relevance of examining these two types of extremist discourses further is consequently driven by the public debate. Additionally, jihadist and far-right groups were among the first extremists who established an online presence and continue to devote significant resources to maintain a steady output of digital content, in particular videos, to share their ideological and political views with potential recruits (Michael, 2013; Conway, 2017).

The Islamic State of Syria and Iraq is the organization for the jihadist case study. Despite its videos being produced in Syria, their reach is global, which consequently also includes sympathisers in Britain. The comparably wide-spread availability and ease of accessibility of their material, both video, and text, provides an ideal subject for a comprehensive study based on MCDA. The 55-minute feature film called *Flames of War* is one of the most professionally produced videos of the group and was released in 2014. It showcases the fight of ISIS soldiers

against a division of the Syrian Army near Raqqah, Syria. The English language narration throughout the movie, as well as the extensive subtitles provided for any Arabic part, are a clear indication of the desire to reach an English-speaking audience abroad.

The English Defence League, formerly led by Tommy Robinson, is the chosen right-wing group for this study. The EDL is one of the most prominent far-right organizations within the United Kingdom and has been compared to ISIS by British police based on the perceived threat the group poses (Hopkins, 2016). Structurally, it is arguably one of the most sophisticated right-wing extremist groups with the ability to mobilize its supporter base within a short time frame. Due to its heavy reliance on self-produced digital content, the League is regarded as setting itself apart from the traditional far-right milieu (Oaten, 2014). Contrary to ISIS, its videos are produced within England for a British audience. In 2016, a full-length documentary titled *Into the Heart of the English Defence League* was released on the group's YouTube channel attracting close to 150.000 views on this platform alone. The video was produced by D. J. Anderson, a self-described filmmaker who has previously recorded the EDL's protest marches.

The United Kingdom makes for a particularly exciting setting to analyse the responses to violent extremist discourses. First, the nation's experience with extremism did not begin with the 9/11 attacks, but there has been a long historical precedent set by the dealings with the Irish Republican Army. Second, this experience has not been limited to one type of extremism, rather the citizens and government have been exposed to three variations, namely jihadist, far-right and nationalist extremism with acts and discourses of similar intensity. In short, the British experience with extremism is neither new nor limited.

4. Case Study: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

The US-led invasion in 2003 fundamentally reshaped the societal and political organization of Iraq. The delegitimization of Iraqi institutions and efforts to erase all traces of Baathism and Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime gave rise to sectarian violence (Gerges, 2014). The occupying forces supported the establishment of a new Shi'a government, which strictly refused to include Sunni groups. This made thousands of Sunnis suspect that the United States sought to marginalize their community even further to enable the rise of the Shi'a and their sectarian ally, Iran. The mutual sense of suspicion was deepened by the rhetoric of political and religious leaders, ultimately resulting in major, violent disruptions, in consequence to which the basic needs of the population, such as food and healthcare, could no longer be met. It was in the

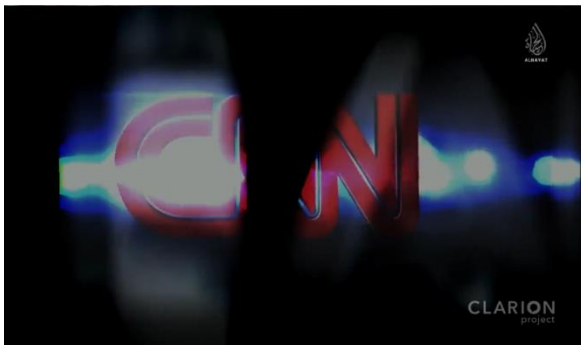
context of this polarization, marginalization and chaos that radical insurgent groups were able to emerge (Gerges, 2016). ISIS proved to be the most ambitious and sophisticated, labelling itself as the Sunni protector of Islam and was eager to grow. In 2011, the Arab Spring demonstrations had reached Syria and thousands of peaceful protesters took to the streets demanding an end to Assad's dictatorship and changes towards democratization. However, government forces opened fire and the uprising quickly turned into a fully-fledged civil war. This proved to be yet another challenging political situation that allowed marginalized groups to gain power (Sinjab, 2013). ISIS used this to its advantage, moved into Syria and proclaimed the caliphate on 28 June 2014. Since then, the group has established itself as a pseudo-state challenging both regional and international security. Various other militant organizations across the Middle East and Africa have aligned themselves with ISIS and networks of splinter groups are known to have been established in Europe (Mabon & Royle, 2017). Despite significant territorial losses in recent months, ISIS has been able to retain its technological sophistication and financial resources. This has ensured the production and spread of online propaganda without noticeable setbacks, meaning that the group and its ideology are expected to remain part of the global threat landscape for the foreseeable future (Europol, 2019).

The feature-length movie titled *Flames of War*[2] was produced by the Al-Hayat Media Centre, a wing of ISIS's media empire focused on publishing content aimed at non-Arabic speakers. The plot tells the story of the group's select battles: the siege of Minnigh Air Base, the fights against the Kurdish forces of the PKK and the YPG, the battles for Fallujah and Mosul, and finally the victory over the Syrian Army's 17th Division in Raqqa. The narration by a native English speaker is complemented by commentary from ISIS fighters and even captured enemy soldiers.

[2] All references to and quotes from the video within Chapter 4 refer to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (2014). Note that the video contains graphic footage. This is discussed as part of the analysis, but no supporting screenshots will be provided.

4.1. Ideology

The movie begins with the showcasing of US presidential speeches, where Obama and Bush detail their victories and alleged withdrawal of their military forces from the Middle East. This is complemented by Western news agencies' commentary. The footage appears darkened and grainy with a limited articulation of details, and the news logos are only partially visible, which connotes mysteriousness. Additionally, the distortion appears to place a barrier between the viewer and the footage. This low visual modality implies that the producer does not endorse the content (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Indeed, the narrator explicitly states that "they lied" (e.g. 01:35) after every speech and report. This marks a clear conceptualization of the enemy as the United States and, by extension, the Western world.



The image of the enemy is expanded on by the narrator: a "dark wave of the crusader force" (00:10) responsible for the "black pages of history enabling the tyrannical and murderous rise of the secular state" (40:48). The colour choice for the visual material is continued in the lexical elements by emphasizing darkness, which enhances the overall negative connotation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). The adjectives "tyrannical" and "murderous" characterize the enemy. These suggest an overpowering strength used for malicious purposes, implying that the victims were at the mercy of the "crusader force". Additionally, "wave" connotes the intensity and scale of the enemy's actions. Stating such power relations elicits a natural response from the viewer to side with the victims. Implying such victimhood is an effective way to build a collective identity (Oaten, 2014). Further, the mention of a "crusader force" and "the secular state" suggests that religion plays a central role in the ideology.

The darkness of the enemy is contrasted by the description of ISIS fighters as „the inks of light" (41:10), "flames of war" (40:38) and "our brothers" (22:25) with "thunderous roars" (09:43). The verb "roar" evokes an association of lions, the king of the animals, which situates the fighters as superior to the enemy. Further, the metaphors of "light", "flames" and lion correspond to a goldish, orange, yellow colour scheme. This is reinforced by the number of

explosions present in the footage, all of which appear edited to enhance the effect. The frequency of these explosions could also imply that ISIS is everywhere. The lightness and warmth used to characterize the fighters signify truth and comfort (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). Combined these elements describe ISIS fighters as the positive, all-encompassing and truthful aspects of the movie.

Apart from this, there is also a contrast between "our brothers" and "the enemy". Through these lexical choices, the speaker depicts the viewer to belong to the same side. This fosters the creation of a collective identity without further specification (Oktar, 2001). On the other hand, "the enemy" remains a distant abstraction. This notion is also reinforced through the footage: When an ISIS fighter dies, the camera zooms in on his face, but enemy victims are merely shown from the distance or in groups. This personalizes ISIS and builds distance to as well as dehumanizes "the others".

The "return to ẖilāfa" (00:10), a state under Islamic religious and political leadership, is explicitly stated as the main mission. The verb "return" implies that the goal is to bring a caliphate back, which has existed before. This notion of historicity is reinforced through the recurring image of the recognizable ISIS flag, as monochrome flags constitute an old Islamic tradition. The white circle in the middle is designed to resemble the prophet Mohammed's ancient seal, describing him as the messenger of God. Above that, the writing states that there is no God but Allah (Gander, 2015).

The emphasis of the number one is a prominent element throughout the video, most notably highlighted by the recurring gesture of one index finger held up (e.g. 32:45). This has become a jihadist symbol referring to "tauhīd", the oneness of God in a fundamentalist worldview that does not accept any other interpretations, and also stands for the global domination ambition of ISIS (Zelinsky, 2014).

Finally, violence constitutes another prominent feature throughout the movie, which particularly stands out because of how taken for granted it appears. The commentary leaves no room for interpretation as it is explicitly stated that the fighters "advance forward to kill and be killed" (18:25). This emphasizes that there is no peaceful option available to achieve ideological goals. At the same time, this statement denotes not only the brutality with which ISIS is prepared to operate but also suggests that fighters are required to be fully committed to the cause. Several clips complement this commitment to violence through the showcasing of weapons, artillery and other combat resources (e.g. 35:54). Arguably, these images have two other effects as well. First, they imply professionalism as the available resources resemble those of a professional army. Second, and closely related to that, the combination of professionalism with the resources suggests that ISIS is not just an amateur group with naïve, utopian dreams. But rather a highly sophisticated organization with realistic goals and enough backing to achieve them.

4.2. Legitimacy

The producers of the movie place great emphasis on avoiding a portrayal of ISIS' ideology as utopian and its fighters as maniacs. Its legitimacy is built through elements which foster a sense of credibility, specifically through point-of-view shots, a mention of imperfections, references to Allah's alleged approval as well as the perceived support by civilians and captured fighters. Two types of battle footage are distinguishable throughout the video: distant shots, creating a perception that the viewer is removed from the happenings and merely an observer, and first-person, known as POV, shots. This first-person perspective is particularly interesting. It is reasonable to assume that these were recorded with body cameras, attached to a fighter at chest height. This results in footage that includes every shake, movement and step, which is in stark contrast to the stabilized recordings of distant shots. Further, the person can be heard breathing heavily, coughing and mumbling. Machin and Mayr suggest that perspective can be a powerful tool to reinforce and personalize ideas (2012). Indeed, the POV shots create the impression of the viewer being right in the middle of the battle. This is enhanced through natural human sounds, normally not audible in videos, which creates a degree of intimacy. As a consequence, it is easy for the viewer to identify with the fighter. This builds credibility and trust for ideological acceptance because the feeling of having been present implies that the overall judgement was made independently based on personal experience, even though it is actually influenced by the commentary of the narrator.

Credibility is also built through the mention of imperfections. If something appears too perfect and artificial, the personal connection established with the viewer is jeopardized. During battles in Aleppo, Kurdish forces attack the caliphate from the East. The narrator claims that ISIS was "forced to make a tactical withdrawal from some of the front lines […] to fend off the cowardly aggression" (26:14). The verb "forced" implies that this was not an anticipated move, suggesting that there are situations out of ISIS' control. Since the idea that nobody is perfect is commonly accepted, this has a humanising effect on the group. At the same time, as van Leeuwen points out, lexical choices can be used to reinforce previously stated power relations within seemingly unrelated content (2008). The words "cowardly aggression" imply an irrational, emotional characterization of the enemy. In contrast to that, ISIS fighters' response is described as a "tactical withdrawal", connoting a calculated, reasonable move. Through this, not only is the superiority of ISIS reinforced, but the group is portrayed in a realistic and human manner, which supports a classification of its ideology as a rational goal, rather than a utopian dream.

Throughout the movie, the alleged connection to Allah constitutes a recurring linguistic and semiotic element. The narrator claims that ISIS fighters are "chosen by Allah" (06:34). The verb "chosen" connotes a privilege and exclusivity (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This lexical choice implies that one cannot simply volunteer, but that the decision is beyond any worldly human. Further, it is said that "Allah is with his believers, and it is he who directs the RPG grenade" (11:03). The statement that he "is with his believers" appears abstract, difficult to grasp and open to interpretation, while the verb "directs" adds a specific physical dimension to his actions detailing how exactly he supports the fighters. This strengthens the notion of Allah being more than a passive deity, but someone fighting side by side with ISIS. The narration is accompanied by footage showing men gazing upwards.

Kress and van Leeuwen have argued that the direction people look at can be used to complement speech acts (1996). In the video, the men do not appear to interact with the viewer, rather their attention is directed towards the sky. This lack of acknowledgement signifies that no action is demanded from the viewer, instead an offer of information is made (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The upwards gaze evokes an association with heaven and, in this context, Allah. Thus, a connection to and approval from a higher entity is implied, which has a legitimizing effect. The idea that everything ISIS does is with Allah's permission is also heavily emphasized in the group's online magazines, such as *Dabiq*, and is clearly visible on the front page of each issue (Mahood & Rane, 2017).

Lastly, ISIS uses the alleged support of outsiders to gain validation for its ideology and actions. A captures soldier of the Syrian Army states that “Bashar has abandoned us” (54:27) and, in reference to Raqqa allegedly being difficult to capture, says “the Islamic State managed with just a few soldiers” (56:01). By praising the tactical skill set of ISIS, it is implied that even outsiders find them impressive. Additionally, the alleged abandonment by the Syrian president reinforces the notion of a cowardly enemy. The statement is followed by footage showing smiling civilians greeting arriving ISIS fighters on the streets.

A smile usually connotes happiness (Machin & Mayr, 2012) giving the impression of approval by a celebrating crowd eager to welcome the fighters. Both the captured soldier and the civilians are used to suggest an independent review of ISIS. However, it should be noted that the captured soldier is digging his own grave as he speaks, and it is difficult to say if the civilians are truly welcoming or merely scared of the consequences should they show signs of rejection.

4.3. Call to Action

The call to action is masked as a forced decision and arguably aims to elicit a psychological defence mechanism. The statement that “you are either with us or against us” (e.g. 00:15) is frequently repeated throughout the video. The lexical choice of the verb “are”, has a high deontic modality expressing the strong perceived influence of the speaker on the viewer (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This implies that it is demanded that the viewer make a decision which side to align with. At the same time, the sentence is masked as a truism, suggesting that there

are only two options available. Based on the linguistic elements alone, this decision arguably remains a distant abstraction, as the viewer does not necessarily know why it would be important to decide or how to decide. However, the visual elements clearly direct the viewer towards one side through intimidation. Graphic footage and brutality throughout the video, such as the systematic shooting of "non-believers", the bombing of cities and the torture of captured enemy soldiers showcase the consequences of choosing to be against ISIS and the worldview it represents. It is a natural human defence reaction to seek to avoid these. Ultimately, the viewer appears to be given no option but to join and fight for ISIS.

This call to action in *Flames of War* is representative of the group's overall recruitment strategy. Learning from al-Qaeda's mistake of showing Muslims slaughtering Muslims, which resonated badly with its sympathisers and support base, victims are labelled as "non-believers" or merely as "the enemy". Further, ISIS predominantly lets the graphic images, the information material and how it is conveyed speak for themselves, in hopes to evoke the interest of viewers and readers. Especially in crisis zones, interest is actively exploited as these areas are often difficult for journalists to access. However, ISIS is able to provide continuous updates from the inside on its social media platforms, thus filling this gap and gaining the ability to start casual online conversations with potential recruits (Farwell, 2014).

5. Case Study: English Defence League

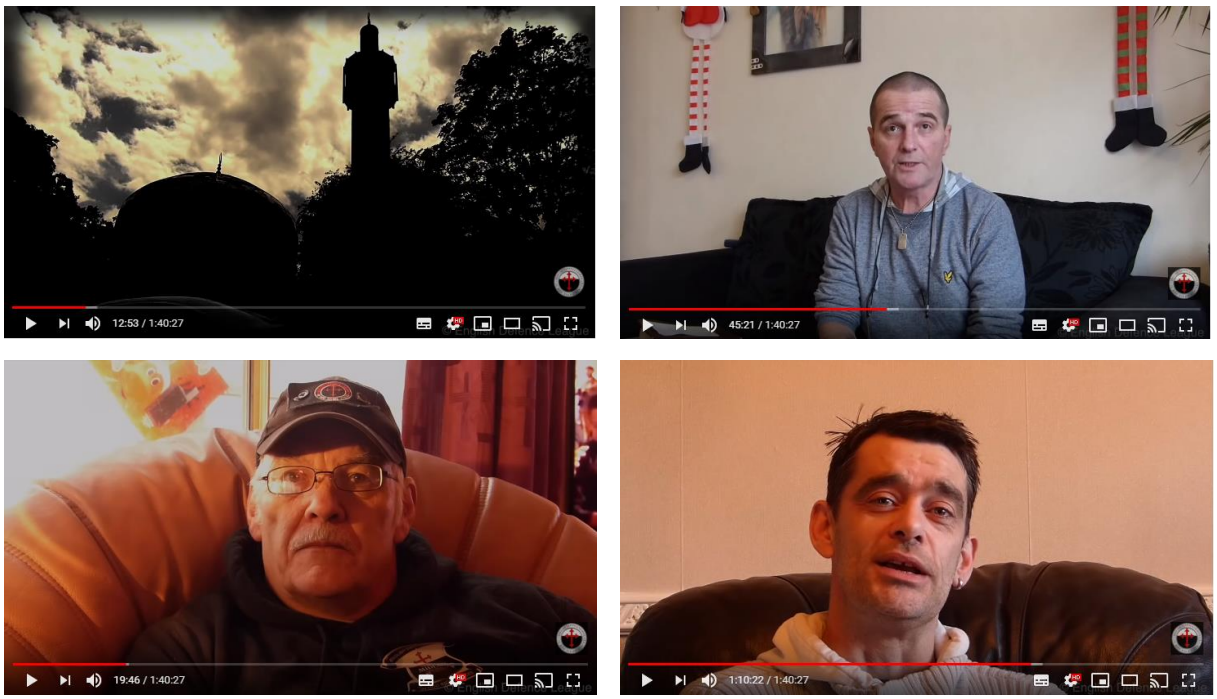
In March 2009, the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah, a splinter group from the banned jihadist Muhajiroun network, organized a protest in the English town of Luton during the homecoming parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment's Second Battalion. They took to the streets in response to allegations that the returning soldiers had abused innocent civilians during their tour in Iraq (Percival, 2009). Despite a comparably peaceful march with only verbal insults and two arrests, the event provoked outrage within the patriotic far-right political support base and served as an incentive to organize a collective countermovement. The, at that time, 25% Muslim population became the target of a series of street protests organized by the newly formed United People of Luton. Due to the group's significant support from the football hooliganism scene, several of their events ended in riots, arson attacks, and other violent disturbances aimed at individuals of Middle Eastern descent, worship sites and shops. Merely a few months later, in July 2009, the English Defence League was founded by the participants and grew rapidly from grassroots activism to one of the most prominent and most vocal organizations opposing the perceived 'Islamification' of the United Kingdom. This counter-jihadist movement has since inspired the creation of several sister organizations across Europe. For example, Anders Behring Breivik, who brutally killed 77 teenagers on the island of Utøya in 2011, was a member of the affiliated Norwegian Defence League (Garland & Treadwell, 2010; Alessio & Meredith, 2014). The EDL's ever-increasing popularity both online and offline, as well as its connection to a larger network of sympathising groups, means that studying this organization offers a unique glimpse into the wider violent right-wing extremist milieu in both Britain and abroad. According to analysts, the EDL represents a significant challenge to social cohesion, because its methods are centred around unpredictable protest marches, rather than political campaigning (Bartlett & Littler, 2011).

The documentary titled *Into the Heart of the English Defence League*[3] is structured as a chronological display of footage alternating predominantly between clips of protest marches and of interviews conducted with EDL members. The videographer, Anderson, narrates the movie taking the viewer along on his personal journey of discovery with the aim to understand what the organization stands for.

[3] All references to and quotes from the video within Chapter 5 refer to English Defence League (2016).

5.1. Ideology

The first protest shown takes place in Dudley, a small town in the West Midlands, where a large mosque is about to be built. The producer comments that he "did not yet understand the purpose of a mosque beyond a place where Muslims gathered to worship" (03:02). The use of the preposition "beyond" reduces prayer to a rudimentary activity within the mosque and implies that more important objectives are being pursued below the surface. However, what else is allegedly going on, is not detailed. Note that he uses the verb "understand" instead of "know". Knowledge and understanding are concepts signalling different cognitive states. The former stands for the acquisition of information, while the latter refers to the ability to see how the information relates to the bigger picture (Huxster et al., 2018). Thus, this linguistic choice foreshadows both the complexity and the depth of the content to follow, while implying that what is about to be uncovered is the truth.



This commentary is accompanied by the first picture, showing the silhouette of two structures. The broader, round building can be identified as the dome above a mosque's prayer hall, while the narrow tower next to it is a minaret. Except for the brightness of the sky, darkness dominates the frame. Blackness often signifies a secret, something meant to be hidden from prying eyes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). Consequently, whatever is going on in the mosque is likely forbidden. The mosque can also be extended as a symbol for Islam, in which case the negative characterization of the building is transferred onto the religion, establishing it as malicious.

This stands in stark contrast to the interview footage of the three EDL members, who describe themselves as "Christian men" (07:34). They are seen sitting on the couch in their respective living rooms. Anderson emphasizes that they explicitly invited him into their homes, which denotes a warm, welcoming, but also intimate environment. Through the close-up shots foregrounding the individuals, Christianity is given a face, while the supposed mosque is merely shown from the distance. The faces of the men are in clear focus throughout the shot, implying openness and transparency (Machin & Mayr, 2012), while the silhouette of the mosque portrays Islam as a mysterious abstraction. Lastly, the tonal difference enhances the opposition between the two religions as the interview footage is dominated by natural light and warm colours, often seen as a connotation for truth (Machin & May, 2012). In short, Christianity is depicted as the path of light, while Islam is portrayed as the path of darkness.

Indeed, the English Defence League's ideology is based exclusively on opposition to Islam (Allen, 2011). The organization describes itself as a counter-jihad movement, which implies that only a violent, fundamentalist version of Islam is seen as a problem. However, its members have been unsuccessful in continuing this distinction within their rhetoric (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2015). In fact, "we hate all Muslims" (Alessio & Meredith, 2014, p. 112) has been used frequently as a chant during marches. In the video, a variety of terms are used to describe the perceived enemy, such as "Mohammadists" (10:30), "Salafists" (41:00) and "the Muslim" (51:50). But synonymous usage causes these to morph into one concept, leaving little room for doubt that the Muslim community as a whole is labelled as the enemy.

At one of the protest marches, EDL members are seen burning a black flag with a white element. Although not shown in its entirety, these colours evoke a strong association with the well-recognizable ISIS flag. The lack of rhetorical differentiation between the terms mentioned above, combined with the visual component of the ISIS flag suggests that the EDL generalizes the behaviour and views of the jihadists, and applies them onto the larger Muslim community. According to Oaten, this simplification is necessary to construct a collective identity that resonates easily within the group (2014).

Why exactly are Muslims seen as the main enemy? Speakers at the demonstrations claim that "[Muslims] will not get accustomed to our values in our country" (41:03), and, in reference to rape, "things along these lines don't get reported in the countries they are coming from" (01:16:11). No further details are given as to what "our values" constitutes. However, through the possessive pronoun "our" and the adverb "here" a linguistic contrast is created, because it implies that there is a "theirs" and a "there". Through these lexical choices, the speaker can depict ideas to be those of the viewer, create a collective identity without further specification and thus emphasize otherness (Oktar, 2001). Further, the second example implies that Muslims were not "here", presumably the UK, originally. This portrays them as intruders, indicating that they are not regarded as a part of British demography, making a British Muslim appear incompatible with the EDL ideology.

Additionally, the notion that rape is accepted in Islam indicates (moral) backwardness, which establishes inferiority, in turn connoting the organization's values as progressive. This barbaric image is built further through a reference to the Paris attacks in November 2015. Speakers at the protest claim that the victims were "butchered in the name of Islam, butchered in the name of control" (01:00:27). The verb "butchered" evokes an animalistic association, suggesting that the attackers did not regard the victims as human. Additionally, "in the name of control" indicates that the attackers, and thus the wider Muslim community, seek domination. In other words, according to the EDL, Islamic ideals are clearly inferior to Christianity. Yet, the two religions and the values they represent are seen to be in a struggle for power (Brindle, 2016).

Peaceful coexistence appears impossible as the interviewees emphasize that "Islam isn't a religion of peace" (30:00) and "migrants from Islamic countries are sweeping across Europe" (32:30). If something is said to be not peaceful, an association with war and aggression appears unavoidable. Similarly, the verb "sweeping" signifies an act that is large-scale and will bring dramatic change. It also connotes Muslims' supposed perception of Europeans as dirt that needs to be cleaned up. Interestingly, through these statements, both the willingness to resort to

violence and the actual act of causing physical harm is labelled as a characteristic of the enemy. These lexical choices appear to be in contradiction with the semiotic features found in the protest march footage, where EDL members can be seen wearing black hoodies and combat boots. The colour black is often associated with strength and aggression (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). The vast majority of protesters wearing the same garment evokes an association of unity. The visibility of the combat boots further strengthens the militant connotation. Some softening effect is achieved through the unexpectedly high number of women shown as part of the crowd. While society is traditionally quick to connect crime and violence with masculinity (Treadwell & Garland, 2011), femininity connotes peace and comfort (Machin & Mayr, 2012). However, this arguably fails to be convincing of a possible peaceful resolution of the perceived power struggle. Consequently, a certain impression of militancy prevails (Alessio & Meredith, 2014) and claims that the EDL may be a non-violent movement appear unfounded.

Finally, the organization's perceived oppression is not limited to Islam. Treatment by the police is described as the following: "80-100 rain-soaked patriots were herded into a fenced off area a long way from the town's centre" (01:04:50). The verb "herded" is usually associated with animals. Along with the notion of having to be contained, "fenced off", these signify how the establishment supposedly sees the EDL as uncivilized and a threat. The characterization as "patriots" implies the pursuit of a positive goal, suggesting that the members were only there to do good, thus making the police's reaction appear unjustified. Lastly, the mention of distance from "the town's centre", where the majority of the people are, connotes a sense of remoteness, if not opposition to what mainstream society believes in. This loneliness is emphasized through the frequently recurring footage of travelling as seen below.

The clip is shot from a bus transporting EDL members to a demonstration. The side of the motorway the vehicle is on appears to be completely empty. In contrast to that, the other side can be seen overcrowded with cars heading in the opposite direction. This implies that the EDL is going against the stream, through which, interestingly, the group figuratively situates itself outside of mainstream political thinking, which could suggest self-characterization as an extremist group. This collective victimhood is central to the construction of the EDL's identity (Oaten, 2014).

Throughout the footage captured during the protest marches, some unexpected visual features can be noticed within the EDL crowd: a rainbow flag, an Israeli flag, persons of Asian and African descent, and a significant number of women. The first has been a symbol of the LGBTQ+ community since 1978, while the second evokes an association with Judaism. Along with the visible ethnic and gender diversity, these elements are seemingly not given any special attention. Neither the videographer highlights or emphasises them, nor do other EDL members. Yet, it is precisely this matter of course behaviour that makes that gives the diversity salience and conveys an environment of unexpected openness and tolerance. Indeed, the EDL has put considerable effort into avoiding being put into the stereotypical far-right box, predominantly featuring xenophobic, homophobic and racist white males. The diversity observable in the protest footage is characteristic for the inclusive image the organization aims to be known for (Oaten, 2014). Although its various Facebook groups were shut down by the company earlier this year (Hern, 2019), data from previous studies highlight a seemingly diverse supporter base which is unprecedented for an organization in the British far-right milieu (Allen, 2011).

Religious affiliation	**Supporters**	**Other**	**Supporters**
Hindus	873	LGBTQ+	720
Jews	796	Women's Division	1,914
Sikhs	1,126	Disabled Division	166
(Pakistani) Christian	58	Green Division	29
Ethnicity			
Greek & Cypriot	290		
Pakistani (Christian)	58		

Table 1: Showcasing the number of EDL supporters according to sub-group pages on Facebook. All data from Allen (2011). No more up-to-date numbers are available.

The EDL's involvement of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as their vocal support for women's rights and pro-Israeli stance, suggest progressive ideological elements, which is a frequent finding in academic literature as well (Treadwell & Garland, 2011). However, there

appears to be a contradiction between the visual diversity and the actual commentary. Throughout the video, there is repeated verbal emphasis on protecting "our white girls" (59:40) and members describing themselves as "Christian men" (07:34). Additionally, the producer comments with surprise that "one of the speakers was a non-white female" (02:05). There would have been other linguistic choices available to say that the EDL seeks to protect girls, there is no need to add the adjective "white", just like it could be irrelevant that the alleged saviours are "Christian". Further, Anderson could have described the speaker's ethnicity directly, instead of emphasizing what she was not. This overlexicalization through the specification of skin colour and religion suggest ideological importance, giving the statements a racial undertone (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Thus, the EDL may not be as inclusive as implied after all.

5.2. Legitimacy

Two aspects of legitimacy are particularly interesting in this EDL video: the establishment of the content's credibility and the justification of the underlying ideology itself. The movie was uploaded on the EDL's YouTube channel under the name "English Defence League – New Documentary 2016". However, the video begins with another title, "Into the Heart of the English Defence League" (00:04), appearing on the screen. The word "documentary" implies a factual report. Similarly, "into the heart" suggests the content will be from an outsider's perspective, because "into" is a preposition expressing movement from one point to another. Visually, the title sequence is kept simple with merely a black background and white letters, there is no logo[4], image or symbol incorporated. The absence of other colours further indicates a commitment to factual accuracy, suggesting that the content speaks for itself and there is no need to edit or decorate it (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Thus, a coherent message of neutrality can be built through the coordination of both the textual and semiotic elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). However, the fact that the video was uploaded on the League's channel constitutes a clear act of endorsement, which arguably undermines these efforts.

The notion of credibility through implied neutrality is continued with the help of the video's concept. Most notably, the content is presented as the personal journey of Anderson, the videographer, who had no previous affiliation with the EDL. He emphasizes through the

[4] Note that a small EDL logo appears in the corner throughout the video. This is a link to the organization's YouTube channel and constitutes a standard feature added during the upload by the platform's system. The logo is not present on the footage itself.

commentary that he is first and foremost an amateur filmmaker, who only decided to film the group because he "had exhausted all other subjects available" (01:20) to him. This suggests the perspective of a person whose views are politically or ideologically not aligned with the EDL, consequently reinforcing the outsider perspective mentioned above. Further, the content is built in the form of a video diary, showing short clips in chronological order as evidenced by the date stamps appearing before each. The choice of raw, rather than heavily edited footage indicates the absence of an underlying agenda that could have influenced the content. As Anderson comments, he "simply filmed what [he] saw" (06:27).

Lastly, his claimed neutral perspective is strengthened through the angle of filming and the use of filters. The protest footage shown at the beginning is shot from behind the line of police officers working to keep EDL members from scattering. Medical personnel are shown to be similarly outside of the police cordons. Physicians are required to adhere to the principle of medical neutrality, which means that they have to treat all patients the same regardless of their political, religious or ethnic affiliations (List, 2008). By filming from the same side as the medics are located on, this principle appears to be transferred onto the filmmaker, strengthening the indicated unaligned outsider perspective. Further, as seen below, clips from EDL meetings are shot from a pool table and appear both darker and lower in quality than other scenes.

The physical distance to the group symbolically removes the creator, and consequently also the viewer, from the happenings. Anderson does not participate; he appears to merely observe. Tonal gradation is kept to a minimum to just two shades, black and white, which results in a

desaturated image. The lack of colour intensity suggests subtlety (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Slight distortion in sharpness is also noticeable, meaning that no object or person appears in focus. The combination of these semiotic choices creates a video style that is associated with shots taken by security cameras. Because surveillance footage is unedited, recording events as they unfold, this further reinforced the credibility of the video.

Establishing the EDL's portrayal as neutral is critical for the EDL. Claims of media control by the liberal elite and the establishment dominate the perceived conspiracy against the organization. Specifically, the EDL claims that the liberal elite, politicians and the media refuse to acknowledge the threat posed by Islam and instead seek to divert public attention towards the fabricated threat the EDL poses. Allegedly, news reports are censored and footage is edited to portray the group as violent and racist, and its members as criminals (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2015). To counter that perceived suppression, this movie is supposed to give a raw, inside look at the EDL. Although challenging to confirm, the comment section below the video implies success in this undertaking as users praise the creator for offering an unbiased and informative glimpse inside the organization.

The justification of the ideology itself is another prominent, element throughout the video. For example, "we have facts and figures" (01:13:12), "we got the proof" (18:40) and "I have done my research" (53:56) are statements made frequently during the interviews and as part of the speeches at the protest marches. Terms such as "facts and figures" and "proof" suggest the presence of supporting data and evidence. Apart from this, they are associated with objectivity and significant time devoted to gather and analyse information. However, there are no further details given as to what data and alleged evidence were collected. This vagueness is deployed to give the impression of too much data to detail within the scope of the video. But it is also a linguistic feature that can be used to help cover up reality, e.g. the lack of convincing evidence (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The EDL website includes a list of cases titled "Muslim grooming gangs and other rape jihad convictions" (English Defence League, n. d.). However, it is noteworthy that these redirect the reader predominantly to Wikipedia or British tabloid sites.

Another way to construct a justification for the movement is attempted through the use of anecdotal evidence. During one of the protest marches, a statement regarding the "alleged systematic rape of a vulnerable 14-year-old child over a one-year period by a 14 strong gang of predominantly Muslim men" (01:07:58) is made. The term "alleged" connotes the absence of judgement and can be used to establish a tone of factual depiction. In other words, this lexical choice implies that the following content will be presented in an objective manner (Machin &

Mayr, 2012). However, the remainder of the statement is filled with ideological remarks disguised as overspecification. For example, a 14-year-old is rarely described as a "child", but in this case, making the victim appear younger stresses her vulnerability and inferior position. This is contrasted by the characterization of the attackers as a "strong gang". Power relations are emphasized through this collectivization, highlighting how one individual was at the mercy of a larger group. Further, the word "predominantly" appears to signify a commitment to factual reporting, as it warns that not all attackers were Muslim. However, this begs the question of why there is a need to mention religion in the first place. As Machin and Mayr argue, specification is often used to conceal objects of ideological importance (2012). Thus, the statement implies that the religion of the attackers is a crucial aspect. Lastly, the words "systematic" and "one-year period" denote that this is not an isolated case.

In short, an attempt is made to justify the EDL's ideology on a factual basis. The group is notorious for blowing incidents like this out of proportion and making dangerous generalizations based on anecdotes and incomplete or sensationalist news reports. Even minor developments, such as the introduction of halal meat in local supermarkets, have been framed as proof of the ever-increasing dominance of the Muslim community (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2015).

5.3. Call to Action

The video does not only seek to inform by introducing the English Defence League's ideology and providing a justification for both its views and the production itself but arguably also aims to entice viewers to take action. Albeit, this is not done in a direct way, rather through an implicit appeal to people's sense of morality and through attempts to elicit a natural defence reflex.

Throughout the protest footage, the marching EDL crowd shouts "Muslim groomers off our streets"[5]. The most attention-catching word within that sentence is the one with a strongly negative connotation, "groomers", meaning the befriending of children with the goal of sexual exploitation. Whether the term "Muslim" is seen as negative, positive or neutral is a matter of personal opinion. However, taking advantage of children, who constitute a vulnerable group in need of special protection (Machin & Mayr, 2012), is frowned upon by society at large. Thus, the message that children are in danger speaks to individuals' sense of morality. Although at first glance the adjective "Muslim" appears secondary in the sentence, once the moral response is generated through the stronger term, it provides a source for the perceived problem, and thus

[5] This sentence occurs so frequently in the video (e.g. 32:54) that no specific time stamp is provided.

a target for action. The possessive pronoun “our” minimalizes the distance to the issue. It implies that this is happening right at the viewer’s doorstep, rather than far away. The fact that it is not detailed any further whose streets are being referred to exactly ensures widespread reception as a personal problem. A sense of urgency is added through accompanying footage.

The clip is filmed out of a bus carrying EDL members to their protest’s location and the lens is directed outside, where police officers can be seen on the pavement. There is a contrast between the movement of the bus and the motionlessness of the uniformed men outside. Combined with the linguistic elements detailed above, the perception is that the police, the ones who would be expected to combat the abuse of children, do nothing. However, the bus carrying EDL members remains in motion, suggesting that the organization is the only one taking action, while others stand still. This creates a sense of moral obligation to stand up against the groomers, who are portrayed as Muslims targeting “our” children. The EDL has largely ignored the fact that up to 85% of sexual offences in the UK are committed by white males. Instead, it uses the few cases of crimes perpetrated by individuals of Middle Eastern descent as its ideological foundation (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2015). Arguably, the reason for the organization’s ability to mobilize effectively at a large scale is that hate is built through an issue that is condemned by society as a whole, instead of something with more polarized views.

The threatening and violent portrayal of Islam constitutes another way to persuade viewers to take action. Contrary to the careful selection of words and efforts towards objectivity at the beginning, several explicit statements are made in the second half of the video:

"Islam is everywhere: in our country, in our food and in our politics." (43:39)

"Can anybody see the rivers of blood yet? […] It is coming people!" (01:07:35)

"They are cutting our throats and blowing us up." (01:08:30)

"Be prepared and protect your people!" (01:07:56)

"They are locking the terrorists in, instead of wiping them out." (01:06:46)

These five statements reinforce the source of the problem, the consequences and action to be taken. The claim that Islam is "everywhere" portrays the religion as a pandemic. The association with a disease denotes Islam as a problem that needs to be cured. Another possible association is that of a parasite. Either way, these lexical choices successfully augment the perceived issue (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Consequently, the suggestion that Muslims constitute a problem in need of fixing is reinforced through symbolic connections to phenomena, pandemic and parasite, which elicit a natural defence reflex. Through the mention of blood, a linguistic picture of the consequences of inaction is painted. Blood signifies the colour red, which can stand for a threat or a warning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). The characterization of "rivers of blood" implies that the consequences will be devastating at a large-scale, rather than locally containable, which gives a feeling of impending doom. Further, ways of causing physical harm are mentioned explicitly by "cutting our throats" and "blowing us up". These specifications generate intensity and give the call to action a sense of urgency (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The inclusion of the personal pronoun "they" emphasizes that it is first and foremost the Muslims who showcase a willingness to resort to violence. This situates the EDL as a merely defensive actor in the perceived power struggle, a position which is further stressed through the linguistic elements of "prepared" and "protect". However, these appear to be in contradiction with the explicit call to wipe the terrorists out. This not only implies that the EDL is willing to counter violence with violence but also signals an offensive, rather than a defensive, solution.

In conclusion, the organization's propensity to violence (Alessio & Meredith, 2014) is reflected in its attempts to persuade viewers to take action. Rather than explicitly, the EDL builds the concept of the enemy through symbolism and metaphors targeting people's natural instincts. As a consequence, standing up for their values is constructed as the only logical response (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2015). The notion that perceived Islamic violence needs to be countered at the same, if not higher, intensity is also emphasized but depicted as a preventive measure. This adds a layer of moral justification.

6. Discussion of Findings

The most prominent features present in both the EDL's and ISIS' video are the portrayal of their ideologies not as a belief system, but as the ultimate truth and their willingness to pursue these views in a violent manner. In both cases, the enemy is clearly defined and calls to action are included, making the message of violence unmistakeable. A slight difference occurs in the overt versus implied use of force: ISIS openly promotes killing as a moral virtue, while the EDL packages violence in the idea of defence. This can be attributed to a difference in a production context, where ISIS can take advantage of the war-torn governments of Syria and Iraq, whereas the EDL operated within a significantly stricter legal environment. Further, both groups have resorted to personification and storytelling as a persuasion technique. Through these, they are able to build content with seemingly more subtle and static rhetoric, which not only resonates better with potential recruits but also allows for the circumvention of government blocking in some cases (Lee & Leets, 2002). Lastly, none of the groups offers factual proof in support of their ideology, instead, they attempt to legitimize the movement through anecdotal evidence, generalizations and supporting interpretations of religious texts. Given this strong similarity, it is of interest to briefly explore if policy responses in the UK have been of similar intensity as well.

7. Possible Explanations for the Difference

Two years after the 9/11 attacks, the United Kingdom introduced its new counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST), which proved to be a novelty in Europe. As the first nation to move away from the military interventionist approach popularized by the United States, the UK sought to refocus its efforts towards combating homegrown terrorism, primarily through the prevention of radicalisation in the first place. CONTEST is built on four distinct strands, also known as the 4Ps, which have remained the guiding principles 16 years on (Gearson & Rosemont, 2015):

- Prevent: stop radicalisation
- Pursue: detect and disrupt attacks
- Protect: enhance protection against potential attacks
- Prepare: improve mitigation measures

The Prevent policy is often described as the most important pillar as it supposedly attacks the problem in its infancy. Thousands of staff working in education, healthcare and social services are trained to spot early signs of behavioural changes that could indicate radicalisation. Once identified, individuals are seen by a counsellor who determines the risks and, if needed, initiates

the next steps (Warrell, 2019). The strategy has come under scrutiny within both the political and academic communities due to allegations that the approach is inherently biased towards jihadist extremism because the majority of surveillance operations under CONTEST targeted Muslim communities (Thomas, 2010; Qurashi, 2018). Further, out of 7,318 individuals referred to authorities through Prevent between 2017 and 2018, 44% were included due to Islamist concerns, while merely 18% were related to right-wing extremism (Home Office, 2018). Similarly, out of the 90 currently proscribed organisations in the UK, only one, National Action, is a right-wing extremist group, and the remainder predominantly jihadist (Home Office, 2019). These numbers warrant the question: why is jihadist terrorism perceived more as a threat in the UK than the violent far-right?

7.1. A Sense of Otherness

A possible explanation can be identified through a closer look at history. Although the colonial era was not the first time that the Christian British and Muslims interacted, it marked the beginning of imperial rule for more than half of the world's Muslim majority countries. Colonies were viewed as culturally and politically inferior in desperate need of modernization, and its populations quickly labelled as uncivilized for their unusual traditions and superstitious religious practices. Occupying troops did not shy away from resorting to violence to brutally crush any attempts at an uprising or to punish the violation of newly introduced legislation. These experiences defined a collective British identity through being an agent of progress and modernization, thus superior to the colonized, which was strengthened by over four centuries of imperial rule (Robinson, 2001).

Then the tables were turned. The end of the Second World War resulted in large-scale labour shortages in the UK. The influx of refugees from within Europe was regarded as an opportunity to close this gap, however, the number of people arriving turned out to be insufficient. The British Nationality Act of 1948 proved to be an effective solution as it allowed subjects of the Empire to live and work in the UK, an opportunity taken advantage of by many Muslims from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Starting in the 1950s, the second wave of migration saw citizens of Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Turkey arrive either as refugees or as economic migrants (Allah, 2014). Both migration waves were met with widespread resentment from the population. Racial tensions culminated in riots and assaults actively encouraged by pro-white, right-wing groups who felt that the new arrivals would take away housing and job opportunities from other citizens (Spencer, 1997).

This divide was strengthened through news reports which played a significant role in the construction of Muslims as a suspect community. The issue with the construction of these suspect communities is that ethnic, cultural or racial markers are used for the identification of who constitutes a suspect, rather than actions (Breen-Smyth, 2014). Discourse analysis of newspapers from 1974 to 2007 has shown how Muslims have been associated with backwardness and criminal activity. They have also been portrayed as a threat to British values, which were predominantly defined solely on the basis of a relation to the perceived "Other". These reports also included explicit and implicit calls for non-threatening Muslims to distinguish and remove themselves from what was believed to be a radical community by default. In short, the perception was that the moderate Muslim not aiming to take over the UK was the exception (Nickels et al., 2012). It is interesting to note that the Irish faced similar scrutiny and perception as a suspect community, however, they had the backing of the Irish state, in contrast to which the Muslim community was largely on its own (Breen-Smyth, 2014). These historical accounts showcase how the UK's colonial past and the hierarchical worldview associated with it have played a major role in enabling the development of this "us" versus "them" sentiment.

A 2016 poll found that over 40% of the UK's population is proud of both the British Empire and colonialism (Stone, 2016). Further, it has been pointed out repeatedly how little the country has not addressed its colonial past sufficiently (e.g. Wearing, 2017). To come to the conclusion that these facts prove the racist nature of contemporary British society would arguably be a stretch. Rather, I argue that certain events and developments have been perceived as a justification for the continuation of practices which were inherited from this historical racial lens. Two aspects are notable in this regard: First, the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks were defining events for the UK. Because both were perpetrated by a jihadist group, this could be perceived as a legitimizing factor for the continued scrutiny of the British Muslim community. Second, the 2011 census found that 5% of the UK's population identifies as Muslim (ONS, 2015). This presents a clear deviation from the mainstream, i.e. the remaining 95%, supposedly evidencing the perception of Muslims as the "Other". It is arguably a combination of this "otherness" with the perceived evidence that has resulted in a focus of jihadist extremism at the expense of the far-right.

7.2. The Reactionary Far-Right

Right-wing extremism is by no means a new phenomenon. Its Western European origins can be traced back to Catholic fundamentalism which strongly opposed Enlightenment and the ideas put forward by the French Revolution. These groups were referred to as reactionary because they sought a return to the status quo ante. This traditionalist nature was also coupled with the willingness to resort to violence, should it help the cause. As Europe started to become an increasingly secular society, groups across the entire political spectrum were required to adapt. In other words, the link between the far-right and its strong religious agenda was broken to a large extent (von Beyme, 1988). After the Second World War, the right-wing extremist milieu became marginalized to such a high degree that it proved to be extremely challenging for any group to break out of the closed box fascism, National Socialism and authoritarian ideals had been put into. However, many of these were able to re-emerge in response to the perceived threat posed by immigration. The contemporary far-right movement can thus be best described as largely fuelled by a single-issue interest with conservative, rather than traditionalist, political ideals (Camus, 2013; Mudde, 1999).

There are three aspects of the far-right's historical development which are relevant to expand on. First, right-wing extremism has always been present in Europe. This is not to say that this political strand has not evolved and changed over time, as shown above, the milieu redefined itself at least twice. However, it is equally important to take note of its continuity. In the European, more narrowly the British, context, the same statement cannot be made with regards to jihadism. Islamist extremism only reached Europe in 1994 when an Air France flight was hijacked by the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria in Marseille, France (Nesser, 2015). And it was not until 1998 when the US embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya were attacked with truck bombs, that the British intelligence community took serious note of the jihadist threat (Bamford, 214). As a consequence, the emergence of jihadism in Europe constitutes a historical anomaly, while right-wing extremism is a historical continuity. With regards to the policy responses, a problem warrants a solution, while something that is considered a relatively normal feature of the diverse political landscape is arguably less likely to be approached as a major issue in the first place.

Closely related to that is the reactionary nature of the contemporary right-wing extremist movements. The EDL describes itself as a counter-jihad movement, rather than a far-right group (Richards, 2013). This has proven to be an effective tactic to mobilise and appeal to a broader range of the population than explicitly white supremacist groups have been able to. Further, it

also highlights the idea that the EDL is not the problem, rather it is merely reacting to another issue that was present before. This is not to argue that the modern far-right milieu is not regarded as a threat by the British authorities. But it is reasonable to assume that with the government's limited resources an act of prioritization has contributed to jihadism being the focus of policy responses.

Lastly, values represented by right-wing groups appear to increasingly become part of mainstream political thinking (Mudde, 2010). The EDL has links to both the British National Party (BNP) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) (Allen, 2011). The BNP gained 800,000 votes in the European Parliament elections of 2006, and three years later even secured two seats for its candidates (Goodwin, 2011), while UKIP has risen to prominence as a strong advocate for the Brexit referendum. These developments arguably showcase a trend towards the radicalisation of the mainstream, which would consequently mean that right-wing extremism could become more widely supported. Thus, a difference in policy responses could also be rooted in this tendency to not regard the EDL and similar groups as extremist in the first place.

7.3. The Scale and Intensity of Violence

Based on the analysis of the videos, it is evident that violence plays a role for both the EDL and ISIS as both refer to and also explicitly call for action to be taken against the perceived enemy. The noticeable difference has been that ISIS showcased violence in its footage, while the EDL has been careful to frame their actions as defensive measures. This disparity can arguably be attributed to the contexts of production. The jihadist group was able to take advantage of the administrative and political chaos of a war zone, where no government could enforce a ban. In contrast to this, the EDL has to operate within the British legal context, meaning that in order to avoid a ban, it has to package its violent elements in ways not to elicit a response from the authorities. Apart from this, the difference can also be explained by looking at the members of both groups. Most of the EDL's support base can be described as armchair warriors, those who do not actively participate in the protest marches but help to compile and distribute propaganda material for online platforms. In contrast to that, ISIS is seeking to recruit foreign jihadist fighters. Consequently, ISIS appears inherently more violent.

While these points are important to reinforce in the context of the videos, the difference is less evident when looking at both violent extremist motivations more generally. Europol data shows that there have been more far-right attacks in recent years than there has been jihadist. Further, the majority of individuals arrested on terrorism or violent extremism charges are

white. The difference is that jihadist attacks in the past have been deadlier than those of the far-right (Europol, 2019). Based on this, it appears reasonable to conclude that the intensity, rather than the scale of violence has been determinant of jihadism being labelled as a more serious threat than violence from the far-right.

8. Conclusion

This thesis was guided by the question of why jihadism has been perceived more as a threat in the United Kingdom than violent right-wing extremism. The findings can be summarized as the following: First, a sense of otherness rooted in the colonial past of the country still has a strong enough, even if arguably subconscious, influence on society to classify people based on their ethnic, cultural and racial markers rather than actions. Second, right-wing extremism presents a historical continuity for Western Europe, while jihadism constitutes a new phenomenon. This and the increasing radicalisation of mainstream political thinking cause far-right violence not to be prioritized. Lastly, the intensity of incidents, rather than the scale of violence at large is used to determine which extremist motivation constitutes a threat.

While these findings serve as an explanation for the difference in policy responses, they arguably do not justify it. Instead, they highlight the reactionary nature of policy making, the power of nations' historical and cultural biases, and also a relative ignorance towards events beyond the UK's borders. The combination of these keeps the UK from developing effective and comprehensive prevention measures and from responding to an emerging threat while it is still in its infancy. This highlights the strong need for nations, but also any organization dealing with extremist violence, to examine their own historical and cultural biases.

The definitory challenges detailed at the beginning are rooted in exactly this context-specific conceptualization of terms that are supposed to be universally applicable. Defining and reacting to the phenomena based on our personal experiences constitutes an inherently human bias, to an extent. However, it is exactly this natural bias that can cloud judgement, in the case of extremism, to a dangerous level. An effective way to overcome these biases is to engage more deeply with the discourses embedded in violent extremist material. There are various ways to go about this, and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is only one of the available options. But what MCDA does well, as this thesis has showcased, is the focus on the connection between image and text, which is of critical importance in the digital age. Once these embedded discourses are understood, groups can be classified appropriately. There certainly is also a need for more generalized quantitative studies, however, these will only yield accurate insights if the

foundation is solid, meaning that there is an understanding as to what these phenomena constitute of.

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